The Crimson Timekeeper

Champ’s story is heroic and tragic, like so many other stories; you’re probably only familiar with this sort of thing from television. You don’t look like the type that reads, or ever really learned how. Sure, you can see the blotches of ink on a page; you might even extrapolate some sort of meaning from them and turn them into symbolic noises—still, it doesn’t mean you’ll know what it means. Anyway, I could insult you until Michael Jackson is cool again; instead, let me tell you about Champ.

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I lived in a mess. I was the guy who didn’t just leave trash on the floor; I would leave garbage. A pig could have feasted all day in my apartment, seriously, apple cores, nearly empty pizza boxes, and other stereotypical crap. See, you have people looking after you, keeping your life clean. I worked all day and could barely pay for the place, let alone, clean it. There may have been crap everywhere and the place most certainly stank, but you wouldn’t smell the rotten milk or see the box that’s full of more cat feces than litter, at least not at first. When a stranger entered my apartment, the first sensation felt is fear. Not from the stink or the garbage, rather from the sight of the flaming hourglass, Champ’s symbol of power.
It’s quite important to note Champ’s sex; her hideous power and elegant movements are seductive. Her competitor’s greatest weaknesses are matched by their lust for her beauty and power.

Like so many victimized insects, her beauty seduced me. However, unlike flies, I’m huge and own a mason jar. So, I put her in the jar and left her on display in my living room. I fed her cockroaches and beetles, and for the first week or so, I called her Princess. That name really didn’t fit her and I’m pretty sure she didn’t appreciate it.

I touted Majesty’s prowess, her second name which she liked less, to my brother Adam—Adam liked his name because he came first. I’m sure you know nothing about Asians, or Asian culture, or even Asian American culture. I’ll fill you in; the first-born male gets everything.

Adam vowed to train a fighter to beat Empress, her final pseudonym before Adam discovered her real name.

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“Let’s see what your fighter’s got,” Adam said the second I opened my apartment door. He held one of those fancy mason jars, with the rubber gasket and latching glass top. Spider Spinks, Adam’s first trainee and Empress’ first challenger, was named only after his death. He really was a shabby looking fighter, densely packed, short legs, and a whole mess of eyes. The brown fuzz that covered him showed off his low breeding.

Spider Spinks was a hungry young fighter. He needed a win to get his confidence up, but his trainer picked a bad opponent for confidence building. It
wasn’t till later that we realized the unfairness of the situation. Not only had Empress been well fed and had some training with roaches and bugs, but Spider Spinks had to play on her home field.

“Our guy has no chance,” I said, actually uncertain of Empress’ potential at the time, “Just dump him in here.” I unscrewed the top of Empress’ jar, hoping she wouldn’t attempt to liberate herself or take revenge on her captor. I didn’t consider myself her trainer yet.

As Adam turned the jar upside-down, Spinks slid across the glass, making no endeavor to escape the impending battle. He touched down half an inch away from Empress. He immediately turned to face her.

You have no idea why we named him Spider Spinks, do you? Well, first of all, he was a spider. Now, this is the last time I’m going to explain an allusion to you—I probably should have better explained Adam’s name. Anyway, back when Mike Tyson dropped the ultimate bombs, he annihilated a guy named Michael Spinks in ninety-one seconds. Spider Spinks had one major difference from Michael; he wasn’t in it for the money.

Empress’ shining black chitin loomed over Spinks. She was almost double his size. The fuzzy brown spider froze in terror the moment before she leaped on him. They rolled around for a couple seconds in a furious ball of combat.

“Whoa!” Adam said enthralled by her motions, “Look at that!” She was already wrapping him up and saving his delicious insides for later. “It’s the champ.”
“She’s female,” I said, almost insulted by his lack of recognition. “I think she likes being called Champ, though.” She lifted two of her glossy black legs up in some kind of victory pose. This is where I stop referring to her by anything other than Champ.

“Where did you find…her?” Adam asked.

