

Chapter 882

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The 'junior'members started the chorus as the last 'senior'joined the main intonation. When thechanting ended, everyone but Hayden sat back down.

"A small number of issues necessitate thisunheralded meeting," Hayden began."A male knows our language, our nature and the secret. I seek guidance."

And then the shit-storm began. The only people not involved were Hayden, St. Marie on Hayden's right, and an unknown older Amazon I didn't know. My life was being debated and I was losing in a bad way. Beyoncé rallied support for me. She was sadly outnumbered but persistent. Among the oldest houses I saw Oneida sitting junior with house Arinniti.

Her house was the only one silent, which seemed rather odd. A consensus was reached. I would get to live, but I would be imprisoned for the rest of my existence -not even a breeding male. That was my'reward' for channeling the ancestors thus saving Oneida's life. Hayden rose once more, took a hand count and raised her hand for quiet.

"I will consult with the ancestors on this matter,"Hayden announced."Does anyone have other salient points to add?"

That was perfunctory. Everyone had already

spoken so when the head of House Arinniti stood up, everyone around her whispered in confusion. She lightly slapped her hand on the table for attention.

"I do, High Priestess," the woman stated. EvenOneida looked worried and confused.

"I recognize Shawnee, Head of House Arinniti,"Hayden nodded then resumed seating.

"My sisters, I seek your agreement that you refrainfrom comment before I have made my three key statements," Shawnee requested. She looked around the room, getting nods-some reluctant.

(1)"First, I must confess to a crime against the Hostand the Council," Shawnee began. There were hushed murmurs."At the end of the Second Betrayal, my house argued tirelessly for the salvation of the males who remained loyal. The Council voted against us so the head of my house defied the council and spared three of our sons."

Murmurs became shouts of outrage. Hayden used a subtle voice of menace to restore order.

(2)"Second, Two Ash Men arrived after the rest;aveteran fighter of three and a half decades and a young man of twenty years. Knowing there was no hope for our sons, we took these two aside and instructed them to take our sons south, to a dubious future. That was our crime and it might never have been revealed if it wasn't for the New

Directive."

"As you now know, Oneida, my granddaughterand heir, gave her Death Pledge. Cá el Nylilas intervened and, acting as a vessel for the Ancestors, he showed Hayden that her pledge had been rejected-for the first time in 3000 years,"Shawnee looked around the table."At first I was simply grateful for my granddaughter's life."

"As that euphoria faded, I began to ask why heacted as he had. I began wondering why, while in dire pain, Cáel refused water and comfort, instead asking for songs in our tongue? That made no sense... unless," Shawnee's face deepened in thought as she let the implications of that thought hang in the air. "Thus I had Cáel's genetic identity tested, to see if..."

"To see if he was one of your bastard maleoffspring returned after all these centuries," Ursula stood and seethed. Hayden slapped her palm on the table for order.

"Oh Ursula," Shawnee smirked, "the ancestors arewiser than you, or me. Had I received my heart-wish and had one of those boys return, they would be condemned by Arinniti's sins and the Council's decision."

"But..." Shawnee persisted. Several Amazon'slooked my way, clearly bewildered.

"We had to check the skulls of the ancestors for

that," Shawnee stated."We took a tooth and it confirmed his lineage. He is the descendent of the young man. He never broke faith with the Host. He was unaware when ordered by the Arinniti what the Council had decided, thus he was guiltless."

"Who?" Hayden demanded. Shawnee looked downthe table, but not far.

(3)"Cáel Nylilas is of the blood of Ishara," Shawneestated. I waited to see which house leader freaked out. None did. Then I realized they were all staring at an empty chair and it just happened to be one of the chairs closest to Hayden. NOT good.

The screaming, shouting and yelling began. The house leaders were standing up, shaking fingers and launching threats at one another. Me? I was trying to recall who Ishara was. She eventually became Ishtar, Goddess of War. In the Old Kingdom Hittite she was also the Goddess of Oaths, Love and Medicine. The only three people at the table not going nuts where St. Marie, Hayden and the woman at her side.

That woman was looking at her tablet intently. Once more the group reached consensus and I was still boned, I was still a male, so my lineage meant nothing. I wasn't part of the Host. Hayden took another deep breath, acknowledging this second decision.

"You are all incorrect," the unknown tablet-reader

spoke.

Everyone looked at her and nobody was yelling.

"Elsa, who is that?" I whispered.

"Krasimira, Keeper of Records," Elsa quietlyinformed me.

"What... what do you mean?" Messina, Fabiola'sMom stammered.

"Only ni ne males went unaccounted for at the endof the Second Betrayal. The rest are recorded meeting their deaths in battle, or death by our hand. Of those nine, only one was of House Ishara and he would have barely been of mating age,"Krasimira related.

