

Chapter 866

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"Yes. See she was short with this tightgymnast's body and found me inherently untrustworthy, so I used a fake fascination with firearms to seduce her," I related. "It turns out we both received an education."

"Is that why you are here?" she tilted herhead to examine me from an owl's angle. "Seduction?"

"Oh God no!"I swore."This place scares thecrap out of me. You are all professional man-killers and I just happen to be a man. Putting a gun in my hand doesn't make me feel safe. No place in this building is safe, but this section is especially lethal."

"Are you brave, or cowardly?" she mused.

"Those are words taken out of context ofany given situation. If given an exit from a hopeless fight, I'm out of there. You come between me and someone I really care about, I'll rip out your eyes and skull-fuck you," I grinned. "I am brave and cowardly on my own terms." She punched me in the stomach again.

"I owed you that,"she commented serenely.She blocked my left jab, but missed my right upper-cut. Then it was all her. I really couldn't keep track of everything she did to me, but it was over quickly. I was left staring up at the ceiling with St. Marie standing to my side. She offered me a hand up.

"What? Had enough already?" I groaned.

"I have been told you don't have much 'quit'in you," she commented then motioned with her hand once more. I took it and let her pull me to a standing position.

"Quit? Quitting is something you do at fiveo'clock," I mumbled.

"Speaking of which --this had been a blast.Feel free to come down here and kick my ass tomorrow morning. Right now, I'm Katrina's bitch and I need to get going," I weakly joked.

"I'll come with you," St. Mari e stated.

"Honestly, I'm already terrified of you. Youdon't need to rub it in," I declared.

"I am going to see Katrina, where you are is

irrelevant to me," St. Mari e informed me.

"Oh, in that case, let me slink along in yourshadow. By the way, my Christian name is Renfield," I noted seriously. She looked at me as we walked down the hallway.

"I have read Dracula before," she studiedme.

"Amazons read!" I gasped. "With all of thiscolored-coded crap around here, I assumed you were all illiterate."ⓈⓈⓈ.n0VⓈ(Ⓢ)ⓈⓈr.m.c0Ⓢ

"You are interesting," she nodded. AH SHIT!Not interesting again. The Amory guards didn't notice either of us. We took the elevator up, stopped at the ground floor to pick Brielle and her companion.

"Hey C  el," Brielle chuckled. "Where isNaomi?" Turning to St. Marie. "Hi, I'm Brielle. I haven't seen you around here before." St. Mari e blinked.

"You are popular," St. Marie mocked at me.Wasn't she kicking my ass three minutes ago?

"I'm the corporate clown. It is a position of

great significance here," I grimaced.

"Ladies, this is a recent transfer from theboonies--Moose Jaw, or someplace like that,"I said."Here name is St. Marie. She'd got some impressive sound ing stuff in front of her name. Something about horses." Now the two other girls blinking in surpriseⓈⓈⓈ.Ⓢ.n0v  lWⓈ(Ⓢ)r  .com

"We apologize," Brielle and her buddybowed slightly."We didn't realize."

"I am sure C  el's deep reverence was thesource of your mistake," St. Marie nodded then, "His wounds don't bother you?"

"C  el is always getting into a fight withsomebody. If it wasn't for our advanced healing arts, he wouldn't be able to stand,"Brielle replied.

"Why do you keep getting in fights?" St.Marie looked at me. I was sure she had reports of every altercation I'd been in since starting.

"Life on my knees is hard," I shrugged."Iprefer to stand whenever I can and only bow to the Worthy."

"Me?" St. Marie mused. She wasn't reallyasking my opinion. That was fantasy.

"Yeah, you qualify. After that upper cut... I'mnot sure what you did to me. My eyes don't track that fast. The next thing I was sure of, I was lying on my back and you were staring down at me with the expression of 'do I have a hangnail'," I related.

"You don't have my respect for kicking myass though," I grinned. "You have my respect because after you administered your lesson, you stopped. Restraint is an undervalued commodity."The door opened. I gave a quick good-bye wave to Brielle and friend.

"Do you think your opinion matters to me,"St. Mari e posed. I had to think about that.

"Yes," I answered. She studied me."You aresmarter than most, meaning you are far more likely to kill me than your garden variety murderer who works here. You don't respect me, but you acknowledge me. Honestly, it is the best I can hope for right now."