“I found her while changing the timing belt on my car.” It’s the third time I’ve changed the timing belt. I know you have no idea what that does. Just believe me; it needs to be changed on schedule. I bought the car when it was brand new. It made it to 300,000 miles with only minor problems. The car was certainly an excellent value.

“He was in your car? You really should get a new car.” He sounded almost concerned. See, Adam has a job with a twenty-hour workweek and made twice the money that I did. He has never owned a car. He’ll lease one for a couple years then get a new one. Ever read a lease contract? You have to be a dumb-ass to sign one of those.

“Yep, she was just waiting to meet me.”

If you haven’t figured out that Champ is a black widow, you’re as dense as I earlier assumed.

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Anyway, Spinks got used. Adam simply wanted to witness Champ’s fighting ability and technique. He knew that he would need a fighter with serious toughness, but only after Spinks’ demise did he know what to look for.
After the first bout, Champ started spinning webs in her glass house. They were chaotic and strangely beautiful. Her silk was spread all about the bottom. All of her ex-opponents were tangled up in the mess. Every fight she participated in from then on was on neutral ground—an empty fish tank. Champ’s list of victories grew over a couple of months.

Ray Mantis was a huge, tough looking, praying mantis—Knock out after a few minutes of grappling.

Cicada Sanders was immediately victimized.

Ant Grant was a joke.

Champ fought a number of unworthy fighters. Her fights were so easy for her, I still wasn’t sure if she could sweat.

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“Champ is done for this time. This fight will be for real.” Adam showed up on a Thursday night, with my sister in tow.

I hadn’t seen my sister in three months. In fact, no woman had been in my apartment since the last time she had been there. You may not believe it, but the rancid stench produced by my apartment must have stuck to me like some anti-pheromone. When women met me, they knew what my apartment smelled and looked like.

“You have a black widow in a jar?” She looked shocked.

See, I told you that it’s the first thing people sense when they entered my place. Followed by...

“Uhg, this place is filthy!” She said in my direction, as if I didn’t know.
She was a smart one and I'm not being sarcastic. Not only was she not the first born, but she wasn't male either. If it weren't for her brain, my parents would be trying to marry her off as soon as possible. She went to Stanford and paid her own way working part time for a pharmaceutical company.

“I just got home from work. I can't stay up and clean the place. I have to get up early for work tomorrow.”

“You have a cat?” She noticed the feces box. “Where is it?”

“I don’t know. She’s probably working up enough energy to take another crap.”

She continued interrogating me, “Where’d you get her? What’s her name?”

“I just found her. I call her Cat, or Hey Cat.”

She gave me an only-somewhat satisfied look, or maybe it was extreme concern. I get that from her a lot.

Adam held a brown box hiding his prizefighter. As you might have guessed, that twenty-hour workweek gave him plenty of time to look for new fighters to train. He waded through the trash and garbage over to the ring we set up. He opened his cardboard box and shook it over the ring. Out dropped a furious fighter, six inches long, covered with green and brown armor plates, he ran around the ring in a furry, showing off his strength and rage. Luckily, Champ wasn't in the ring yet to see it.

“You guys are sick,” my sister told us. Oh yeah, her name is Jenny, but it doesn’t really matter. “I can't believe you're doing that.”
“Lennox Lizard, he’s coming out of retirement to reclaim the title of world champion,” my brother announced. I wasn’t even sure if Lennox’s species was allowed to participate. Apparently the judges deemed it acceptable. My brother continued, “He hasn’t eaten for at least a day. So let me tell you, he’s hungry, he’s real hungry!”

You know how it bothers you when people start messing with your stuff? Well, I don’t really know why, but it irritated me when my sister thought it was okay to start shoveling up my garbage. I got the stink just how I liked it, the perfect mixture of cat turds and spoiled milk. I was going to clean it; I liked to wait for the moment before critical mass.

“The fight’s about to begin,” I told her, “We have awesome seats.”

