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(Thursday Night)*www.NaveLWorm.com*

It was well past the descent of Night's veil when the Havenstone jet landed outside of New York City. Naomi and team gathered us up and led us to the main building downtown. An unlooked for conflict developed. Naomi's team was there to present me to Hayden. Rachel's team was still focused on securing my wellbeing and they didn't like the attitude Naomi's squad was giving off.

With Buffy (Helena was in a different car), there was no concealing Rachel's hostility toward the latest group of SD ladies. The new group was treating me like a 'package', not a Head of House, and that infuriated my First too. All of that ill-will simmered as we made our way to Havenstone. The situation was compounded by the elevator ride.

Naomi, her team, Buffy, Rachel and I went into the first elevator. By the time we made it to the top few floors, it was clear that the rest were not immediately following along. The situation ratcheted up to nasty when Naomi demanded Buffy's firearm. Buffy looked ready to use it.*@www.N(ø)(v)ieOWorm.com*

"Buffy - gun," I held out my hand, palm up. Buffy reluctantly handed it over.

I walked over to the nearest trash can, dropped out the clip, chambered out the first round then dumped the entirety into the trash receptacle.

"If they touched it, the weapon would be fouled and not fit for a true Amazon," I explained to Buffy. "Best to save your noble tool the indignity and dispense with it instead."

Buffy snorted with amusement, Naomi's crew pretended not to care while Rachel was deeply disturbed. It took a perfunctory gesture to stop Buffy outside Hayden's office. In I went to face Hayden, Katrina, St. Marie and Troika of House Šauška alone. Šauška was the 'sister goddess' of Ishara - together they formed Ishtar in later incarnations.

I didn't believe Troika was here for any sister solidarity this time around.

"Why did you do this? Start a war... is this your hatred of Amazon culture shining through, trying to get us all killed in some global struggle against the other Secret Societies?" Hayden opened up with in an even tone.

"No," I kept it succinct. They waited for more of an explanation.

"Do you have anything you can say to defend your actions?" Troika glared.

"I don't need to defend my actions," I regarded her as if she was of alien origin. "The actions speak for themselves."

"Why don't you explain it to us, Ishara?" St. Marie rumbled. Insulted yet again. As an equal, I warranted the use of my first name.

"Do I have your permission to fully and completely lay out my reasoning without everyone closing in like a pack of hyenas on a leopard?" I looked to Hayden - not happy. She gave a curt nod. It wasn't like running away would get me far.

"I will speak slowly because all of you appear to have become incredibly stupid," I started. "My parent and carrier of my Amazon ancestor's genetic heritage was murdered. The leader of the Amazon Security Detail i-d-e-n-t-i-f-i-e-d herself, THEN they were fired upon. Somehow you do not see those actions as Casus Belli. [cause for war]

There are three possible reasons for your blindness: you are all cowards who bully behind closed doors, but fold up like gutless wonders when a true challenge presents itself. Or, the male penis renders you incapable of intelligent thought and induces irrational and unsustainable hostile deductions in your though processes. Or, you want me and the line of Ishara dead and are willing to accept any accident of fate that will render us so," I laid things out for them.

"Or, you were in pain over your father's loss and used Havenstone as a tool to lash out at your perceived foes without concern for what price the other houses would have to pay for your personal vendetta," Hayden suggested.

"Your gender bias is appalling, High Priestess St. James," I shook my head.

"Have I been such an out of control, emotional male that yours is the logical assumption for how events unfolded?" I smirked. "Except for the meeting where I learned your secret - only Katrina caught that. I've risked death three times for Amazons - yet I hate all of you enough to kill those people and myself. Besides, St. James, your opinion has been rendered irrelevant."

"You will call me Hayden," Hayden simmered.

"I will when you and your lackeys get around to calling me Cael," I countered. "I don't like being insulted any more than you do. I could keep up this childishness forever, but, as I was pointing out, we don't have forever.

War is coming. Between my father's murder and my threats to the Condoteiri and Seven Pillars' emissaries, I've guaranteed that. Apologizing won't do any good. They won't believe you. Offering me up won't do any good. They think you hold male life to be worthless - the truth of which I am personally witnessing here and now. They are coming for you no matter what you wish.

The best chance for an alliance rests with me. I can establish truly good will with the Nine Clans, Illuminati and the Earth & Sky. Without me, they don't trust you enough to do any good. I'm sure only Katrina believes this - I did all that alliance-building for Havenstone. I am House Ishara and the fate of the Amazons is my fate.

