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I contemplated attacking her. She was Elsa's best student, so a physical showdown wasn't going to end well for me. I actually considered drawing my gun... except we both knew I wouldn't shoot her. That left pummeling her in the verbal arena as my best response.

"What?" I regarded her.

"What - what?" she darkened.

"You are looking at me of if you are expecting something," I grew serious. "What is it?"

"Are you going to man up, or do I have to smack some more sense into you?" Buffy seethed.

"Oh... that was you angrily hitting me?" I smirked. "I barely noticed."

"You are impossible," she glared. "Maybe I should hit you again."

"Maybe you should leave my fiancé alone?" Hana rumbled.

"Butt out of this..." Buffy started snapping at Hana only to be punched in the ear by Pamela.

"Hana is sacrosanct," Pamela commanded. "Câel is fair game - she's not."(w)w©.n©rê©©©r.m.c@n

Buffy wanted to get physical with Pamela over this. She didn't stop herself because she felt Pamela was unbeatable. She stopped because Pamela was seated behind her and thus at the advantage. There was also the fact that Hana stood outside our social network. She hadn't signed on for the 'rough and tumble' aspects of Amazon society.

"Hana, I apologize," Buffy promised. "Câel - 45 days, Bitch."

"Buffy is it? I'm not sure I accept your apology and what is with the '45 days, Câel?" Hana rebounded.

"Ugh... Hana, in 45 days my internship would have been over and I proposed a little hunt as a Havenstone morale building exercise. I'm what the Amazons will be hunting,' I enlightened her.

Yeah, I could tell Hana was having a difficult time digesting that. Normally she thought I was rather quick-witted.

"Can you possibly survive this challenge?" she asked.

"Not likely," Buffy muttered, as she twirled her jaguar incisor between her thumb and forefinger.

"Tell that to the very delicious 'Hell-Pig' I killed and butchered a few days ago, my 'First,'" I snorted back.

"You have someone else's memories floating around your head," she countered. "That's cheating."

"Who is the whiny bitch now?" I chuckled. Buffy looked away, then rubbed the ear Pamela had impacted. Buffy would get me... later.

"Someone else's memories?" Hana poked me, looking for some translation that made sense.

"Long, long story Hana. We don't have the time tonight," my kiss on her cheek bought me a respite.

The visit to Jormo Sulkanen's townhouse was awkward. Hana wouldn't permit a security sweep in advance of my visit. There was the added complication that Jormo's oldest son, his wife and their two children had decided to stay a few weeks with 'grandpa' after Brennan's funeral (the rapist asshat I had doomed to die at Amazon hands).

Hana added to the picturesque collage by gripping my left hand tightly in her right. The family was finishing up their dinner when we arrived.

"Father," Hana greeted her patriarch.

"You," Jormo growled upon seeing me. "What are you doing in my house?"

"I've come to ask your blessing on my seeking Hana's hand in marriage," I replied. That quieted everyone down. Jormo's wife Misty, the eldest son, and his wife appeared to be happy for Hana. Jormo's grandsons looked intrigued. Baby Karvala looked at me, decided I wasn't coming over to amuse her, and so went back to playing with her food.

I looked young and fit, yet of a sufficiently serious disposition and well-dressed enough to not be a gold digger. Before they could come over to express their feelings.ŴŴŴ.m0v-eLwô©m.c0@

"I forbid it," Jormo snapped.

"Mr. Sulkanen, would you care to discuss this in private?" I offered.

Rocketing to his feet, he pushed his chair back so fast that it fell over before he had stormed out. I sought him out at a more causal pace. I wasn't insulting him. I was allowing him to put his mind in order before he punched me out.

"Sir," I said when I found him pacing in his living room.

"How dare you?" he glared. "How dare you even speak to Hana? You haven't the right."

"Okay," I nodded. "Get it out of your system. Hit me."

"What?" he seethed.

"No matter what I believe, you hold me responsible for Brennan's death," I remained calm.

"What I feel for Hana has to do with what she did for me and you that Saturday night, plus her aid in getting me through a very difficult mishap in my life. Hit me. Trust me, it will help." Jormo wasn't a prize-fighter. I saw the blow coming, bit down on my reflexes and took the punch to my stomach.

