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"Good morning, C  el Ishara," the security team (not Security Detail) leader greeted me. That was part 'thanks for letting my sister 'Runners' into a house' and 'maybe pick me next time.'

"Good morning, Wilma Draper," I nodded back. I went to the counter and leaned in. I needed to fortify my supportive base and I knew how to do it.

"You do realize I don't choose who joins House Ishara, don't you?" I addressed her softly yet loud enough for the two closest security women to hear.

"You do not?" the woman appeared perplexed.

"No," I shook my head in the negative.

At that moment she wondered if this was a trick of the Council. Good girl.

"The senior Amazons of House Ishara chose the next candidates. I make the ritual appeal to Ishara, of course. Selection remains in the hands of former 'Runners' who nominate the 'Runners' who have proven themselves.

I was inspired to initiate Buffy and Helena because I had enough faith in them to believe they knew Havenstone and what House Ishara needed. The Amazons in the second ritual were all Buffy and Helena's choices. I think those two and the latest group Ishara has approved of, will make the perfect judges for picking future 'Runners' of accomplishment and worth - not only for House Ishara, but for the new Amazons who have risked everything for our People," I piled on the propaganda.

She nodded. The two closest security guards nodded as well. Off I went to the gun range. With less than a minute worth of words, I had reinforced my perfection. I wasn't a male. I was a male with a passel of hardcore, praiseworthy Amazons working around me, insulating me from committing any errors and making all the important decisions while I behaved like a bobble-headed doll.

The range was back to 'normal' except I could smell the chemicals this time out. Whatever concrete and surface coating substances they had used to repair my grenade-inspired damage left my nose with a terrible itch. I had a gun selection today. I had no instructor yet was hopeful. I packed up my . 40, my back-up . 380, the combat shotgun and my Personal Defense weapon then headed out.

I patiently waited behind one of the stations, soaking up the view of medium gray yoga pants worn by a woman who presented a meticulously crafted, awesome bubble-butt to the world. After she finished off one magazine, the Amazons looked over her shoulder at me. Horn-dog time. The woman smiled as she motioned me forward.

We put my weapons on the stand and prepared for school.

"I am Wieslawa of House   iva," she smirked playfully. By the Almighty, she had a thick Polish accent, rich lips, russet hair and 'come hither' eyes. I was prepping for some early 'nookie' time.

"Hello, I am Ash Ketchum and I have an unhealthy relationship with free-roaming, anthropomorphic creatures," I replied as we clasped forearms Amazon-style. As Wieslawa was trying to puzzle that out, an Amazon from an adjoining booth came over and punched me in the arm. I couldn't even recall this one's name though I knew that face and physique.

"Stop that, C  el," the woman chastised me. "She's new here."

"I thought he was bringing me more weapons to use. Was this male being insolent?" Wieslawa tried to put things in their proper place. "Should he be disciplined?" At least she wasn't taking me being beaten as her Goddess-given right.

"No, Wieslawa. This is C  el Ishara, Head of House Ishara, he brought those weapons for HIS use and most likely came to your station looking for instruction," the unnamed Amazon stated.

"Does this mean we are passed that whole 'grenade launcher' thing?" I inquired of the women.

"We are not sure. For now we have decided to not pre-judge you since you remain consistently combative no matter what. Constanza is recovering," she tacked on.

"Good," I grinned. "How soon can she return to duty? I imagine she makes a lousy patient."

Pause. The 'Constanza' bit had been a test. I had a feeling that my emotional tendency to spare lives and show mercy was getting around. It wasn't the Amazon way, though it did mean Constanza would remain alive for a while longer when it was generally accepted she should not.*uwuw.no  elwotM.  om*

"She will have to retrain her vision. Her doctors are hopeful," the woman responded.*  w.t  vEl  oRm.c  m*

"That is for the best. I do hope there are no ill intentions toward Pamela," I warned her. "Such a vengeance would be personal and I would feel no obligation to treat those criminals as I would my fellow Amazons - are we clear?"

"It has been made expressly clear that this issue is at an end," she bowed slightly.

"Let us commit this to the 'nothingness'," was my suggestion. The two Amazons twitched. That was a phrase straight out of their cultural playbook. Both nodded, the familiar Amazon left and I turned back to Wieslawa.

"Do you still want a go at training me?" I asked the Pole.

"Yes... yes, I would like that," she gave me a bright, toothy white smile. "I find you interesting." Off I went again. Wieslawa was diligent and definitely 'hands-on'. Twenty minutes into the training one of my familiar SD firing partners showed up.

