

Chapter 857

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"Oh, were you under some delusion that you could tell me what to do, Elsa?" I replied. There was a hush for so many reasons. Elsa being denied, a man denying anything to any of them, and my cavalier, even dismissive attitude toward the Full-blooded assembly.

"Under what delusion do you think you can safely defy me?" Elsa smiled shark-like.

"Hmmm," I mused, "let me think. You aren't Hayden, Katrina, or Buffy -- my chain of command. You are not Aya, who I love. You are not acting in my best interest as it relates to Havenstone. Yeah, that should about cover it."

"I am a woman of Havenstone and I am giving you, a male, an order. There is no acceptable reason to disobey," Elsa countered.

"You are incorrect," I began. The ladies around me didn't like that. "I cannot betray my Amazons. You do not possess the power to force me to disappoint them."

"Your Amazons?" A chocolate Amazon with ash-blond hair jumped up. "We are not yours, filth."

"Were you born stupid, or has education made you that way?" I spat back. An ass-whopping was in the offing.

"If you came at Hayden, or Katrina, do you think I'd sit idly by and let them fight alone?" I kept at it, though I remained kneeling. "If you threaten any member of Executive Services, or House Epona, make peace with your Ancestors because I will fight, bleed and die for MY Amazons. I've already proved that oath. Your opinion on the matter is less than rat-piss to me."

I'm sure arrogance has a use. I haven't found one yet, but I don't ignore the possibility. Chocolate chick grabbed for my hair, ready to slit my throat the moment she tilted my head back. This would have been appropriate if I was one of their old male population. Only total arrogance had kept her from actually listening to the words of defiance coming out of my mouth.

I caught her hand, flipped her over and drove the top of her skull into the mat. That

shoots a numbing jolt right up the spine, I can tell you from experience. I snatched the knife from her helpless fingers as she finished flipping over, her head closest to me then pressed the blade to her jugular.

"Not a single person in this room matters to me. The only person that should matter to you, is me," I stated calmly and quietly. "That being the case, choose your next words carefully and with due consideration of everything I've said before this moment." I was going to die if I killed her. That wouldn't save her life from her own, small, razor-sharp blade.

Almost a minute passed.

"Cael, give me my blade," she replied in a rather brave voice. I pulled my hand up, spun the blade around and pressed it into her palm. She slowly sat up and swiveled around until we were face to face, her cross-legged and me, back to my kneeling pose. Her eyes were ice cold.

"I was never in any danger, was I?" the woman half-asked, half-stated.

"Of course not. I would never shame

Katrina that way. I'd kill for her. Killing an Amazon to save my own life would not be something she'd allow," I explained as much to the room as the woman.

"Don't lie," another Amazon teased me --thankfully. It was Trask a Maza--from the Medical Center. "I heard you murdered an Amazon on Friday--end of business."

"Yep," I confessed. "Hayden has admonished me from repeating that method of assassination. I swear that if Fabiola keeps calling 'Runners' 'Lost Bloods', I'm going to figure out another way to get her."

"The term 'Lost Blood' is the term we use. Accept it, Male," Stanica growled. I had to think about that. I stood up, so I had a good view of the SD bitch. I also had to work up the proper insult. Anything I directed at Stanica would be useless. I knew their weakness though.

"Hey," I addressed my African opponent.

"Stanica's mother mated with her own paternal male to give birth to Stanica. I read it in an inner-office e-mail." Total lie, but the 'lie' wasn't mine. It was from an unnamed

Amazon and it insulted her bloodline, something she truly valued. I glared at Stanica. "That is why it is insulting. In a blood-conscious culture, you are rubbing their noses in a fact beyond their control."

"I agree," Oneida spoke up. "'Lost Bloods' is insulting. I had never questioned that before. 'Runners' is a better term. I will ask my house to use it from now on."

"That's not going to save him," Stanica seethed.

"Do you want to know where the memo came from?" I inquired of Stanica.

"There is no memo," Stanica snapped. I shrugged.

"Why would I make it up? Such a deadly insult?" I pressed the point. Oh, I had made it up because I hate bigotry, especially when it is aimed at someone who was almost a friend.

"Who?" she glared.

"I don't know, but I know who does," I offered. "She's right outside that door,"

I *W**w**W*<sub>(n)</sub>*e*<sub>l</sub>*w**e**r**m*<sub>c</sub>(n)

pointed to the main entrance. Now, do people recall that divide I was talking about way back in Chapter Two? It worked both ways. Full-bloods were aware of the oppression they exerted on their 'Lost Blood/Runner' sisters. Creeping around in the back of some of their minds was the worry that those newcomers resented their superiors *w**w**W*<sub>Nov</sub>*E**l**w*<sub>RM</sub>*C*<sub>(n)</sub>

Had the two groups been truly united, Stanica wouldn't have given my bluff a second glance. Here was the backlash of being a bigot--the idea that those you hated, hating you right back. In short order, Buffy was by my side and listening to Stanica's grievance. Finally we were speaking English again.

