

1018

In our bunkroom, we found three Macedonians resting after a day of sight-seeing: two guys and girl. One of the guys seemed annoyed that a hostess was showing us our bunks and explaining the rules for using the showers and the kitchen while the Macedonians were trying to sleep. Once she left, he looked my way.

"You are Americans?" he said it as if it was an insult.

"Yes," I answered sincerely. "I apologize for disturbing your nap. Where are you from?"

[Macedonian] "Look at these two idiots," he engaged his friends.

[Macedonian] "That lady looks ancient," the girl said.

[Macedonian] "Maybe she is the only whore he could afford," the second guy laughed.

[Macedonian] "What do you call a Macedonian man with a sheep?" I asked Pamela.

[Macedonian] "Married," she snickered. The three were stunned that we knew their lingo. "What do you call a Macedonian in a restroom?"

[Macedonian] "Lost. What do you call...," I was continuing the verbal offensive. At which point the two guys slipped off their bunks and got all riled up www.novOrM.com

"You two had better watch out," the leader growled. He brandished an antler-handled knife, too.

"Let's get one thing straight," I turned to face him.

"You are feeling insulted AFTER you insulted my grandmother and me. We responded to your boorish behavior by disrespecting you and your countrymen. You got served," I pointed out.

"Apologize," he demanded. "I'm not afraid of you."

"I apologize," I shrugged. He and his buddy were flummoxed.

"You are pissing me off," he grumbled. I took off my shirt because I needed to change.

"So, after you insulted me, you asked me to apologize. I apologized. Now, you are pissed off because I did what you requested?" I mused.

"I think he's one of those homosexuals who likes to wrestle men," Pamela drawled.

"He's not a homosexual. He's a Macedonian," I countered.

"Macedonians are what Europeans call Homosexuals, Son," Pamela enlightened me.

"Shut up, Old Lady," the second guy stabbed a finger at Pamela. She grabbed that one finger, twisted and bent it in ways nature had not intended and the boy was on his knees crying.

The knife-guy took his eyes off me so I obliged him by knocking the knife out of his hand. He stumbled back while the girl rushed me. To her credit, she tried to kick me, as opposed to bum-rush me. She was having difficulty trying to figure out what to do, what with me holding her foot at waist level. I could see her next foolish action playing across her face.

"Please don't," I advised her. "Doing a roundhouse kick with me holding your other foot is incredibly difficult and if you haven't trained to do it, you are far more likely to land on your head than hit me." She was doing the same calculations. I let her foot go and took a step back. She took a step back as well, plus she gave me a sexually curious twist of the lips.

The knife-guy retrieved his blade and moved to confront me once more.

"Emil, stop it," the girl stated. He wasn't in the mood to listen to reason. The man stepped forward, made one jab, followed by a wide slash.

"Monkey-brains," I complained as I caught his wrist - again.

I continued through with the attack by driving my knee into his groin, and when he was doubled over, a knee to the jaw. The knife fell out of his slackened grasp, then I shoved him back onto his bunk.

"Umm... ah... I'm Divna. Would you please let my brother go? His name is Neven," she looked from me to Pamela, then back.

Pamela let the guy go with a smile and a nod to the girl.

"You had better hide any drugs and weapons you have," Pamela counseled.

"Why?" Divna inquired.

"Have you missed the tons of cops down by the ferry?" I said.

"What cops?" Neven worried.

"Cops, National Police and a helicopter, or two," I informed them.

"Ya," Pamela nodded. "They might come around and check out any strangers in town. Just a friendly word of warning." They hadn't been friendly to us, which wasn't an issue.

What we didn't need was anyone running to the cops and pointing them our way. Pamela's and my duffels had a nice little ribbon with the Republic of Ireland's "Diplomatic Status" stamped on it. In theory, that made the bags immune to search and seizure. Of course, if I made a stink about it, Ireland might begin wondering who the fuck I was and who in the hell qualified me as a member of their diplomatic corps.

