

Chapter 883

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I'd re-examine how Leona had missed that crucial first shot because Aya had missed hers. Aya herself and the same spiritual twist that caused Oneida to hurl her life into my unsteady hands. I'd like to put that to accident and genetic abnormalities. Then there was Pamela. I'd like to think she was delusional, suffering from an acid flashback, or whatever.

Shawnee slid a wooden box-a meter by 70 cm-to me. Whatever parliamentary etiquette Amazons followed was unknown to me. I opened the box. Inside was what looked like a lamb, or sheep, skin pressed in some kind of glass. The artifact looked horribly old and was faded to the stage where it was barely legible.

I let the buzz die down around me as I squinted at the picture. There were five figures-from the left was a tall one with a shield and spear, three small figures, and another tall man... with two axes. That was... no I couldn't accept that, not right now. Along both sides and the top were prayers of some kind, though they were too faded to make out accurately. On the bottom were five names. The right-most was Vranus.

Oneida hadn't been trapped by madness and pride. She'd been a slave to destiny. She had seen this skin, I was sure. She'd seen me with my two axes and when it turned out to be more than show, she'd had to save me and she couldn't tell anyone.Ww.NoVeIW0O.m.com

why because of the Arinniti sin. Perhaps she had some delusion we were distantly related. Now wasn't the time to ask.

I closed the box and slid it back. In my absence, the verdict for House Arinniti was narrowed down. Some wanted Shawnee's head because she was the inheritor of those lies. Others wanted Oneida's head because it would be a more terrible lesson for her house. I didn't like those ideas.

"Are you seriously arguing about the paint on the doghouse while your home is burning down?" I mocked them.

"You don't...," a different, yet still hostile, Amazon choked out.

"They didn't sell your sisters to the Roman coliseum," I glared. "They valued bravery and loyalty over conformity. Did they defy the Council? Yes. I think we all agree with that. Put in context though, the rest of you fucked up."

Tons of 'how dare you' and descriptive insults to my family, gender, species and intelligence.

"Answer me this-Ursula, can you turn around right now and slit your 'apprentice's' throat?" I posed. I could see the 'no' forming on her lips before the Great Wall of Implications fell on her head.

"Everyone in this room that voted for the

slaughter of the Ash Men broke your own laws," I explained. "You had every right to kill your sons. They were legally and physically helpless. The Ash Men-they were members of the Host... and there is every indication you butchered them without trial, or attempt at redress. Correct me if I'm wrong, but those men did not break the law; you did."

"You are correct," Krasimira said. "All members of the Host must be informed of their crimes and seek trial if they disagree. Any sentence of Death can be appealed to the High Priestess, who can commute the sentence, assign an ordeal of some kind, or have it carried out." What doomed Leona was the obvious nature of her crime in front of the High Priestess.

The only person who protested was Ursula, the Mistress of Leona's house. Looking back on things, Ursula had acted insanely sending Leona to kill me. Yes, she would have derailed the New Directive for a few years. She would also have alienated every neutral member of the Council. The vote for the New Directive was distasteful yet deemed necessary by enough houses for it to pass.

The vote at the end of the Second Betrayal... that was the issue now. Ms. Senior Egypt made one last end-run around the process.

"What is to stop him from bringing more men into the Host?" she muddled the water. Me? I pulled out my shirt and looked down at my chest.

"Is someone making fun of my A-cup sized breasts?" I appealed to Hayden. A tiny smile crossed her lips.

"I am not sure Cael," Hayden responded. "Fatima, be precise with the nature of your worries."

"He should not be allowed to recruit into his house until his status is decided," Fatima stated.

"His status is not in question," Hayden purred. That was the 'I'm about to lose patience with you' purr.

"I would never recruit anyone into House Ishara who was not qualified. It is insulting to think otherwise. Is there a specific male you are worried about?" I inquired.

"I don't know you, or your ways," Fatima spat.

"You need to think about what you just said, Fatima," I snorted. "So, not knowing anything about me you are making assumptions about what I might do? As you said yourself, you don't know me."

