

Chapter 886

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(Later Friday)

"Having a bad day?" Pamela stopped our lesson.

"I apologize. I am having trouble focusing on the lesson today," I sighed.

"Let us see if we can handle this dilemma," Pamela took two steps back, signaling the end of this round of physical training. "In my experience, most internal issues can be resolved within five minutes."

"This should be fun then," I smirked. Pamela smirked as well. "I was confirmed at this morning's emergency Council meeting to be the sole heir, thus leader, of House Ishara." With a slight dip of the head, Pamela acknowledged I'd surprised her. "I chose to stand for House Ishara—literally. I will not take the seat, or vote. I will hold the place for my first daughter of the Host."

"That last bit was your decision and your decision alone?" Pamela queried. I nodded. "Good, you gave up nothing you could hold onto while gaining honor for the practical choice, Cael. What are your numbers now?"

"Three," I answered. Pamela's look demanded an explanation.

"I immediately brought Buffy and Helena into the

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House. Katrina has advised me to be cautious about adding too many too fast," I stated.

"Katrina's agenda and yours are not the same, Cael," Pamela warned me. "You are the leader of a First House now. Katrina is responsible for the harmony of the Council and Havenstone. These are not the same thing."

"A woman in Katrina's position has no friends. She cannot afford them," Pamela told me.

"I asked her to set up a commission to help select proper candidates for Ishara. She picks nine members and I have Helena representing us," I informed her. Pamela shook her head.

"You concede too much," Pamela frowned.

"Set an absolute date with a designated number of candidates. Make the date soon—a month—and the number 20. Keep the heat on the others. Don't let them constrain you," Pamela lectured. "That is not the Amazon way. You have made concessions to them. Now they must make concessions to you. You gain little by mollifying them."

"I am not sure that a pissing off Katrina and Hayden will increase my survivability," I countered.

"Irrelevant," Pamela slapped the wall. "You are House Ishara now. What matters to you is House Ishara and its relationship to the Host. Tell me

how being weak helps either."

"It doesn't," I bowed my head. My confusion dissipated and we got back to the lesson.

Three more things completed my day. Pamela hung around me. I didn't ask her to and I couldn't figure a good way to tell her to leave. Secondly, I tried to see Hayden. She was busy. Katrina was out of the office. I knew the score. Finally, Buffy knew Havenstone's HQ better than anyone. Together with Helena we gathered at a blind spot in their security and exchanged notes.

We didn't talk because our echoes could be picked up. My message to Helena and Buffy was clear: I wanted a list of twenty 'Runner' names by Monday morning. If Katrina and Hayden were stone-walling my process, we would induct twenty every three days until they relented, or something broke. Miraculously to me, Buffy and Helena didn't bat an eye over this skulduggery.

Katrina showed up for our end of day meeting, with my valise. The meeting was brief and perfunctory. I didn't think Katrina, or one of her agents, had overheard my secret House plotting. She knew something was up because she knew me. We were on a collision course. There was no stop ping it. We hated half-measures. No words were exchanged.

On the way out, I learned I had a Security Detail assigned for my well-being. From what, I had no idea. Was I on Santa's Naughty List—Robot Santa (à la Futurama), that is?

Constanza and Naomi, I recognized. The other two I had seen briefly. Constanza looked like she'd rather be force-fed leeches than be anywhere close to me.

"A moment please," I requested from the group around me. Buffy was uneasy. Pamela was ignoring me, thus not giving me space.

"Constanza, you hate me. I hate you. It was this way at six this morning and nothing a room-full of old ladies says alters that," I said quietly. "I don't expect you to respect me, tolerate me, or ignore my gender status because of what transpired. I do expect you to respect House Ishara. When I must stand for this House, honor it. Neither of us has a choice in that matter."

"I give you permission for nothing because I can't dictate to your heart. It is yours and even this male understands yours is the heart of a true Amazon. My words will not change how you feel. I am okay with that because I have no choice. You are who you are. I request that you draw a line between me, Cael, the unwelcome invader and the Head of House Ishara," I asked.

"You are nothing," Constanza seethed. "Your words mean nothing. You are what you have always been—an abomination." www.Nov@LwoRm.com

"Listen carefully," Pamela said casually. "Talk like that again and you are dead. You are not dead because I can easily kill you. You are dead because you have brought shame to your House."

"You have called a member of the Council an abomination. This implies that all the other Council members are blind, fools, or corrupt. What will they do to you for making such an open, blanket accusation?" Pamela sounded bored. "You refuse to see that the Ancestors have spoken and this is their decision. Defy the Ancestors and you deny your heritage."

