

Chapter 824

They had been in such a rush to reassert their superiority they had forgotten to engage their brains. In hindsight, what was I going to do? Fight them all? Make a break for it? Had they calmly exerted their authority, I would have acquiesced. I would have clearly embraced that option. Once they enjoined violence, they had backed me into a corner.

At that point, they couldn't win. They didn't have the time to break me and no amount of damage I sustained would change the equation. I knew I was going to get beaten so there was no incentive for me to do anything but fight. I had fought Rhada and Madi after all. Best of all, their irrational actions had been highlighted by their highest official.

There were a few 'he should have submitted'. Those speakers weren't convincing anyone, even themselves. Their tame males would have bowed down. Hell, they wouldn't have been in this position in the first place. With pain and blood, I was starting to make inroads. Amazons didn't have a version of the French Foreign Legion at Camarón, or the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae.

Sacrifice was occasionally necessary, but not celebrated. This was not to say giving your life for another wasn't appreciated. It was, yet the emphasis was on killing your enemy before such a deed was inevitable. Vastly outnumbered throughout their history, the lessons they drilled into the next generation was one of killing your enemy swiftly.www.OreilWorm.com

Going toe to toe with your foes was a luxury they could not afford. Numbers and ill-fortune could be calamitous. The Amazons in the gym saw nothing wrong with the Elsa having a spear while I had nothing. In the same way, they had no problem with 'how' I attacked Sabia, only that I had attacked her at all.

It had been foolish of Sabia to turn her back on me, not knowing who I was. Had they been in my position, they would have hit her from behind too. What they did value was loyalty, martial valor and respect. Betraying a fellow Amazon was probably a horrific crime to them. Personal grievances were most likely dealt with internally with the declaration of a blood feud.

Martial valor - well, duh. They were Amazons. I was willing to bet every one of the new male recruits had some sort of combative ability. Tessa and Katrina would not want to dump neophytes into this cauldron without some sort of defensive training. Their system of respect was an elaborate structure I had barely pierced.

Prestige/blood purity was important, yet clearly competence counted as well. Hayden, Katrina and Tessa were all scary-smart. The last two were pretty young for their critical positions. Hayden sat atop a pyramid of psychopaths, many who were unhappy with her and her choice on how to save her people. Their restiveness and Hayden's willingness to stay the course was laid out with the encounter with Leona.

Desiree retrieved her pistol, loading it before pulling me to my feet. A woman put a hand on my chest before I made the door.

"You will not always be so lucky," she warned me.

"Cáel don't," Desiree cautioned me. I proved I could learn something and said nothing.

"Keep him on a tight leash, Half-blood," the lady mocked us as we moved around.

"I take it back," Desiree grunted. "Have at her."

"Please take into account," I grinned at my latest tormentor, "that I have nothing to lose by meeting your challenge while the best you can do is a draw."

"I repeat," she snarled, "you will not..."

"Shove it," I interrupted her angrily. "This is not me being lucky. Being lucky would have implied that any of the douches here had two brain cells to rub together. Then you would have realized I made an honest mistake and three of you wouldn't be suffering from gunshot wounds."www.OreilWorm.com

The woman's flashed hate to me then glanced to Desiree.

"I'm not going to shoot you," Desiree yawned. "He's going to snap your neck like a twig because he's too damn tired to play around with our sensibilities about your perceived value of your life. Have at..."

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I must have looked like death warmed over. She took ten seconds to decide that I was right - the best she could get was a draw. After the beating Elsa had given me, taking me down would have seemed pathetic. Had I won, she would have never lived it down.

"Had enough?" Desiree asked as she helped me limp along.

"You haven't shot me," I snorted.

"We aren't out the doors yet," she reminded me.

"Thank you," I sighed. For not shooting me...for coming to my rescue...for her words to her fellow Amazons...we never clarified my intent.

Outside the doors there were two groups waiting on me - the work crew and Yasmin plus two SD members.www.OreilWorm.com

"Ladies," I addressed the first group. "A moment's forbearance. I need to take care of this." I hobbled over to Yasmin who had hurriedly dressed.

"Wow," I chuckled. "This has to count as one of the most disastrous first dates in history. I apologize for this unforeseen chaos. I'm kind of surprised you are still here." I wasn't surprised. Getting your ass kicked in a valiant struggle is only superseded by winning said struggle in the 'getting the girl all hot' category.

"Are you going to be alright?" she stroked my cheek.

"I get \$247,000 a year plus a truckload of benefits," I smiled. "I also have to deal with a number of colorful characters. Remember, I was shot with an arrow on Saturday." Yasmin tried to pull me away from Desiree and the two guardians, but they were having none of that.

"These women are some kind crazy cult," Yasmin whispered in my ear. Less I forget, she was a kick-ass cop back in Brazil.

"I'm not going to insult your intelligence with a denial," I whispered back.

"Why are you staying?" she looked into my eyes.

"Nothing I could tell you would make sense," I kissed her. She pulled my head down hard and turned a simple peck into a full blow French kiss. Desiree tapped Yasmin on the shoulder half a minute later.

"Time for you to go," she told my date.

"Are you leaving soon?" Yasmin asked me.

"No, he's staying here with us for a while," Desiree answered for me. "He clearly has difficulty taking care of himself."

"Strange," Yasmin growled, "your crowd seems to be the reason he needs to be taken care of in the first place."