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This is from chapter 6. Cratag Maytree, the hero of Heart Change, has returned to his home, T'Hawthorn Residence, and the boy he has mentored into a man (legal age is 17), Laev Hawthorn. Laev has been jittery lately... D'Marigold is Signet D'Marigold, the heroine of Heart Change.

They stepped onto the mat and bowed to each other. "Fifth fighting pattern," Cratag said. Laev's class was working on that one at The Green Knight Fencing and Fighting Salon. None of them had mastered it.

An intensity came to Laev's eyes and Cratag readied for the attack, the kick and leg spin. But Laev shot a short jabbing blow instead. Cratag countered and they fought. As always, Cratag modulated his strength. He took some kicks, a fall or two, and gave back as good as he got, teaching with technique Laev could observe.

They circled each other, sweating, adding heavy scent to the already smell-burdened room.

"So tell me about this deal with D'Marigold," Laev said.

Cratag's mind flashed to an image of the woman sitting in her beautiful Residence that so suited her.

Laev took him down, properly pinned him to end the bout, crowed with panting laughter and rolled off Cratag. "I won!"

"Sure you did," Cratag said.

"I did."

"I said so, didn't I?"

Chuckling, Laev said. "It's that D'Marigold. Diverts you."

Cratag stilled. How did the boy know that?

"I've watched you at GreatCircle Temple rituals." Laev glanced aside. "I watched you the first time you met. At D'Holly's Healing Circle." His voice was a little rough. "I'll never forget that."

"You did very well, then and now." Cratag shoved to his feet, offered Laev a hand up. "And I don't recall that move in fighting pattern five."

Laev shrugged. "Some variation Tab Holly taught us."

Something nobles knew and commoners didn't. Cratag had spottily learned the fighting patterns in his youth, learned more after he'd come to Druida and trained at a gym.

Picking up a towel, Laev rubbed it across his neck. "Think the Hollys, maybe Tab himself, developed it."

Definitely a move Cratag didn't know – or hadn't. Now he did. But the boy's excess energy had drained. His movements were smoother, like a fighter's should be. No more clumsiness for a while, Cratag congratulated himself.

Laev slanted him a glance. "Odd how fate circled around with this – you and D'Marigold met first at a ritual presided over by the Hazels."

Ah, the boy was considering his own personal philosophy and what his culture had taught him. Cratag didn't care what the young man believed as long as it included a strong sense of ethics. If it didn't – well, Cratag'd failed.