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(Late, late Saturday Night)

Had I been alone...?

There are few perks to a solitary lifestyle. One of the few is the freedom from others; and by that I mean you don't have to decide if you care about people you don't know. You are free. Your emotions are free, your decisions are free and your time is your own. Selfish in the best way.

Libra took my keys after we arrived at my apartment building and raced ahead to make sure that Timothy and Odette, if either was awake, would be forewarned. Casper clung to me as she always did. Estere took the lead since I also had to do pack mule duty. Brooke carried the few things that were beyond me. The rain was turning from a drizzle to a downpour.

Odette had a friend over - a female acquaintance. Timothy... Timothy was in the middle of a very successful date night. Now I had the joy of being an auditory spectator in my domicile's sexcapades.

"Shouldn't she be taken to a clinic, or something?" the friend blurted out. I didn't know her enough to decide if she was nervous, flippant, or secretly cruel. Casper dug in tighter.

I had to dump the luggage to deal with her heightened anxiety. Libra, Brooke and Odette picked up the slack while Estere soaked in the ambiance of my dwelling. The look she gave me was one of amusement and intrigue. This was hardly the lair of the one and only Amazon Prince. It was sublime and comfortable. It had a nomadic quality she found familiar*www.n0tre1W0r@.c0m*

Being in a fortress has its comforts. Being in someone else's fortress is far less comfortable. Estere was quietly accounting for every knife, mallet, or other potentially fatal piece of housewares. Brooke, Libra and Odette were already ordering and organizing my life ... what did they need to get and how would they get it?

"So... you are Odette's... friend," the unknown woman stated. Snapping at her was unduly unfair to Odette, who put up with mountains of my insane lifestyle.

"Yeah, that's me. C  el Nyilas - self-made troublemaker," I confessed. "You?"

"Dellilah," she answered. "What happened to her?" Casper flinched.

"Nothing that being reminded about what a wonderful friend she is won't help heal," I cautiously responded. "She is hanging out with me and some friends for the weekend."

"Cut it out, Dellilah," Odette sighed. "Who are you really, anyway?" Dellilah was smooth, I had to give her that.

"Odette, what do you mean?" Dellilah stood up.

"Dellilah, or whoever you are, I'm not such a wonderful person that people I've known two days come home with me," Odette lectured. "Now, I kept you here until you could meet Cael, so why don't you return my courtesy and tell us what's going on?" Odette was keeping Libra and Brooke in my room thus out of play.

Timothy climaxed. Good for him. Out in the living room, Dellilah made a stutter step. She was frozen by Estere's silenced weapon pointed at her.

"You were spotted by a rank amateur," the Hashashin noted. "Who are you with?"

"You people are nuts," Dellilah flushed with panic. Nice touch, but that panic didn't reach her cold, calculating eyes.

"Damn Dellilah," Odette shook her head. "You need to watch more television. BBC America has this nice drama called Orphan Black where the exact same thing happened. I knew you were lying to me in twenty minutes. I was nice enough to not bring the Death Squad across the street over to deal with you. They wouldn't have cared whether I was being paranoid or whatever. They would have dragged you out and killed you on general principle. You owe me."

"I don't know what's wrong..." Dellilah got out. There was a rapid knocking at the door. Shielding Casper behind me, I backed up in that direction.

"Last chance," Odette looked at Dellilah sternly. "That's the Death Squad." Sure enough, I checked and it was two Amazons in full gear. I opened up and the two edged in around me.

"Ishara - status please," the leader asked.

"Estere Abed is a diplomat for her Protocol faction, there should be records of Brooke and Libra on file and Odette belongs here. Casper is behind me - special case. That woman," I motioned to Dellilah, "is of unknown origin."

"Miss, lay down on the floor, on your stomach - arms out to your sides," the leader brought her UP-40 up, aimed at Dellilah.

"This is insane," Dellilah sounded really frantic. Not in the eyes though.

"Lie down, or three rounds in the chest," the Amazon team leader related calmly. "Last chance."*wWw.m0E()0e1W0rm.c0m*

Dellilah decided that she wasn't cut from a fanatic's cloth. She went down like a pro. The two Amazons closed in. I spotted the third of the four woman team at my door, keeping watch. The two inside efficiently bound her hands behind her back and patted her down for weapons - none.

"She is in violation of the truce," the leader pointed out. "Should I dispatch her now?"

