

## Chapter 869

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"Never before in this lifetime. I really wantto see if I could get my horsed trained to do it first," I chortled."Lord knows, nobody else has. The first Airmobile Horse Archery unit. That would be pretty cool."

"The horse would break her legs," Librafrowned.

"Use an air mattress platform for the horseto stand on, sort of like those air bags stuntmen use, but smaller,"I reasoned. I wasn't sure if Brooke and Libra were more stunned about the plausibility of my suggestion, or that I had created it off the cuff.

We ordered lunch and drinks. Service was very efficient so I had only pushed my salad aside to have my grilled shrimp replaced it when a shadow fell across our table. It was a stormy Aisha.

"Cá el Nyllas, you are coming with me," shespoke with deceptive calm.

"No,"I replied then ate a shrimp. She put

her hand on my shoulder. I brandished my fork.

"Listen up," I grumbled. I tapped mywristwatch with my fork,"I've got 35 more minutes on my lunch break. I'm eating with friends... okay, almost friends..."

"I'm Cael's friend," Brooke rallied. Aishabore down on my collarbone, so I stabbed at her hand with the fork. She moved it out of the way first.

"Come now," she growled.

"Very well," I sighed."Since you certainlyhave never heard this from a man before meeting me, I'll clarify. NO, I'm not coming with you. Go away you annoying twit. If that was unclear, let me add-no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no and no."

Aisha looked over her shoulder. There were two more SD chicklettes. Woot!

"Last chance to keep this simple," Aishathreatened:Ww.lluv(e)I@óRm.CoM

"Brooke and Libra, you need to stand upand back away," I instructed them as I stood

up as well. "I'm going to need your chairs as weapons."The girls grabbed their food and backed up.

"Don't make a scene," Aisha whispered.

"Ex-squeeze me? I'm eating lunch. In thirty-five minutes I'll be back at work. You are the one being a total bitch for annoying the fuck out of me here," I glared."All you had to do was tell me why you wanted me back at Havenstone, but you didn't feel the need, so now we have this stand-off."

"It is not a stand-off and I don't explainmyself to you," Aisha glared back. She even showed me she had a gun. I laughed, pulled out my phone.

"What are you doing?" Aisha made a swipefor the phone.

"Making me late for work," I chuckled."I'mdialing 9-1-1."

"Do that and you will be in a world oftrouble," she threatened.

"You haven't thought this out, have you,Aisha?" I snickered. "If it was important to

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my job, Katrina, or Medical would have called me. If it was a calamity, Hayden perhaps. Barring that, I can't wait to hear your excuse for starting a public brawl."

"I told you to come with me and you hadbest obey," Aisha hissed. That was the tipping point. Recycling old, failed arguments is the sign that your opponent has lost.

"Yeah... right," I shrugged. I sat back downand began eating. A second later, Brooke and Libra joined me. Aisha retreated to the c urb and waited... and got ticketed because it was a No Parking Zone.

"Who was that woman? I've seen her before,"Brooke commented.

"She's that woman from the first night wemet," Libra answered.

"She's not my boss so I don't care," I tried torecapture our earlier mood. It was only partially successful. The three SD ladies kept their eyes on us until dinner was cleared away and it was time to go back.

I kissed both Brooke and Libra goodbye

with a promise of a date the next night. When I tried to walk past Aisha, she grabbed my arm. From my point of view,a ride to work was a ride to work and this one was free. I travelled in silence. Miraculously, they didn't answer my request to go to Medical, though we were at least going up... and up... and up. Crap.

They deposited me in Hayden's office then departed. It was Hayden, Katrina, St. Marie, Elsa, and Tessa. The door shut ominously behind me.

"Cáel, I like you," Hayden began."Unless youare working on an assigned task, you are not allowed to defy a woman of Havenstone who gives you a clear concise order, especially one from the Security Detail." It didn't take me a second to formulate my treatise on the Rights of Man.

"No."That didn't go over well. Into theemptiness, I forged ahead. "You can't expect for me to be given conflicting orders and expect me to succeed. You people have a chain of command for a reason. I follow that chain like every other member of Havenstone."

"You are not a member of Havenstone,"Hayden pointed out. That I had to think about.

I scanned each impassive face in the room. I wanted to cry-not out of fear; out of frustration because I really had tried so hard to make this work.

"You are all a bunch of cowards and I regretever wanting to be part of this place," I spat.©ww.©+ve!w00m.Com

"Your opinion of us does not matter,"Hayden started.

