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For me, this meant more to me than living with the memories of a very bitter, driven and pitiless man. Alal was essentially the anti-me. It gave me chills to realize that all of Alal's gifts were bestowed on me with a purpose. I knew it was part of his greater plan. Normally, to end-run an evil genius, you just find him and kill him. Not only would Alal not stay dead, I now knew how well he could fight.

I knew only four people who might be in his league ... and I wasn't one of them. Of the four, Sakunyas wasn't likely to help Pamela, St. Marie and Elsa get the job done. That meant I had to rev up the deception engine to comfort my Aunts with hope, while dispelling the knowledge of how little they mattered to their sire. Almost as bad, I had to ignore what horribly people they were while extending that portion of my soul.

It was with some relief that I hugged, kissed, and forcefully separated myself from the Aunts in Dublin. We were going on to Budapest's Ferenc Liszt International Airport. My next action was to make my request to Selena for a contract with the Ghost Tigers to defend Hana when she arrived in Russia. (Of the three 9 Clan Assassin-Babes, Selena was the least impressed with me.) She informed me that the Ghost Tigers didn't do bodyguard work. I still wanted her to relay my request, so she relented. After that - I passed out.

We left Dublin around 9:30 am Friday morning and landed in Budapest at 1:45 pm. - still Friday. As Rachel rousted me so I could grab a quick shower before touchdown, I was gifted with the misconceptions of my fellow travelers:

To put it nicely, Riki thought I was somewhat revolting, Virginia was disturbed and Chaz had lowered his opinion of my moral character. It was the incest thing. Vincent being polite was a pleasant surprise, Delilah's camaraderie less so and Odette was peaches with my most recent sexcapades. She was far too good to me. The Amazons uniformly didn't give a crap.

"So, is there going to be any other bizarre behavior we should be prepared for?" Riki sat down next to me as I was drying my hair. I was back to my jeans, t-shirt and wind-breaker'

style. www.noveltwo.com

"Fine..." I said loudly. "It is really none of your business what I did with and to my mother's clones. Yes, they are all clones of my mother - who died when I was seven." A lie.

"They are also the genetic creations of my grandfather, also known by many as Cael O'Shea. They are sterile, they are wickedly evil, and two weeks ago I didn't know they existed. I do have a real aunt in Maryland. She's my Father's sister and is not part of the menagerie. Oh yeah, my grandpa is currently a disembodied spirit, back from the Netherworld and looking for a body to take over ... if he hasn't found one already," I added.

"He was born roughly five thousand years ago, was cursed by an ancient Sumerian Goddess such that he can never just die and stay dead. I have his memories running around my head, which, along with denying me a good night's sleep, allows me to speak an assortment of languages, use virtually every weapon built before 1970 and know that he is a vicious criminal mastermind the likes of which you've never imagined outside of fiction.

How does that sound, Riki? Shall I get more bizarre? Trust me, I can," I regarded her evenly. She was speechless, but not out of awe. No, she was certain that I was completely unhinged.

"Everyone who believes Cael, raise their hand," Odette demanded. Her hand went up. Odette and the Amazons agreeing was expected by the outsiders. Delilah and Virginia joining in was not.

"Captain Fairchild?" Colour Sgt. Chaz Tomorrow requested clarification.

"You've all seen those five O'Shea's that left the plane in Ireland. Barring some cosmetic changes, they were the exact same woman. You can either go with Sean Connery's Tak-ne creating a female clone army, or you can believe there is an otherworldly plastic surgeon altering a cadre of super-rich bitches to all look alike," Delilah - who was a captain of something - put out there.

"Who in the Hell is Tak-ne?" Riki mumbled.

"Duh," I poked the State Department lassie. "Connor MacLeod's Egyptian mentor in Highlander, the original movie and in the less than stellar sequel, Highlander: The Quickening".

"You are mistaken. Connery was that Spanish guy," Riki poked me back.

"Actually, the relevant quote is: 'I am Juan Sanchez Villalobos Ramirez, Chief metallurgist to King Charles V of Spain. And I'm at your service'." Vincent regaled us with his movie trivia. "He later reveals that he was born Tak-ne in Egypt in the 9th century BCE. Also, his Spanish name makes no sense - he has one too many surnames." www.noveltwo.com

"Agent Loire, I am beginning to find intelligent men to be attractive," Charlotte said.

"Umm... thank you," Vincent responded warily.

"This might be a good point to get something clear," Chaz inquired. "Mr. Nyilas, whose side are you on? It appears to be rather complicated."

"Okay, Chaz, call me Cael. Calling me Mr. Nyilas makes me miss my dad. I can also be addressed as Cael 'Wakk' Ishara, Head of House Ishara of the First Twenty Houses of the Amazon Host. Or, you can call me what the Great Khan does - Magyarorszag es Erdely Hercege. Finally, those who love me, or find me amusing, may call me Fehér mén."

