

ATALANTA K.O. (excerpt)

by D.L. Siegel

## PROLOGUE

*[NICHOLAS, in his mid-20s, stands outside in the mock-amphitheater of Athens Square Park. Astoria, NY. THE CHORUS LEADERS and the entire MALE CHORUS flank the space, watching. They are dressed neutrally, with some degree of uniformity. They wear modern dress. It is night time, and the occasional car can be heard passing by. Nicholas stares at a baby carriage in front of him. He occasionally runs his hands over the top of the carriage, adjusts the blanket. In unison, The Chorus Leaders and Male Chorus members strike poses of prayer.]*

## CHORUS LEADER 1

Lord Jesus Christ, you received the children who came to you, receive also from the lips of your child this evening prayer.

*[Nicholas begins to recite the Greek Orthodox Prayer for Children in Greek under the Chorus Leaders' English recitation.]*

## CHORUS LEADER 2

Shelter me under the protection of your wings that I may lie down in peace and sleep.

## CHORUS LEADERS 1 &amp; 2

Awaken me in due time that I may glorify you,

## CHORUS LEADER 2

For you alone are good and love all people.

## CHORUS LEADER 1

You received the children who came to you—

## CHORUS LEADER 2

Shelter me under the protection of your wings—

## CHORUS LEADERS 1 &amp; 2 AND MALE CHORUS

Awaken me in due time.

*[The train passes by overhead, cutting off the prayer. Nicholas looks up at the sound, waiting for the train to pass. The Chorus members look only at him. The train gone, Nicholas returns his attention to the baby carriage. Rests his hand on top of it.]*

## NICHOLAS

The only survivor of the wreck.

*[Nicholas moves towards a nearby payphone and holds the receiver to his ear. Waits a moment.]*

Yes, hello. I call to report an abandoned child.

Uh-huh, right.

A baby girl.

What?

Oh. Yes, sir. Athens Square Park.

No, in Astoria. Queens, yes.

By the train. 30<sup>th</sup> street and 30<sup>th</sup> avenue. *[a small confused pause]* Yes, is real address.

No. I'm sorry, I cannot stay until you arrive.

*[Nicholas hangs up the phone and fidgets briefly with his wedding band. He returns to the carriage and adjusts his daughter's blanket.]*

NICHOLAS

*(leaning into the carriage)*

My little miracle.

*[Nicholas walks away and off with the Chorus Leaders following his movements.]*

CHORUS LEADER 1

And so it begins.

CHORUS LEADER 2

And so we begin.

CHORUS LEADER 1

Every minute a hero is born.

CHORUS LEADER 2

Rises.

CHORUS LEADER 2 & MALE CHORUS

Falls.

CHORUS LEADER 1

Must they *all* fall?

*[A faint cry begins, drawing the chorus to the carriage. Their formation shifts and they come close around the carriage.]*

CHORUS LEADERS & MALE CHORUS

A hero is born.

*[As the cry gets stronger, it blends with the sound of an approaching police car. With a sharp gesture from the Chorus Leaders, they cue the sound of a boxing round bell. All the chorus members remove their coats to reveal their workout clothes underneath.]*

## ROUND 1

*[The lights shift down and the amphitheater is transformed into a stylized boxing gym by the Chorus Leaders and the male chorus. Perhaps the pillars of Athens Square Park remain, defining the boundaries of the space. We hear the sounds of boxing gloves hitting pads, the chains of hanging heavy bags rattling with the force of successive blows. The rhythmic clicking of jump ropes hitting the ground.]*

*Chorus Leader 2 holds up a large card reading 'Round 1.' She walks diagonally across the space with it in the style of a ring girl.*

*Once the space is set, the Male Chorus members, attired as the boxers, are running through various boxing drills – squat thrusts, jump rope, speed bag, push-ups, etc. The Chorus Leaders stand slightly apart, not quite of this world. The other characters do not acknowledge their presence. SAMIR, weaves his way through the men, stopping from time to time to correct their form, to encourage them, to egg them on. He is a massively-built machine of a man, 30s, of indeterminate ethnicity, looks like he could've made a go of his own career in boxing if not bodybuilding. After consulting the unseen clock for a long moment he yells over the din:]*

SAMIR

SWITCH!