“No thanks,” she responded as she moved a microwave pizza box that I used to cover a cat accident. “Oh, that’s awful.”

“The fight or the dookie?” My brother interjected.

My sister shook her head, held a deep breath, and wiped the so-called dookie into the pizza box. Hey Cat had no room left in his feces box and left me the gift to find when I got home from work. Yes, I know it’s disgusting! It was part of my system. When I find the dookie, I know it’s time to exchange the feces for fresh litter. I was going to clean it up, but I didn’t have time.

Adam and I had to wait a minute for Lennox Lizard to quit showboating. He came to rest in the middle of the ring waiting for the fight to start.

“Well, it’s time,” I said. I took Champ’s house and opened the lid. I kept a popsicle stick handy for Champ’s extraction. One end of the stick was stained
pink where the frozen cherry flavored ice once resided. As the stick approached her, she gracefully climbed onto the end of it. While in transition between the ring and her home, she silently prepared for combat.

“Champ is in for a tough match,” my brother said what I was thinking. I had serious doubts about the outcome. A good trainer wouldn’t send his fighter to certain doom. Lennox was heavily armored and had a thousand times the strength of Champ. How does Don King do it? I guess enough money will quench any feelings of remorse. At the time, it was probably too late to bribe Lennox; besides, I wasn’t sure what to bribe him with.

So, I decided that if Champ is going to lose a match, it might as well be a glorious defeat. I imagined Lennox swallowing Champ’s beautiful sleek body and her poison somehow reacting in Lennox’s stomach, releasing volatile gasses, causing him to explode. Although the second part was unlikely, being swallowed whole wasn’t too terrible a way to lose a fight. Every fighter loses sooner or later.

I knocked Champ off the popsicle stick with a second grape flavored stick. It was some special grape flavor, limited time only type of thing, and the stick was a green grape color instead of the usual dark purple. We placed the top on the tank, so neither fighter could give up without the consent of a referee.

It wasn’t intentional! Champ landed on the back of Lennox. It took Lennox a moment to realize what was happening. He suddenly began to stomp around the ring again, immediately knocking Champ off his back. Lying supine on the ring floor showing off her bloody timekeeper, she flailed her eight jet-black legs. Lennox tramped over her, nearly crushing her, a number of times. We were
waiting for Lennox to discover the meal that awaited him. Once again, he
stopped in the middle of the tank, right in front of Champ. Now that she wasn’t
being trampled anymore, she got back onto all eight legs. Once straightened out,
she stood still in front of Lennox Lizard as if it were the final face off, but she
appeared dazed and unready.

Adam and I just watched and waited. I could hear my sister cleaning. The
smell of bleach suddenly filled the air. What else of mine was she corrupting? I
wanted to know, but I couldn’t take my eyes off the two combatants.

“What the hell?” Adam moved closer to the ring, his eyes centimeters from
the glass wall.

“What?” I joined my brother, as close to the lack-of-action as possible.
Lennox and Champ were motionless. I opened the glass top and slowly moved
the cherry-flavored stick towards Lennox. Suddenly, just before I poked Lennox
in the back, Champ ran onto his back and grappled the stick. Her motions were
less delicate than usual. I quickly rescued her and plopped her into her house. I
figured we could call it a draw at that point.

“Looks like she’s still the champ.”

“What?” I saw what my brother saw, lack of motion. My palms were moist.
I know that you aren’t the type to sit around and watch lizards all day. You
wouldn’t have noticed right away. I spent a number of my childhood days hunting
lizards, so I know what I’m talking about. A lizard’s side will fluctuate between
smooth and rippled; Lennox was stuck on the rippled stage. When a lizard
breathes in, its ribs disappear; it was obvious that Lennox wasn’t doing any of that.

“Looks like Lennox has a glass jaw,” I said with an added laugh.

