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"Ah, I see you possess the same level of common courtesy as your brother, Brennan," I responded. "To answer the first and only question I feel like answering - no; making my own way in the world means I don't answer the questions of exhausted, over-extended, junior plutocrats who somehow assume they can provide any useful input to my life."

Verbal hammer to her facial self-esteem. Hana was a 'producer' in that she had a job she felt she deserved, worked at it to some acclaim and added to her family's productivity - the opposite of Brennan.

"If you feel insulted, by all means leave, Mr. Nyilas," Hana glared.

"Oh, thank God," I sighed happily. I began dressing, as did Brooke. Hana looked uncertain.

"Câel's been looking for a cordial excuse to get us out of here since we arrived," Brooke explained. "I imagine I should thank you. I wasn't sure how I'd keep Câel from punching out your little brother over breakfast." Hana looked out-maneuvered.

"What is that?" Hana pointed to my horse-hoof necklace. She almost reached for it, then politesse kicked in.

"It is gift from a stranger," I told her. "It is from Central Asia."

"May I see it?" she inquired. I nodded, then handed it over.

"Looks old," she muttered. "The language... it's not Uzbek..." Seeing the curious look on my face, "I do some business for my step-father in the old SSR's, so I've picked up some of the languages." Then, "I swear it's Chagatai." (SSR = Soviet Socialist Republics.)

"Where is that from?" Brooke leaned in.

"Nowhere today. For 500 years, it was the lingua franca of the Turkish people ... until the Soviets wiped it out a hundred years ago. They wanted Russian to be the unifying language, so they promoted regional tongues and regulated Chagatai to the long list of dead languages," she answered.

[Russian] "In Soviet Russia, you do not speak a language, a language speaks for you." I joked.

Hana snorted.W(w)w.m.o.v.e(W)OËm.CoM

[Russian] "Be careful comrade, or your cleverness might get you promoted to the rank of apparatchik," she snickered. I feigned horror.

"No!" Brooke protested. "Speak something I can understand, damn it."

I quickly translated for Brooke as the three of us migrated inside. Hana led us to a third, and newer, section of the estate. The goal was her purse and the reading glasses there in. Compared to the few bedrooms we'd seen, Hana's room was rather austere.

"Well, I know Uzbek and this is similar... say Canterbury Tales English to Modern American," she mused.

"The only thing I know for sure is that it belonged to Shahrukh Mirza of the House of Barlas," she read off several of the symbols. No one said anything. "Please don't tell me you found this at some rummage sale, or flea market." she grew intense.

"No. As I said earlier, it was a gift and given with the understanding it would be returned at a future place and time," I told her.

"Too bad. I would pay a pretty penny for this," she held it up to the light for further examination.

"I'm not one of those dreamers that feels money cheapens stuff and blah - blah - blah. Money has its uses," I countered. "I also believe some things are priceless. They either can't, or shouldn't, be sold. As I said, this was a gift meant to be returned."

"Maybe you can put me in touch with the owner so I can make them an offer," Hana suggested.

"I'd do that except that I have no idea who gave it to me, or where I am to return it," I shrugged. Hana was now looking for some deception on my part. "It was delivered to my place of work and a person who intercepted the necklace destroyed the message that came with it."

"Well, I hope they got a stiff reprimand, if not outright loss of employment," Hana sighed.

"Oh no," I chuckled. "That's not the Havenstone way. My people and I are going to stalk her and her people down and then beat/stab/scar each and every one of them. What she did wasn't a mistake. This was a direct and calculated insult that only blood will cleanse."

"That sounds positively Old Testament," Hana nodded.

"Câel's women don't kid around," Brooke added.

"Really, now. What is it exactly that you do?" Hana asked me.

"This should be good," Brooke muttered through her saucy grin.

"I'm a facilitator for an aerospace project with our R&D division," I feigned concentration. "Its high-tech stuff - I don't understand all the details. I'm relatively positive we are creating nano-thin, artificial polymers for balloons aimed at space. You know, fill up the aerial unit with Helium, create a powerful x-direction buoyancy then let the package accelerate into high orbit."