*[The men rotate in the space, each man switching to the station to his left. After another few moments of this organized chaos, with Samir continuing to observe and supervise.]*

*ATALANTA enters, her gym bag slung over her shoulder. She is beautiful, intense, a smudge of a bruise under one eye. At her entrance, nearly the chaos of sound slows, stops, and the men slowly back away to let her by. The Chorus Leaders hold the men back. They murmur between them, displaying a frank discomfort with her presence that Samir can't help but notice.*

*Atalanta squares her shoulders and hardens her expression before setting her bag down in the space and creating an area for herself. Her hands are already wrapped. She swiftly removes her sweatshirt, unselfconsciously adjusts her shirt. Tightens the band that holds her hair back. The men have returned to their drills, at a more leisurely pace now, their eyes still frequently darting to where Atalanta is preparing herself. Samir saunters over to her, his arms folded over his chest. She starts to shadowbox, throwing a series of punches into the air, and Samir eventually stops beside her. Watching her.]*

SAMIR

You got nothin' to say for yourself?

*[Atalanta does not stop what she's doing, simply scoffs to acknowledge that she heard Samir.]*

ATALANTA

I didn't do anything.

*[Samir nods, letting this settle.]*

SAMIR

So Jackson Healy broke his own jaw last night?

*[Atalanta pauses for the tiniest moment but otherwise doesn't respond. Keeps shadowboxing.]*  
He claims it was unprovoked. That you jumped him for no good reason.

*[Atalanta lets out a bark of a laugh at this.]*

ATALANTA  
*(under her breath)*

The fuck he does.

*[Samir sighs, observing her.]*

SAMIR

...what happened.

*[Atalanta stops punching. She takes a long, aggravated look from Samir to the men, who continue their calisthenics.]*

ATALANTA

Fine.

Jackson walks into the locker room last night and he goes 'tell me...if I flip a coin right now, whaddya think the chance is that I'll get head?' He was all 'you get it? Get it? *Head, bitch. Head.* What are the chances.' And then he had the nerve to put his fucking hands on me and—

*[to the Chorus]*

What. WHAT.

*[the boxers are still]*

You want some too? Huh?!

*[The entire chorus moves into a tableau of aggressive positions, braced for attack. Samir puts a firm, steady hand on Atalanta's shoulder, aiming to keep her still. It works.]*

SAMIR  
*(to the men)*

Back to work. Now.

*[The men look at each other, not otherwise moving.]*

Now! Or I swear to God you're gonna spend the next week on suicide sprints.

*[The men shift positions, returning to their workouts. Over the course of the scene, all of them will move off, leaving only Samir and Atalanta.]*

SAMIR

Which hand you hit 'im with?

*[Atalanta holds up her left hand.]*

Bare-knuckled?

*[She shrugs, Samir reaches for her hand.]*

Gimme.

ATALANTA  
*(snatching her hand away)*

There's nothing wrong with my/ hand.

SAMIR

Show me.

*[Reluctantly, Atalanta holds her left hand out to him, lets him undo part of the handwrap to see her knuckles. She seems to be vibrating with energy, her whole body caught in a kind of bounce. She wants to get started already. Samir tests different parts of her hand in turn, watching her face to gauge her reaction. She winces, maybe once. A movement so small it would likely be unnoticeable to anyone but Samir.]*

SAMIR

At least nothing's broken.

ATALANTA

I don't break so easy.

*[Samir continues to hold her hand for a few moments longer than he needs to. Atalanta's expression is guarded. She blinks at him as he tests the bones of her hand before:]*

ATALANTA (cont'd)

Can I have that back?