Selena's snort indicated she'd failed to hide her amusement at my presumptiveness, both titular and physically.

"Do you want to explain what's so amusing?" Riki looked over to the Black Hand assassin.

"Your job should be exceptionally easy now," Selena mocked me, "Prince of Hungry and Transylvania... or do you prefer 'White Stud'?"

"Laugh while you can, Monkey-Girl," I sneered. "The guy currently making a run at erasing seven hundred years of Asian history gave me that title. As for Fehér mén - that means 'White Stallion' and is symbolic of my ties to House Epona, not a phallic reference." Riki's look had gone from disgust, to anger (because she thought she was being played) and lastly, to shock.

"No," I interpreted her fear. "I am not here as some vanguard to unite the Magyar people to their cultural kinfolk in Central Asia. If you know your Central European history, you might recall that the Mongols devastated my homeland. For the next 450 years, the Turks were unwelcome visitors, conquerors and overlords. My princely status is a pat on the head for a job well done and nothing more."

"What job did you do?" Riki prodded.

"I saved a man's life." I looked pained to admit. She didn't get it.

"It must have been a major VIP's life," Chaz suggested.

"You can say that," Pamela nodded. "End of discussion time too."

At Ferenc Liszt International, we were diverted to a private hangar once more - courtesy of the Republic of Ireland's diplomatic umbrella. Three grey Ford Focuses and a white panel truck advertising a furniture repair store awaited us. Security issues were immediately obvious. They wanted to separate us (in the Fords) from most of our luggage (in the truck). www.noveltwo.com

The five guy welcoming party hid under the cloak of 'don't speak any language you claim to speak' and Selena was of zip help. So, I spoke to them in Hungarian. They glanced my way, but didn't respond. Serbian? Nope. Romanian? Nope.

[Old Kingdom Hittite] "Bows and doves," I commanded.

That translated rather logically as 'guns/bows' and 'phones/doves'. Out came our pistols. The only Black Hand to react fast enough was Selena and Pamela had her covered. The Amazons were aiming at the locals while Delilah and Chaz had their weapons out and scanning. Vincent and Virginia hadn't been fast enough - this time. They also didn't have guns pointed at them.

The lead BH flunkie began talking calmly in German - heavily Slavic accented German.

[German] "What do you think you are doing?" he inquired of me.

[German] "Disarming you, ya Moron." I grumbled. [OKH] "Go", and in my Amazons went to very roughly search, disarm and de-phone our not so friendly friends.

"Alright, gather up your luggage," I called out to my group. "We are walking to town." That wasn't truly accurate. There was a metro associated with the airport - a kilometer away max. Our guides didn't speak English so they were rather surprised when the bags came out of the truck and were distributed to their owners. Riki Martin and Odette were in some trouble.

Girls and 'only packing the necessities'... Well, we had some diplomatic lumber to toss at the security services, Vincent had web-searched our location and the route we needed to take to the metro, and Delilah had purchased week-long public transport passes for the group. Only when we started marching out of the hangar did the BH comprehend the totality of their error.

The five guys in the hangar were chattering away - in Hungarian - and Selena was peed. www.noveltwo.com

"You are upsetting my superiors by blatantly disrespecting their courtesy," she reminded me. "They have guaranteed your safety."

"Less than a day has passed since the shootout in London, Selena," I countered.

"This is the Black Hand's backyard," Selena persisted, "not London."

"So, you are only going to help us if we do stupid shit we wouldn't do, even on our own home ground, is that it?" I chuckled. "Sweet," then, to my people, "I guess we are on our own."

The airport security guards didn't know what to make of our group of over-worked Sherpa, but the US State department and the ROI (Republic of Ireland) vouched for us, so they let us pass.

We hadn't taken the cars and the truck because that would have been theft. The confiscated guns and phones had been disassembled and tossed into a large iron drum of used aviation lubricant. Odette began shopping around for hotel reservations (I was carrying most of her gear). She was the logical choice because she sounded the most human of the bunch.

Selena called her people back, explained the fuck up and engaged in a mutual ass-chewing that spilled over a half-dozen languages and ended up with Dick-head, the local BH chieftain providing us with a dozen different languages and a thousand names. With the last name in mind, we made for the bowels of modern Budapest.

Unusually, Riki contacted the US Embassy to Hungary's CIA mission head and Chargé D'Affaires, a. i., updating them on our arrival and movements. At the last moment, I had Riki relay the wrong address on a paranoid hunch. I was right to be paranoid except I was looking in the wrong direction.

We had just disembarked at the Kőbánya-Kispest M3 station when we walked into the rolling ambush. A 'rolling ambush' is like a meeting engagement - the difference being that one side (ours) is on the move, not knowing it is being hunted while the other side (our attackers) was rushing to catch up with us, not knowing where along the path they would find us.