“Champ must have bit him. Jen, take a look at this!” It was weird hearing Adam call my sister, Jen. That was what her friends called her. To us, she was Jenny. Like I said earlier, her name is not important. I only said something because I’ll get bored of repeating “my sister” over and over. I know I told you Adam’s name too; that’s because it comes up more often, and you know, he’s the first-born.

“Holy crap!” I said to myself when I turned around and actually saw carpet. The layer of filth was gone! I don’t want to be like my parents, but maybe cleaning is a woman’s job. It would take me a weekend to clean that apartment; she was halfway done in less than five minutes.

“That’s horrible! You two are barbaric,” seeing Lennox’s corpse, my sister reacted, upset and half joking—well, maybe more like one quarter joking, or one eighth.

“Jenny,” I mumbled while still quite shocked. “I really appreciate the thought, but you don’t need to clean my place. I’m going to do it this weekend.”

“That’s fine, but before we leave tonight that litter box is going to be clean!”

After that bout, I was certain that Champ didn’t sweat.

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You should have seen my sister after Lennox’s devastating loss—oh that poor lizard, what a waste of life! Adam had gotten it into his mind to bury him. You know those grassy strips they put between the sidewalk and the street? Well, there was one of those outside my apartment building. Adam and Jenny buried Lennox there. I taped my two popsicle sticks together to make a cross and wrote Lennox Lizard across it. We used the cross to mark his grave.

When I left for work on Monday, the marker was gone and his grave was exhumed. Imprints of animal paws were sunken into the wet soil. If I were to guess, either a raccoon or a small dog enjoyed Lennox and the artificial fruit flavored sticks.

Let me tell you, the human mind is strange. Randomly relevant thoughts and words boil into the consciousness when you are doing the most mindless tasks, like showering or driving. As I drove to work, thoughts of Champ went in and out of mind. Eventually, I realized that they were there and I fashioned them into a poem. It came easily at first, but once I tried to complete the thought, it took much more effort.

Cold black Champion!
You have no love for me.
You liquidate your husband
and drink the milky shake.
Slurping down his memory
without a drop of shame.

I give you many playmates
yet
you have no love for me.
You welcome them like friends
although they try to flee.
Your house becomes their house
as they become part you.

I keep you full and nourished
banquets of defeated foes.
It keeps your chitin glowing smooth
black, and strengthened joints.
And still
you have no love for me.

I see right through
your dreadful thoughts.
They succor violent pangs.

You have no heart within you
Love’s transfigured on your ab.
The hourglass of your doom
is filled with scarlet sand
packed so full, you never age.
In your darkness
I will bleed.
You have no love for me.

I didn’t actually clean my apartment that weekend. Hey Cat had a full box
of clean litter where she could bury her excrement and I could see parts of my
floor. I couldn’t get motivated unless the filth was unbearable. My brother didn’t
stop by all week. He may have had a deadline to meet and been forced to work a
thirty-hour week. Although, I suspected that he simply couldn’t find a challenger
to face Champ.

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I realize that I’ve probably told you enough to understand the tragedy, but
really knowing every detail gives you better insight. Sure, some of the details of
Champ’s life are missing. Even I don’t know some of the details; I wonder if Ant
Grant tasted better than Stinky Brewster.
Champ’s final bout was versus Wasptali Klitschko. It’s pronounced vahst-alley. You know those Eastern Europeans and their strange names. Wasptali was the European champion.

Early Saturday morning isn’t my time of day. I usually sleep in till noon. My brother rang the doorbell. I must not have heard him knock. When I opened the door, the first thing I saw was Wasptali in the fancy mason jar, flying into every inch of the jar looking for an opening. Every few moments, he would land on the bottom of the jar to catch his breath, and then he would continue the furious searching.

Wasptali was all black. Not black like Champ’s glassy black, rather so black, that he appeared to be void of light. Not much bigger than Champ, he looked young, tough, and energetic, everything you need to be a champion. However, I learned not to underestimate Champ. Besides, she had a week of rest and superior training.

