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(Where we left off)

"Bitch, did you just Taser my fiancé?" Orlando's lady stood up. Orlando was struggling back up as well.

"You are questioning the obvious," Estere mused as she dropped the device. She deftly pulled out what I thought was a compact Bersa 9 and began applying a silencer.

It was sort of amazing that no one was screaming yet, then it dawned on me that we were in a soundproofed room and Estere was standing at the only exit.

"Would you have preferred I use this?" the Hashashin killer motioned with her firearm.

"How did you get a gun in here?" Brennan stammered. He looked ready to pee himself, so tonight was coming out in spades.

"Estere," I greeted the woman from Kurdistan. "Those two are okay," motioning to Orlando and his lady. "He's got some testosterone issues - I'm sure you understand.*Www.nôre.lw0rm.coM*

"Is this a kidnapping?" Anima sounded rather upbeat.

"Your rung on the Ladder of Heaven is not high," Estere commented to Anima. "Your outlook is not promising either. Silence is your best option, so exercise it.*Www.móre()w0r@.C0m*

"Cáel, do you know this woman?" Libra had begun piecing things together - as in - my life was so crazy that women with guns showing up was much too common an occurrence. I thought about "Yes Honey, she's a member of an 11th century mystic order of Nazri Ismailis assassins. In fact, her people gave us the word assassin'. Telling the truth at this juncture didn't seem wise, so...

"Yes, Estere and I are old pals," I lied. "She's a freelance archivist, genealogist and an Olmec-tastic historical pioneer." Don't bother looking it up - Olmec-tastic is a made up word; it is the crunching of Olmec (a Mesoamerican pre-Columbian culture) and '-tastic' which means... I guess it is a truncated form of 'fantastic'.

"You mean she's in 'record reduction', the same as you?" Casper whispered.

"Pre-cisely!" I grinned her way. "Except she's got a Masters diploma on some wall somewhere alongside the shrunken heads of her first three victims - I mean clients - Clients!" Why was I blathering? There was a strange (to most of the room) woman between us and the only exit and panicking would suck - big time.

Pause.

"So, Orlando," I restarted things, "are you going to get up and attempt to kick my ass, causing my friend here to shoot you, or can I return to explaining to Brennan how the world is NOT his oyster and I'm willing to slam anal beads made of flesh-eating scarabs up his rectum to prove it?"

That was a gross visual, even for me. A momentary pause as Brooke and her new friend wedged their way toward me (and the girl with the gun).

"Every time we meet," Estere observed, "you are surrounded with a curtain of women."

"Sucks to be me?" I shrugged.

"At least these are sheep," she noted. That didn't go over well. Libra confronted Estere.

"Hey now, you can't talk about us that way," Libra insisted.

"Or what?" Estere regarded her.

"Or... or, Cáel will make you stop," Libra growled... THEN looked at me. Wrong sequence of events.*Ww@.ôVêlwóRm.com*

"Libra," I pulled her back into my embrace, "I've been on the job about a month. She's been making character-building life decisions since before I hit puberty."

"What was that - a month ago," Brennan snorted. A yelp followed. Estere had shot at him. "What the fuck!" he staggered back into his seat. "You shot me."

"No, I shot 'at' you. Had I shot you, you would be bleeding," Estere glowered. "I am not one of Cáel's normal guardians. I take insults to any women as a personal affront - a sickness best dealt with in a pain-filled, educational fashion. You are not bleeding because that would displease Cáel. Now say 'thank you' in the next ten seconds, or be prepared to go through life as a eunuch."

Brennan looked to Orlando in hopes he had some secret mojo to handle this situation.

"Dumbass," Orlando snarled at Brennan, "you are the punk who put us in a room with only one damn exit. I'm not taking a bullet for you."

"You are the martial artist," Brennan snapped back. "Do something!"

"Brennan, you had better say something quick," Casper urged her host.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry," Brennan whined.

"I have crippled supplicants for groveling with twice that level of passion, Cáel Ishara," Estere stared at me. She began removing her silencer. "Cáel and I have unfinished business, so I will let this pathetic insult pass."

She shoulder holstered her weapon and moved to sit at my side. The problem was the passel of ladies around me. Estere looked past the last woman (Brooke) to the somewhat stupefied rich thing beside her.

"Move," she stated politely. Unlike my difficulties earlier, the whole crowd quickly shuffled down to make space.

That tiny hiccup settled, we returned to the abnormal activities of the Illusions Gentlemen's Club's private room. Some of us had fun. A few, used to tormenting the staff, found themselves shooting fearful looks Estere's way whenever they began to act out. I took a few seconds to quietly talk to Estere, now that I had some breathing room.

"I talked with Ishara - the Goddess," I related. "She's pissed with the Host right now and I'm not sure what to do." Divulging information? Yes. I needed help somewhat badly.

