

SILENT SURRENDER

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

- REMUS                      A kindly old grandfather, veteran of wars past and concerned for both his granddaughter and the future of the Roman Empire.
- MOIRE                      A young woman, kind but a little naïve, who lacks the experience to understand the importance of using her rights to ensure that her government does not become corrupted.

## SETTING

A small living space in the Roman Empire.

SCENE

*(An old man, REMUS, is sitting in front of a fire reading from a scroll. Behind him, a sword hangs upon the wall. He pauses at times to consider something he has read, and then returns to the scroll. Soon, a young woman enters. She is bedraggled and bruised, clearly the worse for wear from some conflict. The old man hears her, but doesn't look up immediately.)*

REMUS

Is that you, Moira?

MOIRE

Yes. It's me, grandfather.

REMUS

I wasn't expecting you back so soon. The contest only started this morning. Is everything alright? Was there some kind of delay?

MOIRE

No delay, grandfather.

*(Remus looks at her now, and is suddenly shocked at how battered she appears.)*

REMUS

Moire! Moire, what happened?! Are you alright? Come, sit. Sit. What happened?

MOIRE

Nothing.

REMUS

Not nothing! I've never seen someone so... Surely something went wrong. Tell me. Tell me!

MOIRE

I... There is nothing to tell. I lost. That's all.

REMUS

Did you have a problem with your shield? Did the arm strap bre—

MOIRE

No, grandfather. The shield held true. And a good thing, too, or it would have been far worse.

REMUS

I'm so glad. That was my shield when I was in the legion, you know.

MOIRE

I know, grandfather.

REMUS

I took that shield with me when I went—

MOIRE

The Tristan Campaigns.

REMUS

...on the Tristan Campa— I told you this already?

MOIRE

Only about a hundred times, grandfather.

REMUS

Forgive an old man. My memory...

MOIRE

It's fine, grandfather. Truly. I like when you tell me those stories. Maybe just not today?

REMUS

Of course, my child. Perhaps next year it will go better.

MOIRE

Perhaps.

REMUS

But I bet your opponent took quite a beating too, no? Who was it? Anyone I know?

MOIRE

It was Marcus. I think you might remember him from—

REMUS

Oh, I remember Marcus. Such a wisp of a boy. I'm sure you gave him a few bruises to remember you by.

*(Moire looks away.)*

No? Not even one? Come, sit. Tell me what happened?

*(Moire sits next to Remus.)*

MOIRE

When the challenge started, we both came forward. He drew his sword, and slashed at me. And I blocked the blow with my shield just as we practiced. And then again, and again.

REMUS

And did you swing at him, when his sword was drawn back like I showed you?

MOIRE

I tried, but he blocked with his shield and I bruised my hand.

REMUS

Oh, that can happen if you are unlucky. Very painful. But you'll learn to avoid it.

MOIRE

And I tried to pull on his hair, but his helmet was very snug, and—

REMUS

Wait, Moire. It is probably just my old ears, but it sounded like you said that you tried to pull his hair.

MOIRE

I did. I tried to scratch him too. And at one moment when he was laughing, I tried to bite his hand, but he was wearing those thick leather gloves and—

REMUS

But Moire, my child, why would you do these things? This contest is taken very seriously. It is how we determine who our leaders will be. Did something happen to your sword?

MOIRE

No...

REMUS

Did Marcus knock it out of your hand—

MOIRE

No.

REMUS

Or did it get stuck in your sheath? If you didn't oil it—

MOIRE

That's not it, Grandfather.

REMUS

Then why were you not wielding it? What happened?

MOIRE

I left it here, of course.

*(Remus stares at her in confusion.)*

There.

*(Moire points at the sword.)*

REMUS

You... You left it here?! Why would you leave your sword at home? Surely you could not have forgotten it...

MOIRE

Of course not, Grandfather.

REMUS

But I do not understand! After everything we went through to get you that sword...

MOIRE

That's *why*...

REMUS

The endless arguing with the imperial senators about why women should be permitted to own a sword...

MOIRE

I know...

REMUS

The endless debates, the pleading... the *bribes*...

MOIRE

I know—

REMUS

Your grandmother died because—

MOIRE

I know!

REMUS

How could you be so disrespectful of our efforts to not even take the sw—

MOIRE

But Grandfather! Don't you see, it isn't disrespect! Just the opposite! Look at the sword, hanging proudly on the wall. That sword isn't a simple weapon. It's a *symbol*. A symbol that the empire respects women as citizens alongside men.

REMUS

Well, yes—

MOIRE

And that symbol is the important thing. We've shown people that women have the right to own their own sword, and so now they must respect us.

REMUS

This is true, but—

MOIRE

And I certainly wouldn't sully that sword – that *symbol* – by getting it dirty with grime and sweat and blood! It has to stay on that wall for all to see, beautiful and shining to catch their attention.

REMUS

Moirra...

MOIRE

And when someone challenges—

REMUS

Moire!!

*(Moire stops, surprised to hear her grandfather raise his voice.)*

The sword *is* a symbol, yes, but if you don't use it, then you may as well never have gotten it.

MOIRE

How can you say such a thing?! After everything we—

REMUS

Look, Moire. Child. Having a sword is only meaningful if you actually use it for something. Your grandmother and I wanted you to have this sword so that you could compete in the challenges.

MOIRE

I was always allowed to compete in the chall—

REMUS

I mean so you could *truly* compete. Biting and scratching when your opponent is swinging a gladius is not really competing. That's why women have always been allowed to enter the competition. Everyone knew that they couldn't win. And that's why it was so important that we won the right for you to own a sword – so you could *use* it!

