

936

"Libra, you've seen the scars crisscrossing my body - the bruises and sore ribs I've suffered through," I told her.

"Those were from the co-workers who hold deep and abiding affection toward me," I continued. "Imagine what they are capable of inflicting on those they do not like. Think about what they might do if they thought I was in danger and distressed. Couple that with the intimate knowledge of exactly what Casper has gone through ... is going through, and then draw your own conclusions." There was a pause while the others ate and Libra digested the information.

"Are we ever going to see Trent again?" she leaned in and whispered.

"It can be done, but that it isn't something either of you would enjoy," I whispered out of the side of my mouth. Sending Brooke and Libra on a one-way flight to Indonesia/Philippines definitely wasn't part of my life plan. It was the safest way to let her know Trent was alive.

"Does Brooke know?" Libra nudged me quietly. I shook my head. "Does Trent?" Another head shake. Pause. "That day in the office - when Trent dumped Brooke - you REALLY were trying to keep us from harm, weren't you?"

"Yes," I mouthed. "Now eat up."

The helicopter noises had a purpose and the consequences entered the dining room as breakfast was winding down. It was Jormo and Misty Sulkanen, aka Dad and Wife #3.

"Brennan," Jormo said in a neutral voice. We, Brennan's guests, barely rated a glance.

"Hana," Dad greeted his step-daughter with much more affection.

"Hey Dad," Brennan laughed. "You've almost missed Orlando here busting up Kibble," he waved a fork at me.

"Good Morning, Father," Hana waved, "Misty."

"Kibble?" Jormo sighed, distracted from his path further into the villa by his son's statement.

"That would be me, Mr. and Mrs. Sulkanen," I swallowed a piece of my omelet quickly and raised my hand, "though my fellow homo sapiens call me C    l Nylas."

"Mr. Nylas, along with Brooke, Libra and Estere have agreed to be MY guests for the weekend," Hana added.*www.N    lWolfe.com*

"Very well," her dad nodded. "Mr. Keyes, your endorsement contract with 'Fitness Tech' doesn't include you getting into fights on my behalf, or my son's." Mr. Sulkanen must have owned Fitness Tech, thus Brennan's believed power over an athlete endorsing some product.

"It also doesn't stop me from getting into unsanctioned bouts," Orlando glared at me. The tension was broken by Casper starting to sob loudly and uncontrollably.

We all did the standing-up game once more. This time Casper saw me coming back for her and stood up. Anima tried to calm the shaken woman. Orlando closed in.

"New target," Estere stated serenely. She had a fork at the ready and was staring at Orlando's fianc    e. It gave me the opening I needed.

I took hold of Casper's left arm. Anima took Casper's right. This time she had misjudged the situation and I wasn't settling for a vocal educational moment. I pushed Casper aside, put both hands under Anima's arms and lifted her up.

"I told you this wasn't a game you wanted to play," I cautioned her right before I slammed her length-wise on the table.

Anima's head cracked-down hard and the breath was driven from her body.

"Mr. Nylas!" Mr. Sulkanen shouted. "What do you think you are doing to Anima?"

"I'm not being an enabling bastard, Sir," I growled back. "Come on, Casper," I began leading her back to my seat.

"Why don't we see what security has to say about that," Jormo shot back angrily.*www.W    lWolfe.com*

"Father, something has happened to the young lady - Casper - and neither Anima, nor Brennan, were adequately helping her," Hana stood up. "The last time C    l tried, Mr. Keyes got in his way. This time, Anima discovered she wasn't the same level of deterrent."

"He slammed Anima into the table, Hana," the old wolf snarled. There was nothing wrong with this guy's macho. Anima shot me a treasured, smug glance as she rolled off the table. The spiraling tension was a super-cell caused by the Hana-Brennan poison and Jormo's displeasure with me. Hana decided to not abandon me, which allowed Brennan to go after her like a starving piranha.

"Hold on," Misty tried to calm the pseudo-sibling shouting match. She strode majestically over to me, Casper, and Libra to take a look at our charge. Within a meter there was no doubt what Casper had been put through. The smell of an orgy's aftermath, the tattered look, the listless smile belying her tears and her inability to focus, clearly chilled Misty.

We were thrust back into Sulkanen family politics. The purely human reaction was for Misty to lambast Anima and Brennan then call the cops. Except, Misty was wife number three, Hana was step-daughter from marriage number two - not even blood-relations with Jormo, and Brennan was a blood-heir for what little time he had left on Earth.