“I looked it up,” my brother said with ultra-confidence, “The spider’s greatest enemy is the wasp.”

“Champ loves eating things with wings,” I retorted, “I think they’re juicier on the inside.”

Of course, our biggest problem was getting Wasptali into the ring. We decided that it would be best to put Champ in first, then put in the whole mason jar on it’s side, open it, and close the top of the ring as soon as possible. It went almost according to plan. Since I didn’t have my popsicle sticks anymore, I simply dumped Champ in with a couple victimized carcasses she was housing.
Opening Wasptali’s jar and closing the ring was quite a bit more difficult. Luckily, Wasptali cooperated and decided to walk out of the jar rather than fly.

“I don’t think they want to fight,” Adam said. Wasptali flew from corner to corner of the ring, while Champ simply stood still, probably surveying Wasptali’s movements.

“They’re warming up,” I said.

This went on for about ten minutes before Wasptali got sick of flying and decided to simply walk around the ring. Eventually, he walked up to Champ and had the audacity to touch her with his feelers. Champ picked up her two front legs pushing back Wasptali. She stood in her fighter’s stance now, ready for combat.

Wasptali took to the air, his clear advantage, and came down on top of her. He snagged Champ’s front left leg in his mandibles. As he lifted her off the ground, her seven other free legs wrapped around his body. The flight was very unbalanced. Wasptali crashed into the sides of the ring and ended up on the ground once again. In a single motion, he ripped Champ’s beautifully delicate leg from her socket. A silk-like sinew stretched from the empty socket to her leg, as she backed away the sinew snapped. Wasptali spent a few moments eating her now hideous appendage. Adam and I could see the chunks being ground into goop inside his insect-mouth.

My hands were sweating; my heart throbbed; I despised seeing this mayhem. Champ stayed in her fighter’s stance, except with one leg in the air. This time, she led the charge. Wasptali didn’t even flinch at the impending attack.
He simply latched onto Champ’s second left leg, while her six free legs grabbed onto him. She got herself jammed between Wasptali and the floor. Her hourglass rubbed against his thorax as she frantically attempted to free herself while her fangs scratched against his glossy chitin trying to deliver a deathblow. His chitin armor must have been impenetrable.

The fight entranced Adam and me.

Once again, Wasptali took to the air with Champ’s leg in his mouth. In the completely uncontrollable state, he did barrel rolls and loops, attempting to get the leverage he needed to tear off the leg. Again, they came crashing down to the floor, heavier this time. I swear I felt the impact; I could hear it echo. As they landed, Champ became separated from her limb. Completely letting go of Wasptali, she fell onto her back. The only color in the ring was her crimson hourglass. Champ managed to get onto her feet despite the lack of limbs. Wasptali hardly moved. Champ mounted Wasptali, then proceeded to wrap him up.

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I wasn’t too thrilled with the outcome; even though she finished her career undefeated and was surprisingly functional with six legs—she wasn’t any less appealing.

My brother and I had the task of deciding where she would retire.

“Some place warm and dry,” Adam said. That’s why people love California, warm and dry.

“My car?” I said, seriously. I was trying to think of the best place for her.
We spent some time researching the habitat of the black widow. Every
different source stated numerous places, under rocks, barns, shrubbery,
garages, debris, but every source included woodpiles. So, I decided that the best
place for her would be a woodpile; although for safety reasons, my brother
demanded otherwise. *Apparently*, black widows in woodpiles bite an
unexpectedly large number of people.

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Adam and I drove a short distance to a lightly forested area in the middle
of town. Champ was back in her home with all her trophy carcasses, including
Wasptali Klitschko. I placed the entire jar on its side in a dense bush.

“Destroy your enemies, Champ!” I said.

“Hail to the victor,” my brother added.

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The first thing my sister said when she showed up was, “Where’s your
black widow?” followed by, “Why is your place so clean?”

I figured that I should do something unexpected.