"If you did, you would know that while I wish virtually every Amazon alive would drop dead, thus making the world a much better place, I would never embarrass Katrina, or betray her. Now, are you going to keep looking stupid, or are you going to accept that House Arinniti not only acted in accordance to Amazon law 2500 years

ago, they continue acting so today," I stated.

"After all, they risked everyone's anger for the restoration of one of your eldest houses. When I turned out not to be one of Arinniti's long-lost sons, they could have kept quiet. They did not. Arinniti bravery means one day a daughter of Ishara will bring her voice to this council once more. They certainly didn't do this for themselves. Ask yourself if you would have the courage to bring such possible shame to your family prestige," I challenged the Host.Ww.NoVeIW0O.R.m.com

"You trained your monkey well," Messina mocked Katrina.

"Ah..." I mused as I picked up my pistol. "Safety." I got a feel for the weapon. "Messina, what's the name of your 'apprentice'?"

"You wouldn't dare," Messina hissed.

"You dare to insult me and my House, Whore-Bitch," I smiled insanely. "Why do you think I'll let you get away with that? I'm not going to kill her-just gut-shoot her.Ww.NoVeIW0O.M.fo.m

"Pull that trigger and you will die," Messina spat. Her junior looked far less pleased with the turn of events.

"Not relevant. My House Prestige is too great to suffer such an insult. You did call me, the choice of a hundred generations of House Ishara ancestors,

a monkey," I pointed out.

"Cael of Ishara, put the gun down... please," St. Marie sort of asked. I clicked the safety and put the gun back down on the table.

Messina was looking terribly pleased with herself, ignoring 'The Golden Mare' coming around her side of the table. The hair-yank St. Marie inflicted made me recoil in shock and I was some distance away from Messina. Slap-backhand-slap-backhand. St. Marie released Messina's hair. Messina stumbled back, fearful and furious at the same time.

"Are you going to exert some common courtesy, or shall we continue?" the Marshal of the Amazon Host glared at Messina. "I don't like him, or where he stands, but I am far more embarrassed by your behavior. At least the male exerts some restraint. The rest of you are acting like he is a weakling-idiot. He is not. Know your opponent damn it."

"Wait! Hayden, now that I'm..." I got all excited.

"No, Cael, you still may not refer to the Marshal of the Amazon Host as 'Pony-Lady'," Hayden scolded me. I snapped my finger over the lost opportunity. A pregnant pause was suddenly vacated by a snicker and then several more until half the table had to hold their hands over their mouths.

"Did you really call ***** St. Marie, 'Pony-Lady'?" this unknown House Leader asked. She wasn't one of my fans.

"Only after she kicked my ass, totally humiliating me," I revealed. "I got one punch in. Next thing I knew I was wondering how regularly they changed the fluorescent lighting in the Firing Range while I was on my back, soaking up the cold comfort of the concrete floor."

It took them a second to figure out what I meant. St. Marie was already marching back to her chair.

"You are very poetic," another commented.

"That is how I learned your tongue-I was taught Old Kingdom Hittite erotic and love poetry. I know the same in nine other forgotten languages, as well as four current languages," I informed them.

"Hayden, you would not dare chastise any other Head of House the way you treated him," Ursula griped.

"In what possible universe would Cael Nyilas be considered normal?" Hayden countered. "He is not like any other Head of House. He forgoes voting because HE values our traditions."

"He does not sit in his designated seat at our table because he takes into consideration our sensibilities. This from a man we all decided to imprison forever not five minutes ago. If any of you think he does this out of fear, you are sorely mistaken. He is a person of many failings without question yet he is courageous to a fault," Hayden

lectured the room. "St. Marie, what was the first thing he said to you after you crushed him?"

"He said 'What. Had enough already?'" she snorted. "Those were his exact words, lying on his back, looking up at me. I thought I had concussed him."

"This is not a humorous matter," Egypt Senior was still cranky.

"I don't know about that," St. Marie reposed. "I found it to be fun actually."

"Even the part where he had the gun pointed at me was interesting. I was certain he was about to shoot me," St. Marie continued.www.NoVeIW0O.R.m.com

"Pity he missed you," Messina glared.

"He didn't miss me, Messina," St. Marie sneered. "I told him to give me the gun and he gave it to me. He's not disloyal, just pugnacious."