"Come with me," Misty curled an arm around Casper's waist.

"We are coming with you," Brooke announced.

"That won't be necessary," Misty smiled wanly.

"That wasn't a request," Brooke snapped angrily. "After this, I don't trust any of 'you' people."

That went over as well as a father realizing his son looked like the butler. Jormo's demeanor turned thunderous - he was being disrespected in his own home. Brennan looked happily vindictive and the rest didn't matter at the moment.

"Young lady..." the old wolf growled.

"Shut up!" Brooke screamed. "The fact that neither you, nor any of your people, are calling 9-1-1 speaks volumes about the lack of character and untrustworthiness of your clan, Mr. Sulkanen."

Brooke had just discovered her noblesse oblige. All that crap I'd been talking about the upper crust of society, the top 1% etc.; here was finally the 'face slap' that was married to the 'backhand' so many of us lower class schmucks experienced. Sulkanen was nouveau riche - a self-made man if you considered coming to America with three million in family assets to be a low enough starting point.*www.N    lWolfe.com*

Brooke wasn't going to attack his credit rating, or bad-mouth him to his business associates. No, there were a ton of socially critical charities and committees that were about to be told by an impeccable source (Brooke) that Dad Sulkanen harbored his rapist son from criminal prosecution. No, this wasn't some 'nobody' being defended either. Casper wasn't known, but she was notable.

"You can certainly leave," the Old Man rumbled. "The young lady stays. I'm calling Security and my concierge physician."

"Go," I glanced to Estere and off she sprinted. A moment too slow, Brennan and Orlando clued into the threat. Orlando took after Estere.*www.N    lWolfe.com*

"She's got a gun!" Brennan squealed. Jormo was busy dispensing orders over his phone as the situation spiraled. But then there was Hana.

"Mr. Nylas, please exert some control over this situation," Hana urged.

"I'll try. Brooke, why don't you, Libra and Mrs. Sulkanen take Casper to a more comfortable setting," I suggested.

"What about your Azerbaijani friend?" Hana pressed.

"Oh," I chuckled. "Me giving Estere advice about conflict resolution is like me giving you advice on," I had to wrack my mind about something the Sulkanens were invested in, "natural gas exploration. She'll be fine."

"This way," Misty directed. I was so much more enamored and impressed with my two princesses than I had been during our initial meeting. They both shot me quick looks that said the same thing. They knew I was sending them out of harm's way, not exiling them from the decision-making process.

Only three of the remaining people weren't scared - myself (I'm an idiot), Anima (sick fuck) and Jormo Sulkanen, who seemed to know the difference between fear you could do something about, and the fear you ignored. We heard bellows from upstairs as Orlando finally discovered that he didn't know what room my group was staying in and that Estere had evaded him.

The hopeful-to-be Mrs. Keyes stood up and looked in the direction her fianc     had disappeared into.

"Don't worry," I said. "The moment Hana expressed the bonds of hospitality to Ms. Abed, you were protected from premeditated mischief." I wasn't 100% sure of that. Keeping the woman from racing after Estere was crucial.

The two security types showed up first. They must have had some part of the house dedicated to their use, because I had no idea they were about, yet here they were. They wore moderately expensive, off-the-rack suits, seemed to be in decent physical condition and had pistols and stun guns. One word from Jormo and the guns came out. They had the polished look of pretend-professionals.

Had I not worked at Havenstone and seen its malicious underbelly, I would have been impressed. As it was, how could things go more wrong? They split up; one going after Orlando and Estere and the other closing cautiously with me. He looked cool, but his gun was held too high and he blithely came within hand-to-hand combat range.

Oh please, EVERYONE I cared about had left the room. If this guy and I wrestled for his piece, I could have cared less who got shot while it was his damn job to see that no one besides me got a scratch. I was sure his corporate employer cautioned him about such mistakes a lot... because he still had the safety engaged on his firearm. I'm an idiot... I'm an idiot... I'm an idiot.

"Your bitch is going to get shot now, Cocksucker," Brennan sneered. The security guy was reaching for my arm to pull me away from the table. He hadn't bother to ask me, instead being engrossed in his ear piece chatter. I snatched his gun from his grasp, disengaged the safety and pointed it at the guy.