"Your Order has been out of balance for some time," Estere counseled. "Without balance, there can be no true strength. You are dying out and there must be a blemish behind that - some cancer eating away at the foundation of your belief system."

Wow... actually useful. Essentially ... I needed to stay the course.

"Cool. Thanks Estere," I smiled. "Can I plumb the depths of your knowledge for two more pieces of advice?" We both knew what 'plumb' really meant. I pulled out the necklace from beneath my shirt. "An Earth & Sky envoy sent me this gift, but... the message didn't make it."

"What would a suitable gift be and how would I find the person in New York City?" I asked.

"That is not a gift," Estere smiled warmly. "That is a token of passage from a Beg of the E&S - essentially a regional commander. Pretty impressive. Unfortunately, he, or she, is expecting you to return it at some pre-described place and time... which was probably stated in the message you never received."

"My turn," she twisted in her bench seat and placed her left leg over me then inserted it between my legs. "What will be the fate of our daughter?"

"She will automatically be a member of the Host. Heritage passes through the male line. If she has the genetics that conspire against fate, then she would be in the running to become Head of House."

"Not automatic?" she questioned.

"No. Such things, at least while decided by me, will be based upon merit. I couldn't keep faith with the members of the House otherwise," I explained.*@WW.Nôre!W0r@.c0m*

"Would she be allowed to be passed between us?" was the next question.

"Absolutely. Not only am I a huge fan of motherhood, I see such an education making her stronger and more flexible when dealing with issues with outsiders," I assured Estere.

"You act freely. Don't you have to consult your High Priestess - perhaps the Council?" she mused. "I must seek direction from my superiors."

"Over the welfare of my children? Nope, not happening. The daughters and sons of... the House are our responsibility as a group. We do not need the other Houses meddling in our affairs," I stated.

"That is good," she snuggled up even tighter. Sadly for that romantic moment, we had less romantic company to contend with.

(Later that Night)

Why was I still at Casa da Sulkanen? Brennan couldn't take a hint, buy a clue, or learn a lesson. Why was Estere with us? It was the Pamela factor. Who was going to tell her to leave? After five, non-continuous hours of sex with three women (Casper still hadn't come over to our side yet), how was I still standing? Simply put, I wasn't.

Brooke and I were in the nicely heated pool, her arms wrapped around my neck, mine massaging her naked buttocks and us doing a little whisper/snicker/tickle/giggle game that is very whimsical and hard to explain. Brooke went from micro-orgasm to micro-orgasm to the Big One. Fortunately, our mutual experience allowed me to be in water shallow enough that my toes could touch bottom.

"I've decided I'm not jealous of Estere," Brooke panted into my ear. "I see the happiness in your eyes when we make love. I think you and I are doing okay." Not quite a Writ of Possession. I was working out the uncomplicated response when our gentle, body-bonded, circular motion caused Brooke to tense up. I followed her gaze to the lounge chair where we had stacked up our belongings, and the dark, dark blonde-haired women sitting in it.

Her dress was business chic yet rumpled. Her eyes had the lines of someone who spent too much time looking at a computer screen and she looked mentally and emotionally drained.

"Good evening," I greeted her. I steered Brooke toward the closest ladder only to realize that even our towels were by her seat. There was nothing we could do but face the situation head on.

"I'm Cáel Nyllas and my beautiful friend here is Brooke Lee," I made our introductions. "Please excuse our condition, but we weren't expecting company at this hour by the pool."

"You are not my brother's normal flock of seagulls," she commented. "Hana Sulkanen, by the way." The way 'seagulls' rolled off her tongue, I knew she meant 'winged rats' instead of any true avian.

Oh cool; she had a Carnegie-Melon ring. Oh cool; she was watching my still erect penis bobbing her way. I thought a little damage control/diplomacy was in order.

"As I said, I'm Cáel. I work as an intern at Havenstone Commercial Investments. Brooke recently graduated Vassar, was going to get married to some other guy, but that fell through a little while ago," I directed the conversation to Brooke and I not being parasites.

"School?" Hana inquired. So much for that.

"Bolingbrook in New Hampshire," I answered.

"Never heard of it," she yawned. Brooke simmered with outrage over that.

"You and 99.99% of North America," I joked. "It doesn't change the fact that I kick ass at my job, am constantly underestimated and enjoy making my own way in the world."

"And you consider making your own way in the world to be swimming in my father's pool at four in the morning?" she snorted. Her drink was a V-8. No alcohol for her.

"We came because Cáel's father was murdered this week," Brooke snapped. "He needed a break." That brought a few seconds.

"Really now," she regarded me studiously. Out came the E-device.

"Ferko Nyllas - Burnham Illinois which is a suburb of Chicago," I fed her the pertinent data. Brooke was even unhappier than I felt compelled to verify her statement, so I distracted her by suggesting we gather our belongings.

"Your father was killed in a gun battle - still under investigation," Hana muttered.

"Are you some sort of criminal? Was your father?" she probed.