

Artemis' father had always said that it's important to find a weapon that resonated with you. His lessons about finding a tool that spoke to you, that fit with your body and your mind, were the closest he ever got to being philosophical. It was one of his core lessons, one Artemis started learning when she was ten years old.

He would lament that he never found his, constantly blaming his time in the marines for grinding it out of him. He knew the M27 Infantry Rifle better than he knew his own children, but he always claimed it wasn't really *his* weapon. Jade had a theory, whispered between them on one of their many "camping" trips, that their father's obsession with strange, sports-themed weapons stemmed from an early attempt to find one that he could use as an extension of himself.

When Artemis had shown an interest in archery, Lawrence Crock encouraged her to follow her instincts in the hopes that she had found her weapon of choice. Not from any sort of fatherly pride, or a want for his daughter to have what he didn't. Instead, he knew that if she had found a weapon that spoke to her, if she found a talent for it, then she would be substantially more useful and would be a better legacy for himself. He saw her as an asset and was excited that his investment had resulted in profit.

The sound of an arrow flying from Artemis's bow echoed through the abandoned warehouse, a full two seconds passing before it whacked into the foam target. Soundlessly she pulled another arrow from her quiver, nocked it, and pulled back. Her weapon was a simple compound bow, the same one she had been using for a few years now. The nature of a compound bow made it easier to hold a readied arrow for longer periods of time. Her father insisted on it, as it made waiting for her target to move into a vulnerable position, waiting for the exact moment to release her arrow, much less taxing.

She had grown accustomed to the rhythm of a compound bow by now, the change in pull, the short movement of the bow limbs. The rhythm fit perfectly with her training, breathing, and movements, all precise and ingrained into her body. She could do this in her sleep, in any position, when running, jumping, falling, or sliding. Her father had hammered it into her with pure repetition, backed up with threats of violence or lost privileges and luxuries. He had taken away warm water for a month when she had refused to practice her sprinting drills one day.

The one thing he never took away was food. He was building the perfect pair of assassins, and you couldn't do that if their bodies failed them.

Instinctively, she knew her quiver was empty, her target on the other end of the warehouse full of arrows. She released the tension in her shoulder, relaxing the instinctive positioning her body had settled into as she had practiced.

As she made her way across the warehouse floor, she looked down at her bow, inspecting the bowstring for fraying and the bow frame for cracks. Another lesson hammered

into her skull. Weapon maintenance was as important as personal maintenance. It didn't matter how good you were if your weapons were faulty.

She frowned as she stopped in front of the target, her grouping was much more off than usual. Of the twelve arrows she fired, eight of them were in the inner circle, three in the circle past that. A singular arrow was embedded in the third circle from the center.

Clearly, her calm was in shambles.

With an aggravated groan, she pulled her arrows from the target, putting them back into her quiver before taking a deep breath. It was the offer, the New Titans recruitment pitch, that was throwing her off so much.

For years, her father, the wanted criminal Sportsmaster, trained her and Jade to the best of his ability. He even went as far as to call in favors to get her trained with her weapon of choice. After all, he knew how to shoot a bow, but he was nowhere near a master at it. He had cashed in a rather large debt to get her training, to get a list of exercises, to get her the resources, and to make sure she was getting the best. His focus on her only increased when Jade ran away.

Because Lawrence Crock knew he was a bruiser, a heavy, someone you called when you needed something, or someone, broken and beaten. He knew what he was because he was a self-built man. He had taken what little he had and worked on it until his name was well known and until people paid him a lot of money to do what he loved. He knew what he was, and he knew what he wanted his daughters to be. They would be precise, perfectly trained assassins, capable and strong in ways that would prove the Crock name was one to fear.

Lawrence Crock was a self-made bruiser. Artemis Crock was a trained killer.

So why did the goodie-two-shoes brigade want her to join them? They knew who her father was, knew what he put her through. Jade was already racking up a long kill list and was currently wanted all over the globe. How could they want her to join them when her sister was off proving exactly what kind of person Crocks turned into?

She made her way back to her original position and continued practicing. She worked through her quiver twice more before giving up, unable to focus properly. Instead, she started stretching, working through some advanced positions and movements to improve and keep herself limber. She knew them by heart at this point, being so limber helped her fire accurately when she was moving unpredictably. Now they just helped her center herself.

Once she was done with her usual stretches, she started working out, doing her upper body routine using an old but serviceable set of weights that her father had stored here for her to use. When she was halfway through her workout, sweating and straining against the weights, she heard the sound of footsteps walking across the concrete floor of the warehouse.

She was off of the lifting bench in seconds, grabbing her bow and a single arrow from her quiver, which she had left to the side as she worked out. As she knocked the arrow and pointed it towards whoever was coming, her sister stepped into view, dressed in casual civilian clothes.

“Hey little sis, long time no see,” She said, leaning against one of the support pillars. “You gonna shoot me with that?”

It took a moment for Artemis to lower her bow, though she didn’t put it down or pull the arrow from its position, just pointed the business end of her bow down and slowly released tension on the bowstring.

“What do you want?” Artemis asked tersely.

“Oh come on, is that any way to great your big sis?” Jade asked. “I just wanted to come and check on you since dads stuck rotting in prison. I would have come sooner, but work has been... busy. How are you doing?”

“Dad has been gone for months now, Jade, we didn’t even know he was in prison until we saw it on the news,” Artemis responded. “But thank you for stopping by. You can leave now.”