Yet here I am, being insulted, being treated like a traitor - an infantile traitor at that, and being informed you will not honor your oaths and obligations to me," I shook my head. "Are there any other issues to discuss, or can I go home now? I'm beat."

"You will be housed downstairs for your own safety," Hayden informed me.

"Unless you arrest me, I'm going home," I shrugged. "Not only do I not want your protection, I have ceased to trust you. You do not treat me like a sister. Instead you accuse me of atrocities against MY people and layer on the petty insults. Goodnight." I made to leave so St. Marie interposed herself.

"That wasn't a request, Ishara," Hayden murmured with menace.

"Beat me up," I chuckled, "and you will be more fucked than you know." The Golden Mare and I locked gazes. I tried to move around her so she put a hand on my chest. "Welcome to the consequences of being known liars and bigots, ladies."

"I am tiring of your insolence," St. Marie growled.

"Runners," Katrina sighed with melancholy amusement.

"What about them?" Troika mocked.

"The majority of the 'Runners' aren't going to see this as the Council punishing Cael for starting the upcoming conflict," Katrina chided her cohorts.

"They are going to see the Full-blooded shutting down the ONLY House letting them in. Going to war? They are willing to fight and die for our cause. They assume we are too," Katrina regaled her unwilling audience.

"Pleased with yourself, Ish... Cael," Hayden's eyes narrowed.

"He has almost nothing to do with it, Sisters," Katrina chortled. "We were the ones who promised to let the 'Runners' join the houses then reneged on that promise. The worst you can say about Cael was that only after we picked out, loaded and handed him the gun, did he use it for what it was intended for."

"We are not punishing him for this 'Runner' insult," Troika spat. She meant my 'hasty' inductions.

"Then why are we punishing him - and thank you for making Cael's point for him... 'Runner' insult indeed. Since your disgraceful attitude is overwhelmingly common, the 'Runners' are not going to believe your excuse for dealing with Cael."

"Katrina," Hayden cautioned.

"Hayden, as your 'First Bearer of the Sun Spear through the Halls of Night and Death', I am required to give you this news," Katrina bowed her head in reverence. "I tell you Cael's actions have been a lightning rod for the 'Runners'. He gives them hope where there was none. Putting Cael down will have repercussions you do not understand.

They will then 'KNOW' for a certainty we look down on them and treat them little better than slaves - which is the truth," Katrina responded to the others. "Not only are we going to war, we are successfully convincing half our population that they CANNOT trust the Council to spend their lives wisely."

"How dare you?" St. Marie seethed at me.

"Are you seriously blaming me for keeping the oaths the rest of you made in my name - while Ishara was dead to the Council?" I laughed. "The 'Runners' are your idea, St. Marie, not mine. You promised to bring them into the Houses ... and didn't. You lied and I chose to not perpetuate that lie, thus honoring my ancestors, my founder and my Goddess."

"Do I need to remind you who Ishara is? The Goddess of Oaths - particularly military oaths," I added. "In case you missed it, I AM implying that you have failed your ancestors..." and I went flying. Damn, St. Marie was fast. I rolled as best as I could, ending bumping into Hayden's desk.

No one said a word which I found tragically consistent. My follow-up pain wasn't 'Mare' induced. Spiritual flames consumed me internal organs, causing me to cry out in torment and vomit copious amounts of something. I was cradled inside a horror film as first my esophagus, then stomach and finally my intestines seemed to flush forth from my lips.

The stench was beyond horrid - putrid and corrupt combined with the atrocious odor of bloated flesh left to rot in the Sun for weeks. Considering the minimal amount I had eaten on the flight home, I was even more baffled by what felt like 100 liter quantity of discharge. When the ordeal eventually ended, I half-rose then flopped backwards into darkness.

I hurt. I hurt in the same way you have 'pins and needles', except mine were industrial capacity and giving it 110%. My head was resting at a slight incline and someone was flipping a lock of my bangs on and off my forehead. I opened my eyes into infinity - seriously worse agony consumed my brain pan.*@www.nøVeIWorm.Com*

"That is too much for you to know, Cael," she murmured*@www.n.Ve()Worm.com*

Those eyes had been feminine, just not in a human way and definitely filled with more joy and suffering than could be granted by a thousand lifetimes.

The pain faded, so I tried the whole eye thing again. At the top of the lap that cradled my head was a really nice pair of boobs clothed in thin wool - lush, mature, yet firm like a young virgin's.

"Thank you," she tilted. Mind-reading?