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I hit the small hotel fitness center with Mona, the fourth member of Rachel's team. It helped. What helped more was the constant reminder that I worked with smart people. Mona's mother was dead as well, killed on an undisclosed mission with the SD when she was ten. She could understand my sense of grief and confusion.

We didn't cry and hug. It wasn't something she could do with a man. Give a decade, or two and she might come around. Instead,

"Thank you for Constanza," Mona said quietly to me as we exited the center.

"I measure a person's life in the lives we save... as well as the ones we take," I enlightened her.

Before that moment, I didn't really consider killing people to be all that praiseworthy an endeavor. Today I had been in a situation where my life had been in immediate danger. I was glad the other guy ended up dead. Since I was prepared to keep acting stupidly, I was grateful for those who would murder people so that I could remain both noble of purpose and alive.

"She is close to me... she helped me grow up after Mom was gone," Mona opened up a tiny bit.

"Aren't you a bit angry with me?" I asked.

"Initially, I was very angry. Then I heard your words and I knew you spoke the truth of the matter," Mona exhaled. "She should have died. She deserved death for what she said."

"No one..." I started to comfort Mona.

"For a member of a Faith that exults in the harshness of martial conflict, you spend an inordinate amount of energy struggling to keep people alive," Mona noted. "I'm glad I helped deal with those Latin Kings now. It was a mission worth doing."

"What?" I stumbled.

"Didn't Buffy tell you?" Mona regarded me. She smirked. "Yeah, we hunted them down late Sunday night and into early Monday morning. I doubt the few who escaped will ever be back."

"Why haven't I.... anybody heard about this?" I worried. Mona looked at me somewhat perplexed.

"Cáel of Ishara, we always take the bodies of murder victims, cut them up, place them in large drums of acid and ship them to Canada," Mona informed me.

"Aaahhh... thanks for telling me that. Let's both agree to not let Buffy know that I know, okay?" I requested. "She'll get an inordinate thrill thinking she knows something I don't."

"As you wish, Cáel of Ishara," Mona nodded gravely.

\*Victory is neither pointless, fleeting, nor soon forgotten. It is yours.\*

(Tuesday Morning)

Sexual addiction is somewhat like military service. It requires you to be alert to your surroundings, think on your feet, follow procedures and – most crucial to me – shows you how to remain functional with minimal sleep. In this case, five hours sufficed to clear out my cobwebs and make me incredibly horny.

All of that was despite the layers of upsetting news being placed before me. Executive Services had gone over the feed from the four SD members. Inadvertently, Dad had fought on the 'right' side. The team leader died first. Her back-up put two men in the grave and wounded a third before they tossed a grenade on her.

I looked at Charlotte as she gave me the news. We both had a 'what the' expression on our faces. Grenade? I kept doing my calisthenics. The second two-Amazon group killed three attackers on their side of the building then charged the back door. I wondered if Mom's Garden Dragon was okay. It was like a Garden Gnome, except it was a Dragon. Mom was odd that way.

The attacking group had blown the front door and entered the first floor. The Amazons in the back decided to shoot out the lock instead. While transiting the kitchen moving forward, the second group took fire – from a Zastava M21. I was confused.

"It is a modern Serbian weapon," Charlotte filled in the blanks.

"Dad was killed by Serbians?" I muttered.

"No," Charlotte sighed. "No he wasn't." Another look from me as I started my standing push-ups. "That team member was wounded. The shooter was taken down by both of our teammates. At this point, three other attackers moved from your front room to the dining room, pinning our team down.

That was when your father broke cover and assaulted the attackers. He had this large lamp and cracked it over the right shoulder of the closest man," Charlotte stated. I knew that light fixture Charlotte was talking about. It was a floor lamp, nearly two meters tall, made of glass and bronze. My physique was from my Father; broad shoulders and powerful arms.

That 'large lamp' weighed over 30 kg and, powered by my father's upper body strength, I was betting the guy who was on the receiving end had have some of his bones snapped.**www.No©EIWOर्म.com**

"The man screamed in Bulgarian, his two companions turned to see what was happening and the Amazons advanced by fire toward your father," Charlotte continued.

"Your father swung again," she looked at me, "connecting with the man's chest. In response, the other two shot him three times. He fell. The second team pressed forward, killing the man your Father wounded and wounding another. The last unhurt Amazon was killed trying to get to your Father while the survivor was concussed by the use of a second grenade.

