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Brooke finished getting dressed and came to my side. To your average Lothario, what she did might seem odd. To me, it was the normal refrain - Brooke shoved her panties into my jean's pocket. That was a not so subtle 'Call Me' for when I got back.

"Three minutes, Ish - C  el," the leader updated me.

My amateur guess was this was the team from across the street. They had back-up vehicles and personnel streaking down from Havenstone to provide extra security for my move.

"Velma," she gave me her name. A quick description was in order. The three Amazons all had Bluetooth devices, shooting glasses and steel-gray long coats that had to be uncomfortable in this upper seventies evening heat.*w  w.n  v  l  w  m.c  M*

Underneath, they had on light ballistic body armor on their torsos, arms, and legs. Even their dull grey, all-terrain boots looked armored. They had a hip holstered sidearm, most likely a back-up pistol at the small of their backs and a deadly blade, or three. Their main deterrence was their H&K UMP-40 - my second favorite Amazon killing device.

Timothy snuck off to get my toiletries, returning around the same time Odette trundled out with an overnight (or three) bag. There was a final round of hugs then Velma indicated it was time to leave. The fourth member of the team was stationed at the top of the third floor stairs. That gave her a good view of my hallway as well as the passage going up and down.

Two SD's to the front, Velma and the fourth watching our backs and Brooke caught between giddy and freaking terrified. Things got even more exciting when we hit the bottom of the stairs. Two more ladies were waiting. They put a trench coat on Brooke and she nearly collapsed. The freed up Amazon took my bag while the second put a trench coat on me.

I grunted as well. This bitch had to weigh 25 kg. That was some serious ballistic and blast protection. The closest newcomer began attaching my pistol with hip holster on my side while Brooke was 'buttoned up'. I was slipped a few spare clips then was buttoned up as well.

"I'm not sure I can walk in this thing," Brooke gave me a weak smile.

"Don't worry," I smiled, "I'll carry you." I slipped my arm around Brooke's waist and, on Velma's signal, we rushed out to the middle of three Mercedes Armored GL550s. The doors had barely shut before we were racing away from my favorite home. I walked Brooke up to her apartment, we hugged, kissed and she insisted I go to the Hamptons with her this weekend.

I left with that promise unanswered. I didn't ask the Security Detail to do anything else outrageous and they didn't give me any crap about Brooke. Their vigilance didn't end at Havenstone either. No; they formed a tight knot of outward hostility until we marched into Katrina's office. Even then, they spread out over the Executive Services offices as an extended perimeter.

Katrina's office was another step up on the unsettling meter. It was Katrina, St. Marie, Buffy, Helena, and a woman I didn't know yet seemed to belong.

"Excuse me?" St. Marie shot a hostile look my way - actually right behind me.

"Don't mind me," Pamela snorted. She was in the process of sneaking into the room.

"I'm here for moral support," she concluded then took a seat.

"C    l?" Katrina queried, as if I could somehow exile Pamela from the room.

"What's going on?" I began the meeting instead.

"Your Father is dead," Katrina reported. If someone ever asked me what it felt like to have an arm cut off, I could truthfully answer them 'Yes'. Dad.

"From what we have been able to gather from the video and audio gear the four Amazon Security Detail team assigned to watch over him transmitted, the team was setting up a perimeter when three vehicles with ten men stopped on the juncture of Janus and Kerr streets and approached the house. The team leader made formal recognition and was attacked," Katrina told me.

"Are they okay?" I mumbled. I didn't want to know how my Dad died. Had he been in pain? Which side had killed him? Would knowing make a damn bit of difference?

"Three of the four members were killed," St. Marie interjected. "The team commander was killed instantly. The second died defending that corner of your Father's domicile.

The third member was killed attempting to rescue your Father. The surviving member stopped the enemy from escaping with your Father's body, but was too badly injured to extricate herself and is now in police custody."

"What are we going to do about this?" I inquired. Pamela was a lying bitch.

She'd lied to Brianna because the truth would have gotten me and Dad killed. Dad had still died, but Pamela had kept me alive.

"There is nothing we can do," the stranger spoke up. "Troika of House   sau  ka." *w  w.  O  vel  n    M.c    M*

"You are joking, right?" I stared at her.

"He was a male, not of..." Troika began to state.

