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(Saturday Night)

The Hamptons gathering had transformed from a post-college exploration to a mature gathering. We had an adult-level task laid out before us - creating an emotional buffer zone for Casper. I gave Estere an 'out'. There would be no more 'fun time' this weekend. She elected to stay anyway.

When we moved out to a cliff-side patio for dinner, Brennan and company showed up, sans Orlando and his lady. Casper tensed up, Hana and I rallied and put up a warding wall, so the cast of idiots settled for taunting Casper as she shivered behind us. Because, you know, all of this was one big joke...

I had enough peripheral awareness to not get blind-sided by Casper. Hana didn't and went tumbling into Anima. Casper launched herself at Brennan. He had some under-developed martial talent while Casper was clearly driven by frantic energy alone. Brennan received a few scratches then flipped Casper over his shoulder and down hard on the patio's deck.

A punch to her face was coming Casper's way when I pushed Brennan several steps back. The one scumbag who attempted to get behind me took an ice cube to the eye, courtesy of Estere. His yelp allowed me to yank Casper up and circle my arms around her.

"The whore scratched me," Brennan exhibited his scarred forearm. "I guess she goes to jail now."

I didn't do anything and I think three of the ladies were thinking I should. Brennan snorted. Now for a lesson in community.

"Okay," I shrugged. "Casper can go do jail." By the depth of her whimper, that wasn't what Casper wanted at all. I looked to Libra and Brooke. Giving someone the unwarranted label of 'snob' was wrong and those two ladies were going to exhibit that.

Libra hurled her drink from the patio table at Brennan. She missed but that was okay. Brooke missed as well.

"I guess we are going to jail with Casper," Brooke declared as they moved up. Casper wiggled around in my grasp so she could take in the scene. "We'll stick with you, Casper."

"Bitches!" Brennan snapped. "What the fuck..."

"These people can't help you, Casper," Anima stepped up. "You are in trouble now and they don't know trouble."

"You are horrible," Brooke seethed in response.

"Why all the hostility?" Anima gave a disarming smile. Libra had definitely tapped into her 'Inner Cael'. That was only fair, since her 'Outer Cael' had been tapping her pretty vigorously.

"Because we are better than you and you consistently fail to acknowledge that, you soulless tramp," Libra volleyed.

"Cael, I apologize so much for bringing you here this weekend," Brooke touched me.

"I'm not," I squeezed Casper. Crap, I could use a break. It was so wrong that I suddenly wished for Monday and to be back to the work week. It was even screwier that I thought that would give me any sort of relief - it wouldn't.

"Touching, but foolish," Anima sighed with amusement. She pulled out her phone from her back pocket. She made a call then showed the device to Casper. "I'm sure your boyfriend will be very impressed with last night's antics. Of course, he may expect a repeat performance." Casper trembled. I rubbed her back as she sobbed into my shoulder and bicep.

"I'm not very impressed with your virtue," Anima sounded disappointed in me.

"You and your ilk deserve only two words - 'Good bye'," Estere sounded serene. "As a general instruction, anyone on this deck that I do not like and that hasn't left by the exits in the next three minutes will be flying over the railing."

"This is my fucking house!" Brennan shouted.

"Actually, it is Dad's house, Brennan," Hana smiled.

"He's not your father, shit-for-brains," he snappedwww.NoVeltw.er@.com

"Brennan, for every time you have forced your way into my life through bratty behavior; I consider this moment long overdue," Hana snorted.

"I'm not leaving," he took a defiant stance.

"Good," Hana laughed. "In..."

"Two minutes 25 seconds," Estere supplied the data.

"I'm taking every other lady and leaving, locking the doors behind me," Hana kept grinning.

"Before I leave, I will ask Cael to physically obstruct the stairs leading down the bluff," she added. "Then it will be you and Ms. Abed. She is going to kick all of your asses, I'm not letting you inside and trying to get past Cael constitutes assault and he may defend himself. Ms. Abed has diplomatic immunity courtesy of Azerbaijan - an oil producing country Dad's contacts at the State Department won't want to upset, even for you."