We don't have the video of what happened in the interim. When the last Amazon began moving again, the two remaining attackers had dragged your father out the front door. She pursued and fired. She wounded the undamaged attacker... and one of her bullets ended your Father's life. She was wounded in this last exchange of fire. The two men helped each other to a vehicle and left."

I kept working out as I made an acceptable collage of my misery.

"Does she know?" I whispered.

"Does she... the Amazon? Her name is Sabina. I don't think she's been informed yet," Charlotte answered.

"Unless it becomes necessary, don't tell her that her bullet killed my Father," I sighed. "The only thing that is important to me – to Ishara – is that she gave her all as did her sisters. My Father was killed by the men who first shot him. Had they escaped with my Father, they weren't taking him to a hospital, so he was as good as dead anyway. That is all that matters."

"Yes Ishara," Charlotte responded with quiet reverence. Knowing nothing of Security Detail's procedure and tradition, I had tossed out an excuse to spare a valiant woman a terrible piece of news. Charlotte's demeanor suggested to me that it would be a kindness conveyed. A few minutes later, Rachel and Tiger Lily came in from their suite**www.no'velworm.com**

Mona had been my guardian while I slept so she slept now. This was our signal to shower and put on some clothes before the group went downstairs for breakfast. Pamela presented herself as I was getting dressed. Esmeralda's arrival signaled our migration to the ground floor Atwood restaurant. As everyone glided into the elevator, I had a nostalgic moment for Odette.

A normal, non-lethal, happy young lady. This all-encompassing seriousness around me was crimping my efforts to find the silver lining in this personal calamity. Ten seconds after exiting the elevator, Nicole angled toward us then we proceeded to breakfast. It took a little jockeying and refereeing by me to get the seating arrangements set**www.novelworm.Cx(m)**

Nicole was on my left then Pamela. Rachel and E were on my right. Charlotte and Tiger Lily were across from me as orders were taken.

"How are you holding up, Cáel?" Nicole put a hand on my lap. I had no immediate reply.**www.n©Vefworm.com**

"Lonely. Sad. Alone. Bereft of anger – it is pointless. I want to scream, rage, tear things up, throw things across the room and hear them shatter... but not really," I confessed.

Suddenly, a strange essence infused my core.

"No, that's wrong. I am not alone. We have suffered more, lived through worse and never wavered even in the face of death," I said in a ghostly whisper. That was really the last thing I wanted to say. Its origin was from an enigmatic corner of my mind I was resisting venturing into.

"Taking oneself to the cliffs' made a whole lot more sense suddenly. The Amazon prepared her daughters and granddaughters for her absence. She volunteered to make that trek. In her heart, she called out to her Ancestors to prepare them to accompany her on that final journey. That all sounded like comfortable spiritual mumbo-jumbo, safely quoted by a rational man under duress.

The abyssal rift in that psycho-babble, makeshift patch over my emotional pain was I felt Vranus and Ishara standing at my shoulders. Vranus because his seemingly endless quest was finally resolved and he and his descendants would at last be welcomed into the halls of their kin. With me, he had succeeded and brought his people home. There was still the matter of the rest – the three sons of Arinniti and the elder warrior.

Holy Crap – they were still out there, waiting to be shown the path home. My 'Evenly Holier Crap' moment was feeling the weight of the eyes of Ishara upon me. Not Ishara, the matron goddess of this – my House, but that ancient Amazon who had surrendered her personal name to oblivion to give her followers a sense of unity. No female was solely 'her' daughter; all the women of the house were equal in birth and station.

It was that Ishara who stood at my shoulder and, beyond some perverse desire to look behind me to see how sexy she was, I felt I had her – not approval – her mandate. We had to be held to our oaths and would die to a woman (and man) for them. We were to give the Host a second chance to make things right. There would be no retreat.

It was not in the Amazon psyche to fight the relentless, remorseless and bloody battle – to risk everything on victory with no thought of failure. It was not something guys were accustomed to, but had been the doom of men down through the ages. Whether too romantic, too stubborn, or too bound to our brother's in arms, men had embraced hopeless causes before – mostly perishing without fanfare yet with the exceptional impossible victory to give us hope.