"Wait!" Dellilah squawked. "I'm supposed to keep an eye on him and protect him, not hurt him. Fuck, don't kill me for this."*0e1W0rm.c0m*

"Who are you working for?" Estere came closer. Dellilah hesitated so both Estere and the number two Amazon drew their knives.

"Fine! Fine. All I have is a name and I'm only supposed to tell him," she pleaded. There was a moment of uncertainty.

"She'll tell us," Estere knelt beside Dellilah. Now Dellilah's panic was real.

"Wait," I stated. I motioned Brooke and Libra to move around the crowded room and comfort Casper.

"Well," I sighed as I went on my hands and knees beside Dellilah's head. The Amazon leader had her hand on the woman's head, pressed tightly to the ground.

"Sibeal," Dellilah whispered. Mom.

"Do you have any way of contacting this person?" I asked.

"No. It is not how I work," she said and finally I caught it. The accent. I looked to the leader.

"Look at her hands and tell me what you see," I asked the Amazon. I went back to resting on my knees.

"Hard... callused from repetitive weapons practice. Short nails. She's very fit," the Team Lead kept up the examination. "I apologize Ishara. She's a soldier."

"Let her go," I commanded. The Amazon only paused for a moment before cutting her bonds. Dellilah moved cautiously as she moved to a cross-legged position. "You don't have to answer me, but I'd appreciate some honesty. You're English. Would that make you MI-5, or MI-6?" It wasn't as huge a leap as it looked. Who could Mom trust?

In this case, a government operative would actually be safer for her and she had to have decades of Illuminati information inside her head. Dellilah had one reason to be honest - her mission.

"MI-5 is counter-intelligence," Dellilah grinned as her British accent came out to play. "MI-6/SIS is foreign intelligence. I'll let you figure it out."

"Good enough," I stood then helped her stand as well. "You can stay - starting Monday. I need a break, okay?" Dellilah nodded.

"Deal. Now do me the courtesy of telling me why I'm here?" she asked.

"Love. Deep, abiding love," I looked right into her soul.

Crisis averted. Dellilah 'agreed' to go with my guardians to 'work things out'. Dellilah was curious as to why they called C  el Nyilas - Ishara. She also congratulated Odette on figuring something was up. Odette told her not to feel bad about it - reference all the psycho bitches that showed up in my life.

Brooke headed out to gather some more belongings for herself and Libra because - my vote not even elicited - they were going to hang close to Casper and I for a few more days. Libra and Estere headed out to that authentic Italian pizza joint I'd taken Libra to earlier since my food stockpile was abysmal and the neighborhood was far from safe this late at night. Odette took Casper to my bedroom so that Casper could talk with her parents in Delaware.

Timothy and his date emerged from his room. It was Sovann Mean, who I had met before and gotten along with. It took me all of two seconds to figure out what had happened. Sovann had asked Timothy out because Timothy never thought Sovann was interested in him. Sovann was a second generation Cambodian-American and had this stoic demeanor he raised up whenever he was nervous, ensuring Timothy's confusion.

"Hey C  el," Sovann smiled at me. "Still being good?" That was code for me being 'straight'. It still weirded me out a bit - Sovann was a serious weightlifter, like Timothy and I, but a head shorter, so he looked stockier than he really was. When he smiled, his whole face lit up too. It was the Khmer 'twang' that always sounded out of place to me.

"We will not discuss the number of women who were here mere moments ago," I joked wearily. "Timothy, I apologize for coming back early - shithead-intervention shut things down in the Hamptons."

"No problem, Bro," Timothy came and gave me a man-hug.

"With your newfound wealth, we may need to convert the sofa to a sleeper-sofa," Timothy semi-joked. "Oh yeah, and that girl down the hall - when I told her your father died, she baked you some cookies. They're in a tin by the toaster. They really are pretty good, too - walnut and caramel chip." That sounded tasty. I guessed that meant I finally had to meet the women.

Sovann came up and fist-bumped me as Timothy went for the refrigerator. The doorbell rang. I wondered who had forgotten what as I swung the door open. Lighting exploded outdoors, our lights flickered and thunder shook the apartment. It was Uncle Carrig. As the old song said 'he looked like a jigsaw puzzle with a couple of pieces gone'*@www.n0tre1W0rm.c0m*

His eyes wore a harried, feral look. His bellow, as he charged, rolled over me like the amplified heartbeats of a hellish primate. I had no time before he was on me. Down he went. I tried to push him off of me. His suit was soaked with rain and blood, some of it had to be his own. In his right hand he held a dull aluminum cylinder with a metallic suction cup on the bottom.