*[Samir relaxes his grip and she removes her hand from his, fixes her wrap.]*

SAMIR

A'right, so he shouldn't've gotten fresh with you, but that doesn't—

ATALANTA

Fresh?!

*[Atalanta rifles through her gym bag to get her gloves out. She stops, her frustration building.]*  
They treat me like a fucking sideshow attraction.

*[Atalanta can't seem to stop moving, fidgeting. It's not a tick as much as it is energy spilling out of her.]*

SAMIR

You still can't go around attacking—

ATALANTA

Those boys can handle themselves.

SAMIR

It's not about *them*. What do I always say, huh? Tell me, what do I always tell you.

ATALANTA

*(through gritted teeth)*

Save it for the ring.

*[She's looking everywhere but at Samir.]*

SAMIR

Yes. *In gloves.*

Don't you dare risk messing up your hands trying to prove a fucking point. Look at me. Attie, look at me. *[She does.]* It's not worth it. Do we understand each other?

ATALANTA

...Yes.

*[Her voice lowering to a tone of secrecy, Atalanta turns a very serious face towards Samir.]*

ATALANTA (cont'd)

*(with great pride)*

But I wish you could've heard the crack when my hand connected. Like a thunderclap.

*[Samir stands blinking at Atalanta, completely unsure of how to respond to this. Atalanta holds her hands out to him, palms facing up, the gesture nearly supplication. Samir wordlessly fastens her gloves on her wrists. Atalanta tests the fit, smacking them against each other.]*

SAMIR

Ready?

*[Atalanta nods. Samir crouches a bit to put himself level with her. He puts defensive pads on his hands for Atalanta to hit and he calls out the hits seconds before her hands connect with the pads.]*

Jab, cross.

*[Atalanta hits the pads.]*

Good. One, two.

*[She hits.]*

AGAIN. One, two.

*[She hits harder.]*

Jab, cross, hook.

*[She hits.]*

Put your shoulder into that hook, Attie.

ATALANTA  
(breathing heavily)

I am.

SAMIR

No you're not. Again. Jab, cross, hook.

*[She connects with a grunt.]*

Yes. One, two, three.

*[She hits.]*

(marking this for her) Jab, cross, hook, uppercut.

*[She hits him hard. He smiles.]*

Again!

*[She nails the combination.]*

*[Samir stops for a moment, swiping his arm across his forehead to deal with the sweat there. Atalanta bounces between her feet, almost trance-like when she speaks.]*

ATALANTA

What, am I tirin' you out?

*[Samir smirks, glances at a clock somewhere above Atalanta's head and adjusts the pads.]*

SAMIR

30 seconds. Quick and controlled. Ready?

*[Atalanta lifts her guard and nods.]*

Go.

*[Atalanta lands a series of hits to the pads. Breathtaking. Powerful. The intensity of her movements compels the Chorus to join her in her movements. Chorus. After 30 seconds:]*

SAMIR

Stop.

*[Atalanta drops her guard, breathing heavily. Smiling. She and Samir stand facing each other, each seemingly overcome by the adrenaline release. The moment has a feeling of afterglow. It is the most still and centered we have seen Atalanta.]*

SAMIR

Good.

*[Samir shifts the pads under his arm, freeing up his hands.]*

Get some water.

*[Atalanta undoes the velcro on one of her gloves with her teeth. Samir laughs at her.]*

SAMIR  
(gesturing to her glove)

That's...really gross.

ATALANTA

Thank you.

*[Atalanta grabs her water bottle with her now ungloved hand. Samir joins her on the ground, facing her. He grabs his own water bottle, his eyes trained on Atalanta's face. She notices.]*

SAMIR

He hit you back, huh.

*[She feels her face, remembers.]*

ATALANTA

Oh. Yeah, he got one in.

SAMIR

*(more tender than chastising)*

I don't like the color.