"Cowardly act number one," I interrupted.Hayden's gaze hardened.

"It is your time. You publically defied aHavenstone employee on a mission concerning you," she continued.

"Cowardly acts number two and three," Igrowled. Now St. Marie and Elsa closed in.

I turned to face them. I wanted to go down swinging, no matter how futile the gesture.

"Cowardly act number four- suddenly,when you desire, my insolence matters," I

set myself for what was to come.

"Don't fight," Tessa commanded softly.Katrina kept her own counsel.

"That's your fucking problem, right there," Ishouted. "This isn't the Sunshine Scouts. This is a martial society. I fight, because that is what every bit ch here is broadcasting. I didn't hit Rhada when she hit me. I called for help, like any sane individual. When no help was forthcoming, I called for someone to get the police. Again, you did nothing."

"Fuck you all. Rhada attacked me, so I puther down. Mad I attacked me, so I put her down too-and it all your damn fault and not one of you has the courage to face that fact,"I shouted."You attack me for fighting back at the same time you tell me to fit in. Now which is it? Am I to fit in to a martial culture, or am I not? Make up your damn minds!"

"You do not get to talk to us like that," St.Marie murmured.

"Somebody better talk to us like this,"Katrina finally spoke. "Face facts: Cáel is here because he resists. He resists because

that is the lesson we are teaching him, Sisters."

"What do you mean?" Elsa regarded Katrina.

"When Cáel is challenged physically andresists successfully, or even unsuccessfully, he grows in the estima tion of our Sisters. No one admits it, but it is the truth. The harder he fights, the more he is valued. It is a very simple principle. He has never believed he is a member of the Host, a Runner, or even a recruit. He does not strive to be an Amazon of any kind," Katrina lectured.

"Then we expect him to do ridiculousthings like walk off with an Amazon he barely knows who doesn't even explain where he is going, or what he is supposed to do," Katrin a shook her head."Somehow we forecast his desire to be treated with a modicum of respect to be a threat? Respecting him does not make him an Amazon; it makes him a warrior in our cause."

"The Council has not decided on thatportion of the New Directive yet," St. Marie stated.

"Warrior-Fathers," Katrina declared firmly."My niece, Aya-you all know of her-shewent to camp this week and SHE formed her own war band with her fellow students. Fuck you all very much -It works!"

"Katrina," Hayden cautioned.

"Hayden, I am tired of this half-measurebullshit. There is no being half-alive. We live, or we die. We made a mistake then we made another one. Let's not make it three." I raised my hand.

"Yes?" Hayden finally acknowledged me.

"Can I go back to work now? Sitting here islike comment ing on the rain. I have a lot to say, but it won't affect the rain one iota," I reasoned.

"You are not going to run?" Tessa asked. Iknew she was joking.

"Well, I can't get past the front door. I can'tescape out the garage and I left my diamond-tipped glasscutter and 150 meters of rope in my other jacket," I informed her.

"I guess I'll have to use the 15 kg of C-4I

have stuck in my shorts. I know it makes me look like I took a colossal dump in my underwear, but trust me, it is only a weapon,"I grinned. I tried to get around Elsa. She brushed her hand over my chest.

"You are special," she purred.

"You scare me," I mumbled.

"I know," she grinned happilyw@©.π+ve!L(w)o0M.c(c)m

"Bye Pony-Lady," I waved to St. Marie.

"Cael," Hayden called out. I halted, butdidn't turn around."You will stop referring to the Marshal of the Amazon Host as 'Pony-Lady', is that clear?"

"Yes Hayden. Good-bye St. Marie," I said as Ideparted.

"Are you sure he is not mentally defective?"St. Mari e questioned.

"He is," Elsa replied. "He laughs at Death."See, what did I tell you? Now you can run out and pick up an infatuated female psychopath of your very own.

(Later in the day)

Knife-fighting class was taught by this painfully thin yet tall Amazon with mostly grey-white hair. There was nothing wrong with her reflexes, or sight. She regarded me, her only student, with passionless eyes. She had me sit down cross-legged, she did the same opposite me, and we spent an hour talking about the philosophy of knife-fighting.

Knives were hardly ever the first weapon of choice. That was part of the lesson-knowing when to choose a knife to fight with. We talked about all kinds of blades, focusing on the short, hill-less blades every Amazon carried. I had to get one special-made. It was the size of my palms. If the blade was too small, it would cut up my hand when I used it.