MOIRE

But it doesn't really matter, does it? Now that we have swords, women will be respected and the men will—

REMUS

Moire, my dear, sweet child. The citizens and the senators aren't going to respect you simply because you own a sword now. If you don't use that sword to win these competitions, to win your own place in leadership, then you might as well not have them at all!

MOIRE

I don't see it that way. I think this has been a true victory for us.



REMUS

Think of it this way. Your sword is your opportunity to make a difference, your chance to be a true part of the decision-making system. If you don't use it to be part of that system, then the same decisions are going to keep getting made. Is that what you want?

MOIRE

No...

REMUS

Think of that sword like it is your voice. Having a voice doesn't do anything if you don't speak up, does it? Do you remember what you told me when you were little?

MOIRE

I said a lot of things when I was little, Grandfather.

REMUS

When you were just a little girl... The first time I took you to the forum, and you saw all the market stalls. And you asked if that was where babies come from.

MOIRE

I don't remem—

REMUS

And I said no, that people should not be bought and sold, and you asked if that really happened. And I said that sometimes it did. And you said—

MOIRE

*(Softly, remembering...)*

I don't want to be bought and sold.

REMUS

I don't want to be bought and s— That's right. That's what you said. And I said—

MOIRE

Then you better be the one making the rules.

REMUS

That's right. That's what I said.

MOIRE

Is that the reason you and Nani fought so hard for women to have the right to own a sword...?

REMUS

Yes, so that when the time came, you could become part of the senate and be a voice. You could have a vote, and make things different. That's what that sword really is, Moire. It's your vote. And it's not enough to just own it. You need to use it.

MOIRE

But there will be other women, won't there? Others who will—

REMUS

If you believe that, you'll be stuck where you are forever. The only reason the senators agreed to let women own swords is that they firmly believed that the women wouldn't use them.

MOIRE

But surely...

*(Remus looks at her critically.)*

No one?

REMUS

They thought perhaps one or two would, but that the rest wouldn't want to carry the burden. Or that they would only use their swords if their husbands told them when and how.

MOIRE

Grandfather?

REMUS

Yes?

MOIRE

Can I tell you a secret?

REMUS

Of course.

MOIRE

I don't like swinging the sword. It's heavy, and makes my arm hurt.

REMUS

Yes. I never liked using it either. And it made my arm hurt too. For a long time.

MOIRE

Well, then maybe it's not worth swinging it.

REMUS

If you believe that then you better find a way to live with being bought and sold like property. You'll have to find a way to be comfortable when the next idiot emperor rises to power and decides that it is okay to abuse women, to treat them like property.

MOIRE

Oh, come on, Grandfather. No one would let that happen. Not again.

REMUS

Do you remember the stories of Caligula? What people used to say of his marble stables and the way he forced his sisters to become whores at his very own estate?

MOIRE

But he was then killed.

REMUS

Yes. And was his successor any better? Or the one after that? Or after *that*? What about the emperor Commodus? What did your history tutor tell you about the "Great Commode"?

MOIRE

That he was an idiot?

REMUS

And what will we do when some new idiot comes along to trump even Commodus' stupidity? Or perhaps not stupid, but so self-absorbed that he'd be willing to bring ruin upon the empire for nothing more than some vain statue or the adoration of supplicants?

MOIRE

That's not really possible. It's just—

REMUS

It is more than possible, Moire. It has happened over and over in the history of the empire. And between you and me, there is nothing worse than realizing that you had the chance to take action – you had the chance to cast your vote – but didn't. And then it was too late.

MOIRE

But if we have the chance to make a change, will it ever really be too late? I mean, we can always get ourselves elected the next year.

REMUS

You may think that, but these things take time. You – and other women – need to be part of the senate *before* it is too late. Suppose the head of some criminal family rises to power and attempts to become the next emperor?

MOIRE

The head of a criminal family? You mean a don?

REMUS

Right! Just that. Suppose some *don* comes into power. Don't you think the first thing he'd do is to eliminate the possibility of a fair vote, a fair process?

MOIRE

But that's why we have the senate, to make sure that the empire is safe from corruption.

REMUS

And what if the senate itself becomes corrupt? Your grandmother and I – and others too – believe that it is young women like you who can keep that from happening. We think that if the empire is to remain, people like *you* need to hold those seats, casting votes from your conscience, not from greed or fear.

MOIRE

That won't happen, Grandfather. There are good people in the senate, and they won't let it happen.

REMUS

There are fewer than you think, my child. That's why you need to get involved now. Who knows when it will be too late...

*(Remus' voice trails off, and a look of deep worry falls over him.)*

MOIRE

You think it is already too late.

REMUS

I don't know. Perhaps. All we can do is stay wary, and look for the signs.

MOIRE

Signs? What kind of signs?

REMUS

When the senators start to behave irrationally, when they start to cast their votes for the purpose of staying in power rather than to promote the interests of the empire. When that happens, there will be nothing to protect us from the next Caligula or Commodus. Or worse, that criminal don who would trump the corruption of even our worst leaders in history.

MOIRE

You're scaring me, Grandfather.

REMUS

It is a scary world, Moire. That's why good-hearted people like you need to do everything you can to make a difference in it. Even if it isn't comfortable.

MOIRE

I'll try. I promise.

*(Moire gets up, kisses her grandfather on the cheek, and exits.)*

REMUS

*(Worried...)*

Try hard, little Moire. We're counting on you more than you realize.

*(Lights out)*