"Does it occur to you that you are toobright?" St. Marie inquired.

"There is no such thing," I replied. "Thefailing is letting people know how bright you are. Can I ask you something?"

"No."

"I'm asking anyway. Is Elsa okay?" I pressedit. She looked at me again.

"Why do you ask?" St. Marie stopped usoutside Katrina's door. I wanted to be smarmy, but I wasn't. Katrina and Elsa deserved better.

"Me being downstairs, you opposed to thatand you having a mean, vindictive streak," I answered. "That worries me. Elsa annoys the crap out of me, but I don't want to be the source of any trouble for her."

"You put a hand on Katrina and I don't carewhich of the 31 Flavors your pony is; we are going at it again," I promised.

"Interesting," she kept studying. "At theArchery range, when the child ran at you, you ran the other way-- why?"

"I draw strength from kindness and love --something you ladies are sorely lacking in," I

expressed."I owe Katrina my life and I owe Aya my heart. The rest of you are monsters and can burn in he ll for all I care."

"Do you consider yourself adopted intoHouse Epona?" she kept quizzing me.

"I have an actually job to do here," Ireminded St. Marie. Sigh."I am not a member of House Epona, the Host, or even a 'Runner'," I said."I'm a male. I'm one too many flippant remarks, one lady having a bad day, or one political expediency away from death. A few women might speak in my defense, but none of them would stop my execution. That is my reality."

"You should be running away fromHavenstone as fast as you can. You are brave, resourceful and have a minute chance of dying a masculine death," she advised me. I laughed.

"When you grow a set of testes we canrevisit the issue of male priorities and motivations," I grinned. "Until then, you have your version of loyalty and I have mine."

St. Mari e opened the door and went in with

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me following along. The meeting was in process. We were flashed concerned looks for multiple reasons--Pony-Goddess St. Mari e in her sports br a and boy shorts, me in biker pants, biking shoes and nothing else, and me being late. Katrina gave the two of us a momentary notice then proceeded with her meeting.

"Katrina," St. Marie interrupted. Katrinaresponded with an icy stare.

"You are interrupting-- make it quick,"Katrina stated calmly.

"Then I'll wait until you finish," St. Marieresponded with her own false politeness. She randomly meandered around Katrina's office making a nu isance of herself.

I resumed my place in the line-up in time to get my work-review from Katrina. I rocked at my job. Apparently I was purloining corporate resources for a prototype gravity device that would crash the Moon into the Earth. My crime was that my project was over-budget... oh yeah, and I'd end all life on Earth.

"C  el, I am unsure if I should order you to

work harder, or not to try so hard," Katrina worried.

"First off, I apologize for being late andunder-dressed today. I meant no disrespect and I have no excuse. I'm being stabbed repeatedly with a knife at three o'clock if that helps?" I offered.

"Really?" Katrina arched an eyebrow  W.N  v  lⓈ(Ⓢ)  m.coM

"Really," I confirmed."Then I get to carryaround one of those cool knives like the rest of this merry band here."

"My breast implants --I'm going for arespectable 'B'-- go in next Wednesday. Two weeks later and I'm off to Denmark to get my 'franks and beans' cut-off and tucked,"I tried to sound serious.

"A few hair extensions and I'll be one of theteam for real," I grinned.

"Katrina, why do you put up with this?" St.Mari e seethed.

"St. Marie, it is not your station to questionme, or my orders," Katrina countered."Still, a lesson is in order."

"Daphne, do you like working with C  el?"Katrina regarded her female 'new hire'.

"He is more than funny-- and veryattractive," Daphne responded. "He provides insight into life that a normal Amazon wouldn't have access to. He instructs with humor and bravery in equal measure."

"Fabiola?"

"He is a waste of resources best putelsewhere," Fabiola insisted."He is a source of dissension. We would be better training him and others like him to replace our diseased stock."I took some small level of comfort that the other'new'hires were almost as offended as I was, though I couldn't show it.

"Tigger?"

"He was a vessel for the will of ourancestors," she replied. "What more proof do we need that he is necessary around here?"

"Does anyone have anything different toadd?" Katrina gazed over the others. No one spoke.

"That's why ***** St. Marie," Katrinaassumed a dark goddess-like aura."Now apologize."

"Apologize for questioning you?" St. Mariesnorted."Hardly. You are using my people and my facilities to train a male in a manner not approved of by the Council."