ATALANTA

Then stop looking at it!

SAMIR

You've gotta protect your face, kid.

ATALANTA

*(joking)*

Oh yeah. The money-maker, right?

*[Samir laughs lightly, takes Atalanta's chin in his hand, examining the bruise on her face. His expression is soft, though it seems to take a lot of effort to hold her face relatively still. Atalanta frowns and she puts her hand over his, moving him away from her. Atalanta glances towards the same unseen clock and leaps to her feet.]*

ATALANTA

Come on.

*[Samir grabs Atalanta's discarded glove, stands, and refastens it on her wrist. They get back into position.]*

SAMIR

Now focus. I wanna see you landing those combinations.

*[Atalanta starts throwing punches in combination again. They speak over her punching.]*

ATALANTA

Cal Donovan's got no one to fight next week.

*[Samir does not respond. Doesn't take his eyes off her as she hits the pads.]*

For The Battle of the Boroughs?

*[Atalanta hits Samir hard enough to make him wince.]*

SAMIR

Easy, Attie.

ATALANTA

*(continues to punch)*

His partner flaked. Took some title fight.

*[Atalanta lands another particularly vicious hit. Samir backs up a step.]*

SAMIR

Yeah. I heard something about that.

*[lifting his hands into place]* I wanna see that power in your cross. Again.

*[Atalanta hits the pads again. Speaking through the exertion.]*

SAMIR

Watch your shoulder—

ATALANTA

I wanna fight Donovan.

*[Samir abruptly drops his hands. Not expecting this, Atalanta almost hits him in the face but he ducks just before her hand connects. They pause, with Atalanta panting into the silence.]*

SAMIR

Ok...hold up. Cal Donovan? Is that a joke?

ATALANTA

*(offended)*

No.

SAMIR

“The Boar of Bushwick.”

ATALANTA

Yeah.

SAMIR

You ever see him? *Way* out of your weightclass. Not that it even matters 'cause he'll never fight a woman, even for an exhibition fight.

ATALANTA

We'll change his mind.

SAMIR

He's undefeated.

ATALANTA

So am I! Eight for eight this year.

SAMIR

Eight club fights.

ATALANTA

Against *middleweights*.

SAMIR

Still, I don't—

ATALANTA

You want me to 'save it for the ring' then what are you waiting for! Put me in the FUCKING RING!

*[A tense face-off between them.]*

SAMIR

Cal is...a machine.

ATALANTA

Is that supposed to scare me?

SAMIR

He's controlled. He's precise. He's a real smart fighter.

ATALANTA

*(with a flash of temper)*

Put your gloves on and I'll show you how smart I can fight.

SAMIR

*(frustrated)*

Attie...

ATALANTA

*(hitting her gloves together)*

When I win the Battle of the Boroughs—

SAMIR

I'm telling you, he won't fight you—

ATALANTA

When I win the Battle of the Boroughs...everything'll be different. Good. Better.

*[Samir continues to frown at her.]*

If I take down The Boar, people will notice. People will care. People will...  
Everything can finally start for me.

*[Samir takes this in.]*

SAMIR

He's built like a tree!

*[Atalanta shrugs, clearly unconcerned. Samir sighs.]*

We'd have, like, a week to train for this.

A really brutal week. Every day. All sorts of new drills you're gonna hate.

ATALANTA

I can beat him, I can. I can and I want this shot.

*[Samir looks away from her, rests his hands on his thighs for a moment, his head bowed.]*

SAMIR

...Ok.

ATALANTA

Ok?

SAMIR

*(with a gesture of surrender)*

I can't make any promises...but I'll make some calls. I'll try.

ATALANTA

*(grinning)*

Thank you. *Thank you.* I'm not gonna let you down. I swear to God. Swear to God, Samir. I'll make you proud.

*[Samir smiles at her as she bounces from foot to foot.]*

SAMIR

A'right, killer...Show me what you've got.