I pushed a reluctant Casper far enough away so she could see my face.

"You need to go with Brooke, Libra and Hana now," I soothed her worries. "This shouldn't take more than three, or four minutes..."

"No scarification?" Estere sounded upset. She polished that off by covering her veiled mouth and giving that enchanting little Arabic women's warbling cry for action.

"I don't know about that," I looked past Casper. "Surprise them." Estere's veil didn't disguise the whiteness of her teeth, or the panther-like savagery of her smile.

"Fifty-one seconds," Hana noted. "Cael?"

"Go with the others. Estere and I will be back inside within ten minutes, tops," I pushed her hair away from her eyes.

She nodded before folding back into Libra and Brooke. I went to the top of the stairs and took my stance. Estere pulled out a thick, short, curved blade from Allah-knows where and the stampede began. Only Anima retreated with any pretense at style. She shot me a wistful look that insisted she was waiting for the next round. It wasn't happening.

Some people obsess on victory being a mass of bleeding wounds and broken bones. It can be that, but it is often much, much more. In this case, it was Casper seeing her tormentors in flight... revealed to be nothing more than selfish, rudderless cowards. The eyeball math would never be the so lopsided. They had seen her degraded, humiliated and violated.

That was the lowest ebb. Now those people were less a pack of monsters and more a puddle of vile sleaze that you wouldn't want to step in. That crushing hold they possessed was weakened. Dispelling the pall over this weekend would be a long time coming, yet here it had stopped, bottoming out and her desire to overcome this nightmare began.

For Casper, it was recoiling from the pain and betrayal. For the monsters, the Abyss wouldn't be long in calling.

Sometime later our group was in a small home theater when a security guard came for me. Hana had left a few minutes earlier so Casper and Estere were a bit edgy. I gave a comforting kiss on the head to Casper, a kiss on the lips to my ladies and a quick 'I have no idea' look to Estere.

I was taken to the old man's study. Jormo was behind an old 19th century desk, Hana was standing by the unlit fireplace and Brennan was looking incredibly petulant in an overstuffed chair near his father.

"What's he doing here?" Brennan snorted. He didn't warrant a reply.

"Mr. Nylas, an hour ago one of my personal jets went down off the Virginia/North Carolina coast. From what I've been told, they apparently suffered a catastrophic loss of cabin pressure at 25, 000 feet, lost control of the aircraft and slammed into the Atlantic at over 500 miles per hour," Jormo looked at me. "Mr. Keyes, his fiancé, a business associate and the pilot were on board. The search for survivors has only now begun. Do you have anything to say?"

"You mean do I have anything incriminating to say while this conversation is being recorded?" I sighed. "Sure - I had no idea where Mr. Keyes and his lady-friend were. I wasn't even aware they'd left this place."

"It was an accident, right?" Brennan half-rose out of his chair.

"I'm working on that," Jormo grumbled. "Mr. Nylas, is my son's life in danger?"

"From what?" I met his unsettling intensity. I could have said 'bad parenting', except that would be cruelly truthful. "Danger? No, Mr. Sulkanen, your son is a dead man. He and all his friends are dead. They simply haven't had the inclination to lie down yet."

"That is not a death threat," I interrupted the oncoming outburst. "It is my assessment of the forces at work here - namely your son and his crowd's cruelty and the universe working as it should."www.NoVeltw.0@m.c0m

"I won't let you harm my son," Jormo came around his desk. He was a powerful specimen, just not one who should be taking on a physically fit man thirty years youngerwww.NoVeltw.0Rm.c0m

"Don't make this personal," I refused to back down.

"It is my son's life - it is personal and I want you to know if anything happens to Brennan, I will make damn sure you pay for what you, and whomever you work with, have done," he threatened.

"That is incorrect," I began loosening my own anger. "What is happening to your son and his friends has nothing to do with his name, or your continuous failure to hold him accountable for anything. It has to do with a violation of a young lady after my direct plea that she not come to harm. He and his gang ruptured the rules of hospitality and heaped derision on the basic concepts of humanity with willful, evil intent. They even made a video of that vile act.