"Man, Desiree is going to be so sorry she missed this," Buffy looked down at me.

I was kneeling again so she was able to appear lofty and run her hand through my hair the way she liked to do when she was extra horny for me. I also liked the way her boobs nearly obscured her face from my view. Very nice tits.

"Stanica, he lied to you," Buffy revealed.

"I knew it! Stand aside, I'm going to gut the little shit," Stanica started to come at me.

"No you don't," Buffy interposed herself. "See, Cael was following his instructions and he used your idiocy against you, Dumbass," she gloated to Stanica. "He was ordered to serve at my side today, so that is what he did. Who in the right mind would commit anything about blood prestige to an office e-mail anyway? It wasn't even up to his normally superb level of deception."

"Then he should be punished for lying to me," Stanica seethed.

"I told him to," Buffy wasn't even lying. She'd approved my plan the moment she agreed to 'trust me'.

"When?" Elsa requested. She was coming our way. Buffy looked over her shoulder.

"Funny, you don't look like Katrina, Elsa," Buffy guffawed. "Make an official request through the proper channels. You don't get to tell me what to do."

"Do we need to clarify our positions?" Elsa menaced. I jumped up and took up a

stance. With Stanica on one side, Elsa on the other and the preference of Amazons to gang up on opponents, I had to have her back.

"Kneel," Buffy tapped my shoulder. I knelt. "Honestly Elsa, Cael fucked me so hard and long this weekend that even your pettiness doesn't annoy me today. Now, why are we here?"

"He's not allowed to have sex," Trask seemed a bit distressed. Me having sex outside the office had never occurred to her apparently.

"Strangely, I have all of you to thank for that," Buffy smugly regarded the room. "While you let Constanza and Crewe ambush him then sat back uselessly while he kicked both their asses, gazed on as he refused to take advantage of Constanza once she was clearly incapable of resisting and let her put a blade to his throat, he found a way to legally sleep with me."

"Afraid? With a blade to his throat, he couldn't care less about any of you," Buffy regaled them. "Oh, we know you don't care what he thinks -- or what I think. Well,

welcome to the world you've created. I don't care what you think. Blood Prestige? I'll only give as much respect as I'm given. I am embarrassed I ever thought any of you were better than me." *w**w**W*<sub>no</sub>(v)*e*<sub>or</sub>*M*<sub>(c)</sub>*om*

"My prestige is that I volunteered for this lifestyle. I made a choice that no one else in this room ever had the courage to make -- to abandon my old life for another, unknown one. From here on out, I'm going to be like Cael. One of you bitches puts a hand on me, be ready to back it up," Buffy challenged them. Not the best move as far as I could tell *W**w**W*<sub>Nov</sub>*E**l**w*<sub>RM</sub>*C*<sub>(n)</sub>

"Be prepared to be put in your place," Elsa grinned.

"Go right ahead. Don't get too worked up. There are around a hundred of my fellow -- 'Runners' at the door," Buffy smirked.

"It is best to end this rebellion right now," the chocolate opponent stood up.

"Over what?" I looked up. I hated Buffy making me kneel. "The 'Runners' are doing the exact same tasks you are doing. They want to be awarded respect for that."

"This is not your place," the woman stated to me. As an afterthought. "Ngozi."

"Thank you," I acknowledged her consideration of giving me her name.

"Ha," Buffy snorted. "Oh... rebellion? Let's just say when we realized that '\*\*\*\*' meant Lost Bloods, we were-- unhappy. All this weekend, this petty insult had been spread ing out to all our non-Full-blood sisters. Actually, we have come up with two alternatives. One was to approach Hayden with our grievance."

"The other was to start calling the rest of you '\*\*\*\*' (which meant 'Poison Bloods'). Buffy stared down the festering crowd. "After all, we are all fertile and the few children we have been allowed to have are born without defect." Amazons don't threaten often. Normally they simply go straight to the punishment. I was somewhat of an exception for reasons that somehow alluded me.

I tried to stand again, but Buffy pushed me back down. Pain was imminent then the muttering began. Around us, small clumps of Full-bloods began pushing for space.

That could only mean they were getting ready to fight and since they weren't close to us, they were getting ready to fight their own sisters.

I doubted they were enamored with me, or the 'Runner' cause. This was a common sense reaction. They recognized a no-win contest when they saw it. 'Runners' were demanding respect--same recognition for taking the same risks. They weren't even asking for admission into the 'Host'-- the true Amazons and their House structure.

The tipping points in this protest had been Fabiola and the loyalist opposition led by Helena, the only 'Runner' close enough to my struggle Friday afternoon that could have started it. Remember, the Old Kingdom Hittite language was a closely guarded secret. So secret that Buffy, despite her years of loyal service, hadn't been taught it.