"You do know your Amazon law, correct?" I countered. She gave a curt tilt of the head. "Recount the means of succession to the Head of a House then please explain to the room how my Father, the descendant of Vranus, fits into all that."

Cha-ching!

"Oh, by the Seven Goddesses!" St. Marie jumped up. "They murdered the Head of House Ishara!" Katrina was already back on top - ahead of the game.

"But what does that make him?" Troika pointed at me.

"It confirms him as the Head of House Ishara. We can sugar-coat it and say C    l, being the only 'active' member of Havenstone 'represented' the Head of House Ishara. By our traditions though, Ferko Nyilas was the lawful head of a 'First' House. Certainly four days were not enough time to settle the manner in an acceptable way," Katrina said.

"At the very least, House Ishara would have been given 28 days to resolve any matters of succession internally," Katrina pointed out. "There was no deception. C    l worked for Havenstone, so was our active member. The existence of his Father was known. It is in his basic file. It was highly unlikely that ANY House wanted to bring another male into the mix so the matter of his ascension was left unquestioned."

"This is Casus Belli," Troika stood up and declared in a firm voice. "I will inform Hayden. We must know the perpetrators of this act, Katrina. I will prepare to relate this breach of the Protocols to the other Signatories."

"To make sure I have this straight, I can defend any member of my family, no matter who they are, without violating the Protocols?" I questioned. "Can I kill them?"

"That is correct," Troika appeared confused. "Other Signatories cannot harm, or detain your family in any way." I gave a bitter, hollow laugh. Dad... Dad wouldn't have understood, but Mom would have, no doubt.

"Troika... hell, everyone but Pamela and Katrina, I am C    l Nyilas, grandson of THE C    l O'Shea and those people who murdered my Dad very well may have been my family," I felt like crying.

That was good because I was crying. I had talked to Dad early Monday morning. I had been so nervous about not leaving any trace of Mom behind that I couldn't recall if I said 'I love you' to him. I'd never get the chance to make up for that oversight. As I began to take in the faces around me, I realized Ishara had gifted me with a respite. No one else knew who C    l O'Shea was - yet.

"Troika," I started out. I could tell she was still having difficulty with the 'Man as someone worthy of stating an opinion' moment. "When the Council decides that the Illuminati have breached the Protocols, do I have a deciding vote on what we do - since Dad was my family?"

"No," Troika clarified, "and what makes you think it was the Illuminati?" Pamela laughed at her.

"Because I killed C    l's Grandfather when that man was head of the Illuminati - slit his throat and rendered him incapable of resuscitation. The rest of that twisted clan have only now discovered that there is a successor, genetically, to the Old Man and you are looking at him," Pamela related in an amused tone.

"Perhaps - just perhaps - they were interested in what happened to C    l's Mother and the man she mated with to produce C    l... who also happened to be the Head of House Ishara and now leaves this man (me) as the last of his kind - coming and going," Pamela finished, "for both the Amazons and the O'Shea family/the Illuminati."

Troika was having problems fitting all the puzzle pieces. St. Marie cut to the heart of the matter because she listens to me.

"If you go to war against the O'Shea's you are being forced to fight your own family," the Golden Mare stared at me in shock.

"Let me get this straight," Troika stood up, waving for silence. "When the O'Shea's killed Ferko Nyilas, they murdered the Head of a First House. They also murdered a member of their own family by way of marriage." She seemed totally flummoxed. Everyone agreed about how fucked up everything was. Breach? No Breach?

"Welcome to life working with C    l Nyilas," Katrina declared. There was a pause.

"I'll let the professionals figure out the finer points of diplomacy. I have to go," I said.*(  )  w.n  vel  w    m.C  M*

"Were do you think you are going?" Buffy popped up. Until this moment, she'd had no role in affairs. My safety though...

"I am going home to bury my Father, Buffy," I announced. This was not a discussion.*    W.No  V(e)    o  RM.c  m*

"Shouldn't we take his body to the cliffs?" Troika suggested.

"My Father will face the Afterlife with my Mother at his side. It was his wish and I'm not going to start dictating to my Ancestors now," I sighed.

I was trying to make light of my pain. By the looks on their faces, I was failing. I had barely exited the office, Buffy, Helena and Pamela in tow. The security team was closing in and my phone rang.