"So?" Ursula remarked. "He's still a male."

Krasimira looked at Ursula as if she was talking to a five year old.

"He was a member of the Host. If Shawnee ofArinniti is to be believed, Vranus, Cáel's ancestor, lived and died in service to the Host. He was never removed from our records, so he died a member of the Host, so his descendants are also members of the Host."

"He married without permission of his house, thushe is illegitimate," an old enemy from Egypt chimed in.ŵŴ⊙.nvv£1(ω)⊙RM.Co⊙

"Perhaps," Krasimira nodded."That is a matter hemust take up with the Head of House Ishara."

"There is no Head of House Ishara!" Ursula statedthe obvious and pointed at the empty chair.

"Again, you are incorrect," Krasimira shook herhead. She half turned in her chair."There is a Head of House Ishara and he's standing right there." Even Hayden had a problem with that.

"But he's male," Hayden declared.

"That is Irrelevant," Krasimira said.

"To be the head of a house, one must either beelectd by the peers of your house, succeed in accepted ritual combat, or, in extremis, it shall be the eldest surviving member of the Host of that house. Cáel Nylilas is clearly the oldest member of House Ishara currently in the Host," she quoted Amazon law,"so he is House Ishara's head." Silence reigned.

"Gun," I extended my hand to Elsa. She looked atme as if I'd lost my mind."Don't make me repeat myself." I growled. Elsa didn't look for guidance. She wasn't that type. She drew her .45 automatic and put in in my hand.

"The safety is engaged," she enlightened me. I leftmy spot and began rounding the table to 'my'seat.

"One more step and I'll shoot you where you

stand," Ursula threatened.

"No you won't," St. Marie stood."I'll kill you first."

"Ursula of Marda, you have no justification toattack House Ishara," Hayden explained. "I don't like this anymore than you do. We do not pick and choose which laws to follow. Accept the will of our ancestors."

There were between fifteen and twenty women close by aching to put bullets in me. I didn't stop because that wouldn't be me. I ended up by the chair and absorbed the essence of this tiny shard of reality. Was I the son of some lost 'First' House? Without a doubt, the placement of this chair was in the top ten on this side. The ones across from me were all clearly 'First' Houses as well.

The chair was old-maybe two hundred years. It held a sadness to it-no one had ever sat in it. It had been built knowing no one would ever sit on it. I thought about Pamela. I thought about holding Oneida up and refusing to let her die. That effort was me, physically conditioned over years, but I had never discounted willpower.

It was possible that man could indeed be found back somewhere in my ancestry. Few invaders wipe out all the indigenous inhabitants. Usually they intermarry with the invading culture overwhelming the previous one. I couldn't forget my present and future while examining my past. I put the gun down. Hostility washed over me in

palatable waves.

I pulled back the chair. The room was about to explode. I kept moving it back, farther and farther until it was clear I wouldn't be sitting in it.

"I will stand for House Ishara," I announced."I willnot vote though I will speak my thoughts on matters. I will hold this spot until I have a daughter of age.ŵŴw.nvv£1Ŵ⊙⊙.CōM

"No man of House Ishara has ever voted in theCouncil of the Host and no man will now," I kept going. "Outside of those concessions to my Mothers, I am House Ishara. I am right here. If you have a problem with me, I will be easy to find. I have never hidden from you bitches and I'm not going to start now."

"You insult us," Messina stood up. Five otherwomen joined her.

"By all means," Katrina stood, "we eagerly awaityour challenge." Eight other women joined her. I hadn't suddenly become more popular. Between my refusal to vote, the bizarre revelation of Shawnee and the gravitas of the 'First' Houses, the more conservative women were retiring to regroup.⊙ŴŴ.nvv£1ŵ⊙⊙.cōm

Messina's backing down lasted only seconds. She immediately proposed that no male be allowed to be a member of the Host-disqualifying me by fiat. Krasimira wasn't going for that. Amazons

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could not legislate a member of the Host, or a House, out of existence. That's why they had killed the Ash Men in the first place. Technically, they had been Amazons.

They couldn't make them 'not-Amazons' and there was no exile in this society. Eminently practical, they made them dead instead. That was coming back to bite them in the ass now, because they killed them-they'd never taken them off the rolls. Poor, young Vranus had loyally led his charges away on orders. Had he fled, they would have put him under a death sentence -which I would have to fulfill.

No, my ancestor was unsurprisingly pig-headed. One senior warrior and three children... sure, let's walk off into the wilderness with hostile tribes all around. Why? They told him to and like a loyal little mutton-head he'd obeyed. If I believed in magic, or mysticism, I'd worry about how I ended up in that first board meeting speaking this fucked-up language.