I tipped over, so Jormo hit me again, this time just behind my right ear. That hurt both of us. Hitting the skull isn't wise. I avoided falling forward, though I was staggered. When I stood back up, Jormo was still muttering curses in Finnish and shaking the hand that had impacted my head.wŴŴ.môVeLwoR(n).coM

"I still hate you," Jormo grumbled, nursing his knuckles.

"I understand. I was able to see many of the men who murdered my father die before my eyes - at the hands of the police," I related. "I wish it would have made me miss my father less, but it didn't. I still miss him every day." Jormo allowed me to keep going, which was true progress.

"You are never going to forget what happened between me and Brennan. He was your son - your flesh and blood. You wouldn't be much of a father if you did let this slide - and Hana thinks the world of you and I think the world of her," I continued.

"Why is she marrying you?" he still sent waves of hate my way.

He didn't care why I wanted to marry his favorite child (well technically, step-child). What he wanted to know was what angle I was pedaling to Hana so that he would have an easier time talking her out of it.WŴŴ.e.nôv-eLWôRm.ê©m

"I have strong ties to the Khanate and I've been able to get a guarantee they won't nationalize your investments in the region," I informed him.

"He also arranged for our employees to get the Anthrax vaccine," Hana said from the doorway. The conversation could have gone a number of horrible ways. Terrorism, warfare, mass murder and regional instability were all possible weapons to beat me with.

"What did this cost you?" Jormo addressed me. Sulkanen clan welfare trumped global troubles.

"Nothing," I confided in him. "In fact, it elevated me in the eyes of those running the show. I told them that Hana and I were a pair, thus convincing them I have a vested interest in their success. I demanded that they protect Sulkanen interests in my name. That included the vaccines."

"Câel is also arranging for some extra security for me when I go back to Kazakhstan," Hana said.

"So this is a financial game..." Jormo ruminated. "Why?"

"I pay my debts, Mr. Sulkanen. Hana fought you over Casper and the fallout from that. She helped me meet an important member in the Khanate a week ago.

This morning, when I was 'read in' to the Khanate plan, I was horrified. The lone, positive light in all of it was I suddenly had a chance to repay Hana. To do that, I had to convince them that Sulkanen property was mine by way of me marrying Hana... so here we are," I said.

"I do not forgive you," he clarified. "I never will. Hana, you are correct to agree to this proposal. You have my blessing."

"Thank you, Father," Hana started weeping as she slipped past me and embraced her Patriarch. "This will work out, I swear to you." He hugged her tight. Jormo hated me, but loved Hana and he could see a spark of happiness inside Hana's heart that he'd never seen before. This was probably not the time to bring up that I had three children on the way from three different women.

"Let me see the ring," Jormo huffed. He wasn't going to cry tears of joy in my presence.

"Câel didn't give me a ring," Hana took a step back. "He gave me this." The necklace.

"Does it have any relevance?" Jormo looked past Hana at me.

"It is a family heirloom. It was given by a 2nd century CE Parthian princess to an emissary of my people - a cadet branch of my Hungarian side of the family," I stated.

"I know that sounds far-fetched, Sir," I sighed. "Of course, a 13th century Mongol-Turkish Khanate springing to life would have sounded rather unbelievable last week, as well." Pause.

"Could you have spared Brennan?" he asked me, while again staring at Hana.

"Yes Sir," I didn't hesitate. "I don't regret my choice either." He sent hate my way once more.

"I wasn't avenging Casper, Mr. Sulkanen," I refused to wilt. "That's a macho, bull-headed and stupid motivation. Nothing I could do would help Casper. What I couldn't do was turn away from the knowledge that she wasn't the first and she wasn't going to be the last. I'll take your hate. No man can hold that against you, least of all me."

"If I had insisted that Hana break of this engagement?" the Old Wolf drilled me with his intense gaze. "What would you have done?"

"Broken it off," I replied. "She is your daughter first. I would never stand between the two of you." He was finding it harder to utterly despise me. Hate me - yes.

The downside of being such a hard-ass was that Jormo knew that Brennan was terribly flawed. He'd paid the hush-money and futilely lectured his youngest son about being responsible. It was inevitable that Brennan would finally run into someone who couldn't be bought off, or forced to back down by the Old Man. That had cost Brennan his life... that was Jormo's pain to bear to the grave.

Hana was waiting on something. I wasn't sure what, but Jormo knew. He stepped up and put forth his hand. Neither one of us made it a death-squeeze. This was his sore hand and I wasn't out to make this moment any worse for him. We did the required two shakes then let go.