"Your name will be stricken from the rolls, you will be butchered like a sheep and your body burned. You will never see the cliffs in this life or the next. Despite you being a twisted mockery of all things Amazon—Cael doesn't know the true Amazon heart—he is trying to save your life. It is the person he is. He loves more than he hates. It is why he is winning."

"Who are you to speak to me this way?" Constanza spat at Pamela. Pamela was unfazed.

"I am a 'cliff walker', " Pamela replied. "I teach knife classes every day at three. I am a mother and grandmother. I am on a quest for my ancestors and I am looking for the six-fingered man."

"That... that is insane," Constanza stammered.

"Was it the kitten juggling, or the obstacle course

for marshmallows?" I looked to Pamela.

"No, it was the spot-checking for freckles in Rio de Janeiro," Pamela regarded me seriously.

"Do areolas count as freckles?" I looked hopeful.

"You are both diseased," Constanza shouted. www.Nov@LwoRm.com

I was still dealing with the wrongness of Constanza's words when I experienced the sensation of Pamela moving beside me. St. Marie may have been faster, but I wouldn't swear to it. Constanza was pretty good too. Her mistake was knife-fighting 101—know your range. Constanza went for her pistol when we were all less than a meter apart.

Pamela's right hand sprouted her nasty little knife and scooped out Constanza's left eye. Her left hand wrenched Constanza's pistol from her grasp. Constanza stumbled backwards then fell, screaming all the way. Her left hand covered the gushing ruin of her left eye socket. The other members of the SD group had their guns pointed at us - Pamela and I.

"No," Pamela mused. "I don't think areolas count since everyone has them." Pamela wiped the blood and ocular bits off her blade on Constanza's still thrashing covered calf. I picked up on her clues. I pulled out my phone and calmly called Medical, informing them that someone had insulted House Ishara and graciously only been robbed of their

left eye.

"She is coming with us," Naomi informed me as her buddies closed in.

"Pamela-gun," I demanded. Pamela handed it over. For a second, everyone thought the situation was resolved. After making sure the safety was engaged, "Buffy," and I tossed Buffy the gun. "No," I met Naomi's gaze. "I will not allow it."

"Cael, this is not something you can deny," Naomi was trying to be patient.

"If I was Mad I and Constanza called her diseased, and an abomination, we wouldn't be having this conversation," I stared at her intently. "And if the next words your of your mouth are 'you are a male,' I'll personally order Elsa to cut out your eyes for compounding Constanza's insult with this one."

"Cael, I cannot let this pass," Naomi insisted.

"I'll be okay," Pamela touched my arm and tried to move past me. I stopped her.

"I sincerely doubt my ancestor crawled back into the Greek camp thinking he'd save some of his sisters, leaving others to their fate. When I start abandoning any, I am no longer worthy of my blood. Stay put, Pamela."

"Naomi, let us pass, prepare to be attacked, or

shoot me," I met Naomi's stare, "because here I come." We pushed our way through the packed group into the elevator Dora had been holding. They even brought a sniffling, scowling Constanza along. Medical was first. The second the SD could hand their wounded comrade to the staff, they climbed back onboard.

Elsa and five friends were waiting for us.

"St. Marie would like a word with you," Elsa informed me. Since St. Marie, the Golden Mare, was on the Council, I thought it wise to obey. She showed up looking really steamed.

"Take the woman," St. Marie pointed to Pamela. "The rest can leave."

"I can't allow that," I stepped up. St. Marie glared. www.Nov@LwoRm.com

"This is not an issue you can intervene on," St. Marie snapped. "She is not of your House."

"She is bound to me by the will of the Ancestors," I proclaimed. Pretty much every woman was ready to tear my head off for that,

"St. Marie—Elsa, for the little amount of time you have known me, I have joked, been irreverent and even mocking of you and your ways. Look at me. Trust your instincts. Pamela is bound to me by the will of the ancestors," I pledged.

"How so?" St. Marie studied me.

"I cannot say," I sighed. "Just because the Ancestors want something done doesn't mean they make it easy for us to do. In my limited experience, they are rather obtuse about what they want and how they want that goal accomplished. You will have to take my word that Pamela and I share a bond." There was a stand-off.

"What was in the box the Arinniti showed you?" St. Marie inquired.

"You would have to ask them," I answered.

"I did. Now I'm asking you," she persisted. Think.

"They showed it to you, so you already know," I stared.