

902

"Cáel Nyilas," I answered sadly.

"Mr. Nyilas, this is Investigator Brewster of the Burnham Police Department. I need a few moments of your time," a man's voice requested. I hesitated. I looked at my watch.

"Yes... Dad?" I finally spoke.

"Mr. Nyilas, your father seems to have been murdered late this evening in a bungled attempted burglary," he lied. It was a good lie.

If he really believed a bungled robbery consisted of two heavily armed groups shooting a small residential home to pieces he was... nah, he was lying.

"I'm on the next flight to Chicago," was the response I chose. I had so many 'loser' replies to choose from.

"That would be helpful, Mr. Nyilas," he told me. "Do you know when I can expect you?"

"Ah... I have no idea when the next plane from New York to Chicago is, but if I can buy a ticket on it, I'm there," I countered. Admittedly, me having a plane ticket for home would have been damn suspicious.

"One last thing, Mr. Nyilas, do you have any idea why someone would want to murder your father? Anything you could tell us could be of great assistance," he pressed.

"Yes, I have a clue who murdered my Father and I'll point you to the dead bodies when I'm done," I snapped - quite literally and mentally snapped. Pause.

"Mr. Nyilas, I understand you are upset, but do not do anything rash. Now, could your father have been murdered for anything you might have done, or are doing?" Det. Brewster kept is game face on.

"We'll have this chat when I get to Chicago. Until then, take care," I said before hanging up.

"Smooth," Pamela gently chastised me.

"I actually liked him going all 'Mafia Don' on that cop," Buffy countered.

"I'll arrange for Havenstone to get us transportation to Chicago," Helena added.

"No," I countermanded her. "You two stay here and finish up business. Join me late Tuesday night, or early Wednesday morning."

By the looks Buffy and Helena gave me they were surprised... and proud. I was keeping to my 'Runner' induction time table. My family would not be diminished by this tragedy. It would grow. Come Wednesday morning, we would add twenty new voices to Ishara's war cry.

"I'll take the first commercial flight available," I continued.

"We cannot protect you on a civilian aircraft, Ishara," Velma warned me.

"They - the authorities are expecting me to show up at O'Hare, so I'm showing up at O'Hare, like a normal person," I reminded her. "I'll also need to know at what hospital they are keeping our sister." Our sister - the sole surviving Amazon who nearly gave her life for Dad.

The SD picked up on that immediately. Another leap had been made. I wasn't a masculine monster, raging against a female warrior who had failed. By the tone of my voice, they knew I was in grief yet not overcome by it. She was the last member of the Host to see my Father alive and she might hold the closure I needed.

"It will be done," Velma decided. "We will have your team meet you at O'Hare."

"My team?" I asked.

"Rachel - her team," Velma clarified. That was enough good for me.

"Oh, and get Pamela a ticket as well. I'd hate to have her mug another passenger and take theirs," I sighed. Pamela patted me on the back - an 'atta boy'.

(Monday Noon)

(The hospital)

That was not the first time I wondered about how fatal Pamela had been in her prime. In fact, I wasn't sure that post-60 wasn't her best time yet. The only mistake the police officer guarding the Amazon's hospital room made was to sit in a chair. Pamela had long ago mastered the peon-craft that Rosetta had started to teach me.

The policeman looked up, stared right through her then looked the other way. His gaze never swept back in my direction. She jabbed him quickly underneath both arms, paralyzing them for a few seconds. That was all she needed. Hers hand clamped over his eyes and on his throat, cutting off the blood flow to the brain before his hands could recover.

He appeared to the outside world to have taken a nap. According to Pamela, we had roughly three minutes before he came around. Pamela kept walking down the hall as if nothing happened. I came ten steps behind, guarded by a gun-less Rachel as I entered the Intensive Care Unit. A few of the staff looked our way, but no one impeded our progress.

According to the Duty Nurse, the Amazon had exited surgery barely an hour ago. Her eyes opened to slits as I approached her beside.

"We stand before the Eye of the World," I whispered. That meant surveillance. "I cannot tell you what is in my heart. My name is Cáel Nyilas. Does that name mean anything to you?"

Her hand flopped. I put two fingers into her feeble gasp. One squeeze - yes. "I am grateful for your prowess and I share in your sorrow for those who will no longer fight in this life. Please heal and grow strong for this is the start, not the finish," I completed. She squeezed my fingers once more. I stepped aside, letting Rachel take my place.

They didn't exchange words but communicated volumes. We slipped out of the room while the guard was still groggy. Pamela was nowhere to be seen. That proved to be pre-sentient when a group of people with the propensity to flash IDs caught up to me at the ground floor.

Had the backdrop of this fiasco not been the death of my Father, I might have enjoyed the twitching/counter-twitching going on between Rachel, who desperately wanted any one of her guns, and the cops who were picking up on that desire.