“Oh, come on, Arty! I haven't seen you for so long, we-”

“It’s been so long because you abandoned me,” Artemis responded. “You abandoned the family, and you left me alone with dad.”

Jade was silent for a long moment before looking away.

“I’m sorry about that,” She said, unable to look at her sister. “I just needed to get out... get away from him so badly I forgot I was supposed to take care of you.”

“Why are you here Jade?” Artemis asked, her face softening. “I know you shouldn’t just be walking around like this, not with how badly they want to put you behind bars. So you must have a reason.”

“As if they could catch me,” Jade responded with a smirk. “But you’re not wrong. My... boss, wouldn’t let me come here by myself if I didn't have a reason.”

Artemis stayed silent, Jade eventually rolling her eyes with a groan.

“Fine, I have an offer for you,” She explained. “My friends, they’ve had a bit of trouble. Had to leave town in a hurry, move around a lot, and burn a lot of resources to get it done. But now, they need people, strong people, people who can learn. I know with a little training and-”

“Are you trying to recruit me into the League of Shadows?” Artemis asked, her eyes wide. “Why? We both know I don’t have the stomach for that kind of work.”

Jade winced when Artemis ignored her attempts at subtly and steamrolled into the conversation. After a moment, she continued, clearly resisting the urge to shout.

“Partially because I vouched for you. But a lot has happened recently, lots of shaking up going on, and a lot of important plans got screwed up. We need new blood to-”

“Jade, I’m not interested,” Artemis said, cutting her sister off. “I won’t work for them, ever.”

“That’s right, you fancy yourself a *hero* now, don’t you?” Jade asked, scoffing at the idea. “Arty, I know you’re smarter than that, Dad might have been a terrible father, but he did teach us better than that, at least. I was hoping it was an act to keep the heat off of you while you tried for a bigger score, but I can see it’s not. Please tell me you’re skimming the spoils, at least. I’ve seen where you and mom are living, you deserve a better place if your going to be ‘cleaning up the streets’”

A flash of guilt ran through Artemis. Several times now, she had been tempted to do just that. Only a few days ago she had stood in an alleyway, a roll of hundreds in her hand, knocked out drug dealers all around her. Hundreds of excuses had run through her head. She could buy better gear, increase her effectiveness and take down even more crooks. Just some of that money would make her and her mother’s life so much more comfortable. It was drug money, destined to sit in evidence for years, if it didn’t end up in some crooked cops pocket first. She worked hard to take these criminals down, she deserved to get paid for her service, right?

In the end, she dropped the money on the ground, leaving it for whoever stumbled on the crooks. She had needed to leave before she took another step down the slope her father had been trying to push her down for years. She knew what that kind of money did to a person when you earned it like that. It was an addiction, worse than any drug.

“Please tell me you’re not trying to hardline this?” Jade asked as she looked at Artemis, squinting and examining her before shaking her head. “That is disappointing, Arty. You deserve better. I know you rebelled against dad by trying to be a goodie two shoes, but it’s time to drop the act.”

Jade crossed the distance between them confidently, her smile shifting to a familiar know-it-all grin that used to earn them both extra laps from their father frequently. She put her arm around Artemis, hugging her and patting her head.

“The League of Shadows will help you take the next step in your training Artemis, after all their archery masters are who showed dad how to train you,” She said, stepping forward and

trying to lead Artemis. "Don't worry, we can leave a note for mom so she won't worry. Oh we will make such an amazing team, I can't wait to show you the ropes and-"

"Your right." Artemis said, cutting her sister off and ducking under her arm, standing straight. "I do deserve better."

"I know, I just-"

"I deserve better than to be some toady under a brutal, uncaring psychopathic master. I deserve better than to be a criminal, hiding my face and living with the scumbags you work with. I deserve to have friends, work hard, and know that I'm making a difference. I deserve better than whatever the hell it is that you are trying to pull me into!"

Artemis got louder and louder as she talked, gaining confidence with every word. Yes, she was a Crock, but if people like Batman, Green Arrow, and their proteges knew that and still wanted her on their team... Who was she to tell them they were wrong? If they didn't care who her family was, then maybe, someday, she could move past it too.

Jade frowned when her sister cut her off for a second time, before the frown shifted into annoyance and frustration. She tried to step forward again, but Artemis raised her bow. It wasn't pointed anywhere lethal, she could tell that at least, but it was definitely pointed at her.

"Go. I'm not interested," Artemis said, meeting her eyes and holding them. "Tell the psychopaths you traded Dad for that I'm not interested in letting them leash me too!"

If she was annoyed before, now Jade was furious. For a moment, she considered calling her sisters bluff and attempting to disarm her, but something in Artemis's eye told her not to push her, that she would not hesitate to release her arrow.

"You're going to regret this," She said instead, stepping away slowly. "When you do, don't come crying to me."

"Go away Jade," Artemis responded simply, her bow still drawn back.

With one last scowl, Jade turned and walked away, disappearing into the shadows on the far side of the warehouse, her silhouette visible for just a moment as she walked out the door.

For a long moment, Artemis stood alone in the warehouse, her bow held at the ready, waiting for the team of ninjas that the League of Shadows probably had waiting to punish her for saying no to their generous offer. When none came, she quickly packed up her things and left, heading straight home.

She had a call to make.