"I've never heard of anything like that," Hana furrowed her brow.

"Neither has anyone else before now," Brooke laughed, then hugged me. "The miraculous part is - I think he creates these employment opportunities off the cuff - no rehearsal."

"Wait - you just lied to me?" Hana grew petulant.

"Yes, I did and I apologize, Hana," I looked rather shamefaced. "I work as an intern for Executive Services. I am also on the Board of Directors, but that's a truth best gotten into at another time."

"Oh... if you are on the Board of Directors for Havenstone, how can you be an intern?" Hana frowned.

"I was given the position on the board, I earned the position of intern," I answered. "Being a guiding force for a corporation I know nothing about is rather stupid, in my book."

"I couldn't agree more," Hana said thoughtfully and seemed make a severe weather-vane shift. Brooke stifled a yawn rather unsuccessfully and it quickly made a circuit of our little troupe. It was bedtime for us all.

(Breakfast and fast breaks)

I could have used a good deal more sleep. But I knew working out and jogging were better for my body and soul. Brooke and Libra acted as if I had betrayed their friendship in favor of torture. Estere took secretive amusement at their suffering and at my ability to stress myself as hard as I did. She had already enjoyed the physical benefits of my exercise mania last night.

A wonderful distraction to the whole ordeal (beyond listening to Libra and Brooke spit death curses at me between ragged gasps of breath) was the rising sun setting the Atlantic Ocean on fire.

We had been summoned for breakfast at 9:30 am. That translated to me and three lady companions showing up to an overly large dining room on time to find Hana already there.w(w)w.m(o)v(e)l(w)o(r)m.c(o)m

The South wall was a series of French doors, all open, whose long white curtains billowed in the morning breeze. It was a bit chilly for our 'beach casual' attire, yet survivable. A staffer I hadn't seen before verbally related this morning's menu - blink. By quick consensus, we agreed to order the same things to make our orders easier to recall.

In hindsight, that was probably unnecessary. The woman servicing us was very professional. She was also sympathetic enough to our efforts at kindness to acknowledge it. The vigor with which we demolished our fruit bowls caused Hana to chuckle.

"Building up your energy reserves?" she teased us. Libra and Estere didn't know Hana.

"He made us run this morning," Brooke griped. "It was utter Hell."

"On the beach?" Hana asked me.

"Yeah," I replied.

"Try running along the road next time," Hana snorted. "It is easier on the arches."

Libra hit me with a backhand to the bicep.

"Asshole," she glowered. "You had better get those magic fingers to work on my calves when breakfast is over."

"What's in it for me?" I countered.

"Oh, have mercy, Câel," Brooke pleaded. "You do this every day... as does Estere apparently, but Libra and I don't. Help us out here."

"We have a masseuse," Hana offered. "He's very good. I can give him a call and have him come over from the spa."W(w)w.m(o)v(e)l(w)o(r)m.côM

"Please do, Ms. Sulkanen. I'm feeling a real yen for some time alone this morning," I requested.

"I can do that, Câel, and call me Hanna," she finished just as...

"Hey Hana," Brennan yawned as he came stumbling into the room wearing boxers and nothing more. "Brooke, Kibble, Lisa," he added. His not unimpressive cock was strategically placed in the opening.

Hana rolled her eyes in disgust. Brooke snickered. Libra did one better.

"I didn't know they made them that small," she said to Brooke who began giggling.

"Shut up, you lesbian freak," Brennan's amusement evaporated to bitterness. The attendant showed up, got his order and then the orders of the next two to stagger in.

The low course of the conversation included the arrival of Orlando and his fiancée, only to dissipate with the appearance of Anima leading Casper. Casper could barely take her seat, even with Anima's help. Anima's look was victorious and challenging. Casper... she was stoned, wasted and not in anything approaching her right mind. Her body was sweaty and her hair was slick.