

Journal Entry
April 16th, 45 BCE
Rome

This morning I wake to clear skies and a sun streaming through the window across the room. I quickly dress in my tunic and grab my paints to throw into my leather satchel and head towards the Colosseum. Along the stone path leading to the venue, vendors sell their food, jewelry, and art, as well as take bets on which gladiator will prevail. I snag two stuffed grape leaves and drop a few drachmas into the vendor's hand as I melt into the large crowd streaming into the arena.

I part from the mass of people trying to get as close to the ground as possible and merge with the slaves heading to the top. I climb the large stone stairs until I reached the very top levels. Setting down my bag, I survey the arena. It seems if the entire city has shown up for today's battle. I arrange my colors and canvas and begin to paint feverishly. My brush flies, trying to capture the chaotic atmosphere. The hardest part is capturing how the sun gives everything a harsher quality. It seems to make the sounds and colors louder. I barely finish painting the scene before me when I hear the cymbal announce the gladiators. They march out in a line, six in total and conjugate in the middle of the arena. The emperor enters and shakes the hands of the famous contestants and looks down on the three slaves competing. He returns to his box and signals for the fighting to commence.

The crowd roars deafeningly and the gladiators begin to circle each other. Almost immediately, the three famous men attack one of the slaves, cutting him down in a matter of seconds. The other two are too taken aback by the sudden alliance that they are caught off guard when the three advance on them. They are able to hold them off, but for no longer than five minutes. The aromas of sweat and blood snap me back to reality and my brush glides across the page, recreating the fallen and the fighters. I combine fight after fight until the arena floor is a pool of crimson. Suddenly, halfway through the fourth fight, the sun becomes scorching and the smells from all around make my stomach churn. My palette clatters to the floor and I run back down the stairs, disoriented.

Suddenly I feel a hand clamp onto my wrist. "Where have you been? Come with me, we are late." The stocky man drags me behind him, and I wildly look around. All the colors are too bright and sounds too loud, so I shut my eyes. I try to protest but I can't seem to get a full sentence out. He shouts at me to quiet down as he pulls me down more stairs. I catch a whiff of animal manure and more sweat as the light outside of my eyelids grows darker. I open one eye and see we are walking through a corridor with cages of exotic animals and disheveled people. The screams of the caged, humans and animals alike, creates such a cacophony that I barely hear the man command me to put on a intricate tunic. Finally I manage to sputter out, "What is this? I am just a simple artist who lost her way trying to leave."

The man scoffs, "Nice try slave, I saw you in here this morning, now dress before I have to make you." I turn to try to run, but two guards each with a spear topped with a point made of the strongest iron known to man. The terror inside of me threatened to completely overcome me as my shaky hands had to try three times before I could successfully slip into the tunic. My mind was convinced this was all a dream, that I had fallen asleep next to my easel at my perch high

above the arena floor. "Take her in," the stocky man signals. I snap back to the present and fall into hysterics. Crying, screaming, kicking, clawing and biting the two guards drag me into the sunlight as the crowd roars. They throw me and I land into a pool of blood and release a screech. I run back to the towering wooden doors just as they close and pound my red soaked fist against them, leaving a horrific stain. I turn and search for my seat, for something of familiarity. As I pass over the jeering faces, I spot my easle, my comfort. Then the crowd rises its roar and I look over to see across the arena, a tiger is prowling out from the blackness behind the other doors. My stomach drops. I cannot die, I have so much life ahead of me, but as these thoughts are running through my head, the tiger catches my scent, and charges.

By M. Laffey