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The kicker was the splotches of dried semen and vaginal fluid on Casper's face.

"Say 'hi' to C  el," Anima pressed the issue.

"Hi," Casper waved as her body swayed. Hana was uncomfortable. Libra and Brooke were furious. Estere was... studious. Anima's eyes remained lock on mine.

I pulled out my phone and began taking pictures of the participants. By the time I made it to Brennan, he was laughing and joking at my efforts. Orlando had a different tack.

"What are you doing?" he menaced.

"Life should be about moral decisions, compassion and consequences," I related drolly. "You made your call last night. Live with it."

I finished the photo session while Orlando was still trying to figure out what was going on. I had to use my phone for a different function.

"Buffy, I'm sending you several pictures of people who think they are above the law. Those people raped, or facilitated the rape of the woman in the final picture," I told the First of House Ishara. "I cautioned those people about appropriate behavior last night."

"They chose to ignore me. The legal system can't touch them. I don't know what a proper punishment for such a horrendous act is, so I thought you might give me some council on this matter," I added. Long pause.

"Don't worry about it, C  el," Buffy responded in a ghostly voice.

"Take care and I'll see you on Monday," I finished up. She hung up and that was it.

"That was spooky," Brennan chuckled. "How about I make a scary phone call and mention the words 'C  el' and 'trash collection?'" I ignored him. "I could call the sheriff and have you charged with menacing." I continued to ignore him. "Stop serving him," he snapped at the server as she came to my plate.

"Serve him breakfast, Donna (the server)," Hana interrupted. "He's my guest, Brennan, so no longer your worry." I didn't acknowledge Hana's kindness as this was still part of a family feud and I wasn't family. I'd thank her later. The Vacuous Think Tank members weren't done yet. The privileged shit-heads began playing a video on their ultimate phone devices, sexually feeble soundtrack included.

Deep down in Casper's mind she began to put the current audio input to her recent nightmare. Tears fell down her cheeks. On the video, the name 'Casper' was used enough to move it past the throws of ecstasy into the realm of sorry-ass amateur date-rape porn.

"We may have broken Casper a teensy bit," Anima feigned sincere regret well.

"Oh," I chuckled, "it is too late for word play now, Anima. That train has left the station and the whole crew here missed it. I warned you about slithering horrors and the beautification of humanity. Here is the final lesson..."

"Fuck you and your bullshit," Brennan mocked me.

"Brennan - my guest," Hana insisted. His response was to blather some noise - nah, nah, nah - an act several of his playmates took up. It was a display more appropriate for 5 year olds than men and women above the age of consent. Estere tapped Brooke next to her, motioning with her fork to a melon ball in her bowl. After a momentarily confusion Brooke tossed the melon up.

Estere tossed the fork, skewering it with enough force to sail past me and land on Libra's plate. Two more exhibits, including the final one that had her spitting her thrown melon on a tumbling fork and Estere turned on Brennan, fork ready. The melons were nearly the size of eyeballs.

"Do it and go to jail for fucking ever," Brennan tried to 'man-up'.

"Diplomatic immunity," she smiled. "I doubt the government of Azerbaijan will give a rat's ass about you and your drug-consuming, alcohol-guzzling, whoring lifestyle. The worst that happens to me is that I have to go home for a few months. You will be blind forever." Estere revealed her second fork.

"Not this morning, Bitch," Orlando stood up. "I'm not afraid of forks and side-show tricks." I stood up as well, but went in a different direction. Brennan was at the top of the table - Hana was at the bottom. Casper and Anima were on the opposite side of the table and closer to Hana so that was the route I took.

Anima, Brennan and Orlando had a problem. Estere was threatening Brennan. I was clearly coming to retrieve Casper. The quandary was which way Orlando went - he couldn't both safeguard Brennan and stop me. I was pretty sure that Brennan was convinced Orlando would come his aid because of his role as paymaster.

Orlando Keyes wasn't a thug, or a dog. He was a tactician and he planned to win this fight. Contrary to my desires, that meant I came first. I was far closer and getting nearer all the time. Even if Estere managed to fork out one of Brennan's eyes, Estere couldn't contribute to the fight with me quickly enough to make a difference.

"Casper, you want to stay with your friends, don't you?" Anima cooed to her victim. Casper's head bobbled, making a tragic contrast to her tears. Hana had done as much as she dared at this juncture. Orlando came closer, snatching up an unused chair to counter my knife. I backed up. It was my only true choice.