"Mr. Nyilas, I am..." and the introductions came pouring in.

I had Theodora Chumwell and Brock Miklos, Special Agents of the FBI, John Rios, Special Agent with the ATF, Investigator Horace Brewster from the Burnham PD and Homicide Detective Lisa Capella from the Chicago PD.

"We would like to talk with you," Theodora took charge.

"Can I ask a question first?" I raised my hand. That appeared to set them off their game plan.**WwW.N(v)eIlWorM.cOm**

"Of course," Theodora allowed.

"Okay - FBI, ATF, a homicide detective from Chicago and the only law enforcement official who has any business being here," I finished with Brewster.

"I may not be a Rhodes Scholar, but this seems a bit extreme for the burglary/murder of a long-time employee of Illinois Power and Light. Does anyone care to fill me on what the hell is going on?" I looked over the group. "Oh, and thank you Investigator Brewster for your call. I know I didn't take the news well."

"Was that the part where you said you would point to the dead bodies?" Theodora took charge.

"Yes, I think that was the gaff I was referring to," I agreed.

"Why are you here, Mr. Nyilas?" Lisa Capella jumped in. She had decided to not go along with the FBI playbook.

"I came to see the woman found alive in my family home," I replied smoothly.

"She is probably still in surgery," Lisa gave a twist of the lips - sex.

"Oh, she got out an hour ago," I enlightened them.

"Let's take this conversation to FBI Headquarters," Theodora 'suggested' - you know, in the way that really wasn't a suggestion.

"Have you gone to see that woman?" Lisa wouldn't let up - good for her. It was upsetting Theodora and I'd already decided that Brewster was my go-to guy on this investigation.

"Yes," I responded to Lisa.

"Isn't she under police protection?" Lisa and Theodora blurted out together.

"There was a policeman at her door," I shrugged. "We went in and I talked to her."

"What did she say?" Theodora brushed Lisa aside.

"Nothing. She had one of those tubes down her throat. Whatever I said... well, I was emotional," I evaded. "She was barely conscious."

Lisa was urgently contacting her guy who was supposed to be watching the only person in custody they had. He claimed to have 'blacked out'. He couldn't remember anyone coming in to see the woman and swore he hadn't been unconscious for any length of time. He went in, checked up on the Amazon and she was fine - for someone who had been shot six times.

"We should go to the FBI offices," Theodora repeated.

"I'm going home," I sighed sadly. "I want to go home."

"It is still an active crime scene," John told me. "There won't be any civilian access for some time." Translation: until they decided to give me the carrot instead of the stick.

"Please, come with us," FBI Special Agent Brock added his weight.

"No. I'm going with Burnham PD," I countered. "You can find me there.**WwW.N(v)eIlWorM.cOm**

"That's not how it works," Theodora upped her authority meter. Lisa had fallen back, trying to take in the bigger picture.

Brewster was clearly trying to recall if he had ANY history with me, or my Dad, that would make me trust him over the others.

"I may be a liberal arts major from northern New England, but I know how a larynx works," I regarded Theodora. "Unless I choose to make a sound, it does nothing. Nothing is about to be all we have left to do and say."

"Don't you want to help solve your Father's murder?" Brock tried to sound both sympathetic and threatening at the same time. I was suddenly bombarded with the taste of Lime Sherbet and Jalapenos Ice Cream.

"Really? Fine; I'm going to hang out with the only person in this room I know is working on my Father's murder, not on their career," I reposed**WwW.N(v)eIlWorM.cOm**

"We are all trying to..." Lisa got out.

"You maybe," I gave Lisa that much. "My Father made around \$70, 000 a year after twenty-six years for Illinois P&L. He had almost paid off the colossal debt built up by my Mother's illness and my college expenses."**WwW.N(v)eIlWorM.cOm**

"As far as I know, he took out one loan his entire life - from a bank - and he paid it off," I continued. "He was a lapsed Catholic, a member of the IBEW - Local 9, and he jogged. He barely used e-mail and had no close friends I am aware of. The only woman he loved was my Mother and he mourned her to the day he died."

"What about your activity?" Theodora inquired. We weren't running off to her playground - yet. Handcuffing a grieving son would look bad and, by my attitude, wouldn't make me talkative in the least.

"I have the unfortunate habit of sleeping with every woman I meet," I began.

"So that's over 200 erotic encounters. I get annoyed with people throwing their weight around," I continued, "which is why you and I are getting off on the wrong foot, Special Agent Theodora Chumwell. I work for Havenstone Commercial Investments, getting paid an insane amount to fetch laundry and keep secrets. Good enough?"

"No, it is not..." Theodora simmered.

"How did you know about the existence of the woman upstairs and how did you know to come here?" Lisa interrupted.

"I grew up in that house, know the neighbors and know this is the closest EMS center to home," I lied convincingly.