

## Chapter 873

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"Amazons keep rather accurate histories,basing everything on lunar cycles. Our records, with minor gaps, date back to the Great Betrayal," Katrina began,"By modern parlance, around 1000 BCE, our ancestors stopped a millennia of a nomadic existence to settle in the land between the Váh, Hron rivers and Danube rivers."

"You bitches know who the Magyar are," linterrupted abruptly. Sure, that region was in current day Slovakia, but it bordered Hungary, my ancestral homeland, even though our residency was separated by over 1500 years.

"Of course I know who the Magya r are,"Katrina shook her head mirthfully."I simply can't resist busting your balls."

I muttered angrily while avoiding using actual words.

"Our numbers were enough to seize andhold the land," Katrin a continued. "For centuries before that, we raided for men from tribes whose land we were moving

through. After a few seasons, we disposed of the men and took some more."

"When we chose to settle down, our Councildecided to raid distant tribes and steal boys to be raised among our people. At first the males were virtual slaves yet in three generations, our people began seeing males as fathers, brothers and sons. We trained them in crafts. A few generations later, we voted to train them to be guardians-protectors of our hearths while the Host made war."

"For eighteen generations things went well.We prospered, grew rich and strong. The tribes around us feared our wra th which made us proud yet was our undoing. New, stronger tribes migrated into the region from the West-we now know them to be Celts. The genesis of House Epona is from those first meetings. Many Celtic women embraced the Amazon lifestyle."

"Though they knew of our strength, the firstof these new tribes quickly went from peaceful coexistence to warfare. The Host crushed them. The problem was that new tribes kept coming and coming. Dirges of Mourning replaced the sweet taste of

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victory around our fires. We were always winning the key conflicts but our numbers were diminishing."

"The males came to the Council and beggedfor the opportunity to join the Host in battle. Twice we rejected them. The third time, we relented and allowed a select few males to join us in the fight and for a time the balance was restored. Our doom crept upon us. More conflict resulted in more men taking up arms to fight."

"What the Council could not perceive wasthe insidious influence of our enemies and it swept upon us on the wings of ravens by night-druids. Masculine deities, ethos and egos combined with our own blind arrogance to bring about our downfall. Constant contact with the Celts brought a different cultural view to our men. They began to question why women should rule."

"Somewhere around the year 680 BCE, itbegan. It was not a calamity over in a night, or even a week yet once it began there was no stopping it. Most of our males, never fighters, were taken as slaves by their former brothers and their new Celtic masters. Not all fighting males betrayed us. Those males

risked their very lives to sneak into fallen towns and villages to rescue their daughters."

"The penalty our enemies exacted on ourremaining fighting males was meant to keep the rest in line. They burned those brave men alive, in public. They burned them slowly, in much agony-the druids showed them how it was done. There is no record of any of our fighting males switching sides, or failing to undertake any mission for the Host. We survived as a people because of them."

"When all hope of remaining in our newhomes faded, we fled east into the mountains. My ancestors were furious, frightened and shamed. They decided they had let down their guards around men and swore to never do it again. The only obstacle to this way of thinking was the handful of men who risked all for the Host's survival and still lived."

"They sent those male survivors on one last,suicidal mission. They were to return home and incite the Celts' wra th against the traitor males. For the Hell they unleashed, the druids were chosen for this final act

vengeance. Amazon males slew the druids. The angry Celts fell upon their former allies, slaughtering the lot.

"Somehow, a tiny band returned to theirmistresses. Their return was unexpected. In their absence, the High Priestess and Council decided to rectify their centuries'old error in judgment. Only a few Houses-Arinniti among them-knows how each Council member voted yet the final decision is something we are dealing with today."

"The 'valiant' Host went to their defenselesssons and butchered them. When the last Amazon males made it back they were rewarded with death as well. It is recorded that they didn't even resist, loyal to their last drop of blood. In less than ten minute's time, the last of the male line of Amazons perished."

"These are the 'Ash Men' Oneidamentioned. Burned to death by our enemies for their devotion to us, burned to ash by the Host to hide our shame after we killed them for the crime of never betraying us. All full-blooded Amazons are taught about the Second Betrayal-except that last,

pathetic and tragic addendum," Katrina educated me.

"Oh shit," I interrupted. I was sure Katrinahad more to tell me but I felt the hideous weight of this-now shared -past."You believe that when this gets out, as all secrets do, it will undermine everything you have built. You did more than utterly betray those loyal brothers, you murdered your own sons."

"That is one of the most serious issues theCouncil is dealing with," Elsa finally spoke.WŴW.nðvɛlwɔrm.©ɔm

"That makes sense, but you are forgetting something," I shook my head. "Times change, people change, circumstances change. The Host misses the point."

"That point would be?" Katrina studied me. Ibelieved this was more of a case she wanted me to make the logical next step.

"You betrayed us," I stated. "The lesson is notthat men were lured away from the Amazon cause, it was that despite every reason to save themselves, men stayed loyal to the grisly end. If the Host is mindful and respectful, we males would rather be 'Ash

Men' and safeguard our sons and daughters."

"Men volunteered to fight, they did fightand fought well yet the Host refused to acknowledge anything had changed," I then paused."Which is why I'm learning how to shoot, and knife-fight and why Elsa is here. Katrina, with the upmost respect-you are a manipulative bitch."

"Cáel, I let you get away with a great deal,"Katrina smirked."Don't take advantage of it."

"You seem to forget that I consider beingmurdered by your ilk highly more desirable than slavery," I retorted.WŴW.Nó(ɔ)ɛŁwɔrm.(c)ð©

"I hope it doesn't come to that, but if it does,you know you can't win," Katrína pointed out.

"I have more invested in the fight than youdo," I stated.

"I'm fighting for the future of my people.You know that," Katrin a banteredWŴw.(n)ovelwɔrm.c(ɔ)m

"I'm fighting for my sons to be allowed to

live free of bondage, or thrown from the cliffs, and for my daughters to not be a p lague on the human soul," I grinned."You would turn my daughters into Fabiola and... you can't even agree on letting the other half of your own offspring live, as if that was something 'normal' mothers would ever discuss."

"Fabiola? Not Aya?" Katrina prodded.

"I ignore the reality of Aya because I loveher. There is no saving her. Your reach makes it hopeless, she wouldn't understand and she is already too poisoned by the rest of you anyway,"I explained."Watching her inevitable slide into madness is another reason for me to seek death in battle."

"I enjoy these chats," Katrina smiled as shestood up."You are a very complex individual and crossing wits with you has been an unexpected pleasure. Good night."Elsa moved to follow Katrina to the door.

"Elsa?" I called out. She half-turned. "Trygoing with French cut instead of boy shorts tomorrow."

There was a fe y light in Elsa's eyes. I

continued to creep closer to having status in her eyes. Not a sentient-I was that already. Amazons didn't have a glorious rival. Strong rivals you killed as soon as possible. Cáel Nyilas had become a nebulous entity treading down unexplored pathways in her until-now internally consistent World.

"I won't let you win," she gave me a molten,hungry look.

"I bet you say that to all the guys," I shotback.

"Only the ones I care about," she gave meone more promissory fuck-note, turned and left. I didn't have time to mull over my bl eak future forecast. Yasmin was coming over and we were definitely not going out to eat.