Charging forth against Orlando certainly would have been romantic. It would have also been futile. I couldn't beat the man - hurting him didn't equate to actually winning. Estere blinding Brennan accomplished nothing. When I had back-pedaled to Hana, Orlando relented. Once his bladder-weakening fear turned into post-survival euphoria, Brennan started laughing.

"Fucking dipshit," he sneered. The thump of helicopter blades began dominating perceptions. "I knew you didn't have it in you. You are a wimp and a chicken-shit coward." Brooke and Libra were worried and confused.

"He could not win against Mr. Keyes," Estere stated to them. "Getting pummeled would have been a wasteful gesture."

"Oh, now you are his apologist." a random fuck-nut snorted. The helicopter kept getting closer.*www.NoVe(l)worM.cOm*

"What about Casper?" Brooke worried. Anima smirked at the show of heartfelt concern.*Ww.nO(v)el(worM.cOm*

"They haven't gotten her out of the room yet," Estere pointed out. "Once they depart the table we will be able to double-team Mr. Keyes and break him. The aftermath is an absolute certainty."

"I don't think so," Orlando challenged.

"Oh yes," Estere grinned wolfishly. "Once we have you on the ground, I'm going to shatter your palms then tear off your fingers. Pull up, twist and snap - I've done it several times; it is quick and easy. If you think you can continue your career without fists, by all means, stay on your present course of action."

"What is it that you do again?" Hana asked Estere.

"I'm a... a freelance archivist, genealogist and an Olmec-tastic historical pioneer; according to C  el anyway," she answered.

"From Azerbaijan?" Hana murmured*Ww.nO(v)elworM.cOm*

"I never said I was from there, only that I have diplomatic status with their UN mission," Estere clarified. Hana said something in an unknown tongue to which Estere responded. Their conversation lasted about one minute.

"We both speak Farsi, though mine is 'schooled' and hers has a Tabriz accent," Hana enlightened us.

"I apologize for last night, C  el," Hana nodded. "I mistook you for one of my little step-brother's normal crowd of useless nitwits. You appear to be both smart and know interesting people." "And how", I muttered internally.

"I take it your daughter is with Philip," Brennan intervened. "Miss her?"

By this time, the helicopter had traversed the ocean-side view of the villa and was humming its way to the east end of the estate. Philip must have been Hana's divorced whatever who most likely had alternating weekends of child custody.

"C  el, you mentioned something about a 'final lesson'," Hana turned to me.

"Only this: there was a woman who trusted a man. She decided to leave him; so he, and a few buddies, held her down and gang-raped her for two days. When they passed out, she didn't run away, or call the police. No, she took a baseball bat and knocked them into la-la land. She secured them with garbage ties, woke them up by stabbing them in non-vital areas and then proceeded to castrate each and every one with a dull kitchen knife.

She went to prison, got out and put her life back together. She eventually rose to a position of some importance and influence with various questionable characters at her command," I continued. "If confronted with a similar situation, especially when money renders justice mute, I'm not sure what this woman would do to assuage her haunted memories."

"Do you really want to put poor Casper up on the top twenty free porn sites, C  el?" Anima pouted.

"Not my concern anymore," I sighed. "I put the facts out there. What other people make of that information is no longer under my control. From here on out, it doesn't matter what you do, Anima. You've chosen to act in a heinous manner, as have the rest of your crowd - Orlando and his lady included."

"If something happens..." Orlando rumbled.

"You will do nothing," Estere laughed. "You can do nothing. I know the person of whom C  el speaks and there is nothing you can do, nowhere you can hide where she will not find all of you and balance karmic accounts."

"We didn't do anything," the fianc  e proclaimed.

"Standing back and abetting a vile deed is hardly an effective defense," Estere stared with pitiless eyes. "Did you attempt to alter Mr. Keyes' course of actions - you clearly could have? You did not. Mr. Keyes safeguarded the perpetrators of the heinous deed, and thus both of you are condemned by that crime."

The boot was on the other foot now for Orlando. He couldn't come at me. He couldn't come at Estere. None of the 'men' on his side were going to stand up to any pain while Brooke and Libra, though unschooled, looked ready to be a serious nuisance. That meant Orlando would be fighting Estere and I simultaneously - and he would lose.

Worse, he would lose over a phone call that might not mean a thing. Oh, Estere and I were confident retribution was coming his way and that was unsettling. It wouldn't hold up in court and Hana's presence negated everyone else's legal immunity, except for Brennan who remained her family- the nut sack. Anima's gaze shifted from me to Libra, which my girl found unsettling.*www.1w0Rm.c(m*

"C  el, what is going to happen... over this and getting Casper back?" Libra whispered. For starters, we hadn't rescued Casper yet, so there was no 'getting her back'.