"Don't let him take his clothes off," Felicit   teased me. Her Congolese French contrasted erotically with Wieslawa's Polish.*wPW.NoveLWorm.com*

"His clothes come off?" Wieslawa seemed puzzled. "How is that accomplished?"

"A deeply scientific, psychological process," Felicit   teased my latest friend/fish in the barrel.

"C  el, take off your clothes," she commanded me. I gave her a haughty, condescending glare. "Please." My biking shirt came off first then my biking slippers and finally the shorts.

"Your turn," I regarded Wieslawa. She shot a look to Felicit  . Her sports bra was millimeters from exposing her goodies when my Congolese tormentor stepped in.

"You don't have to take off your clothes for him," she intervened.

"But I like seeing you ladies naked," I protested. Felicit   patted my package.

"We like seeing you naked too. Now put on your pants before a hot shell casing creates yet another incident," Felicit   teased me again.

A great chasm of misunderstanding had been bridged since Friday. The grenade-launcher was part of it, yet I think Rachel and Velma were far more constructive than I could have been. Velma had seen me in crisis mode. I hadn't panicked. I had seen to my partner (though she was an inconsequential female) and been cool throughout the process in Katrina's office as Velma and her four team members had overheard.

Rachel, Charlotte, Mona and Tiger Lily had probably given a different story - less professional and more human. That must have worked in my favor. A stone-cold bad-ass would have been more worisome - a challenge. No, I had been shaken, irrational, brave and grieving. I had fought an assassin of the Nine Clans and not lost (thus not an embarrassment to a culture I didn't really belong to - until that moment).

I had insulted the Condotteiri and the Seven Pillars, who were universally hated. I had been nice to the Earth & Sky and Illuminati, who they didn't like much, but could be handy if a war did break out. I had been 'friendly' to the Egyptians and Nine Clans, who the Amazon rank and file did approve of. The SD had no doubts - they were looking at a war.

Unlike their leadership, the Security Detail was anticipating this, even anxious for the test. Fighting is what they spent their whole lives training for. Thirty years had passed since the last major clash between Havenstone and the others. For the youngest, this was the ultimate chance to prove their training had been perfect.

For the oldest members of the SD, this was the culmination of a lifetime's devotion. 'Take themselves to the cliffs'? Not now. Now came the chance to make every burn, bullet hole, stab wound and piece of shrapnel worth it. Their Host lavished care and resources on the Security Detail - their Warrior Elite - and they were about to reward that glorification with a fervor only female's with 3000 years of martial tradition could match.

Like me? Allowable yet not required. Respect me? Constanza was their lesson on respect. Obedience? No. Rachel had most assuredly related my contact with the 'Runners' and Buffy, so they could hit me like they could no other Head of Household... as long as it was 'appropriate'. Since they were not forced to give me full equality, they could stomach my 'almost' equality.*Wwww.t  velwotM.  om*

Think of it as being able to punch your manager at work in the arm whenever you thought they were doing something stupid. Imagine how much worker morale would benefit. By stepping up and taking a punch, or two, I bought myself and House Ishara much more respect than a snippy insistence on etiquette would have ever done.

Bringing 'Runners' into a First House? The SD wasn't jumping for joy. Here, the SD's sense of superiority worked in Ishara's favor. What did it matter to them that a few 'Runners' had been exalted to Full-blooded status? SD was the best of the best. That they were the best of the 'best available until now' hadn't occurred to them yet.

All that circled back to Felicit   playing with me, no one taking exception to me making a play for Wieslawa and the return of the firing range to an educational platform for me. As I had told Oneida, 'defeat starts in the mind'. Along with that came 'Victory starts with a plan', and 'seize the moment'. I was aiming for seizing victory in the flesh.

I bent over to put my pants back on. Since Felicit   was departing for jobs-unknown, I ran the pants, and my hand, along Wieslawa's inner right thigh. By the look in her eyes when I was finished, she didn't mind in the slightest. At the end of my allotted time period, my marksmanship had improved and Wieslawa was mine for the taking.

What bothered me was that it felt too easy somehow. Weird huh - that 'easy' would bother me.

"You don't hang around men much?" I questioned the Pole as the weapons were being put away.

"No," she sighed. "The last male in my hold died eight years ago. That is one reason I was re-assigned here," she informed me.

"What department are you with?" I asked as we waited on the elevator.

"Security Detail," she answered.

"Fantastic," I murmured. "Elsa is a great boss. The two of us get along great."

"Really? That is good news," Wieslawa sounded upbeat. "How close are you?" Hint, hint.

"Like the Cobra and the Mongoose," I grinned. Into the elevator we went. "I'll let you figure out which is which."

"You are the Cobra," she patted my thinly covered cock. Yay! No personal boundaries.