"Are we going to have any more problems?" I looked the three Macedonians over. Divna and Neven shook their heads. It turned out that Emil was Divna's boyfriend. He was still trying to will his balls to drop out of his stomach cavity. I picked up his knife and handed it to Divna.

"Who are you?" Divna was warming up to me already.

"I'm Cael Nylas, Agent of SHIELD. My companion is an LMD (Life Model Decoy) called PAMELA, which stands for Puissant Assault Military-grade Efficiently Lethal Android. Director Fury has sent on a special covert mission to infiltrate M. A. R. S. and bring back proof that they are experimenting with illegal nano-technology," I confided to them.

"She's an android?" Neven gawked.

"Didn't she feel stronger than any human possibly could?" I asked. Of course the majority of Pamela's power had come from leverage, not raw strength, but for Neven, being owned by an artificial human was much easier to accept than being beaten by a woman clearly forty years his senior. www.novOrM.com

"You are right," Neven nodded eagerly.

"Well, my partner and I have a meeting to go to. You three behave, act like nothing is amiss," Pamela stated, "and we'll see you later tonight."

"You are coming back, though?" Divna inquired.

"Absolutely," I confirmed. "I have a six person industrial espionage team, masquerading as college students that I need to interrogate. They will be staying here in this room tonight."

"Oh," Divna gulped.

"Don't worry. I'll keep the noise down," I lied.

"Good-bye gang," Pamela waved as she steered me out the door. I left word with the manager about where we were going, in case the boat girls asked. Once she got us out onto the street, Pamela bumped against me. "Cael, you scared me today. I don't like that feeling," Pamela admitted.

"Me getting shot? I've been shot, stabbed and beaten plenty of times," I replied.

"Not on my watch," she sighed. "Never when your life was in my hands. I have to say it truly sucked." I put an arm around her shoulders and hugged her to my side as we walked.

"Pamela, the only thing that matters to me is that we are doing something worth the risk - making a difference, saving lives and never giving-in to fear," I comforted her.

"You are such a hopeless romantic," she smiled at me.

"I prefer hopeful romantic," I grinned. "Like 'hopefully I will get laid six times tonight'."

"It could be seven," Pamela was lightening up.

"I was actually hoping to have that one for breakfast," I laughed, and she joined in.

"By the way," Pamela snorted in amusement.

"Yes?"

"Congratulations on weaving Joss Whedon, Marvel Comics and the plot of GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra all into one nice, neatly-packaged lie," she snickered. "I continue to admire you."

"Well, I had to come up with something to explain my planned orgy tonight that still had her wanting to have sex with me in the morning. A guy's got to plan ahead," I teased.

"It is the art of telling people, not what they want to hear, but what they want to believe," Pamela pointed out. "It is your own spin on Bruce Lee's 'Art of fighting without fighting'."

The Both st. Brewery was easy enough to locate. This town was not overly big, most of the businesses were small scale operations (10~40 people) and agriculture was a big deal here. It also meant that everyone pretty much knew, or knew of, everyone else. Locating the person who didn't belong wasn't all that difficult in a bar around 4 pm on a Saturday afternoon.

"Hi," I sat down. "You must be the intelligence officer we were told to meet."

"Could you keep it down? We don't want to make a scene," the only other stranger in the sparse, late afternoon, eight person crowd cautioned us.

"Excuse me, but we are in a burgh of roughly seven thousand people," Pamela chided him. "We stand out by simply being here."

"How about you try and keep it down anyway?" he countered snidely.

"Fine. I'm Cael and this is Pamela," I made the introductions.

"What name do you go by?" Pamela asked when he wasn't immediately forthcoming.

"Whatever is handy," he said.

"Your name is Whatever S. Handy? How sad," I remarked.

"No. My name is not important," he retorted.

"Would you make up your mind? Is that 'Knot' with a 'K'?" Pamela frowned.

"Were you named after Don Knotts, the comedic actor?" I inquired. www.novOrM.com

"Stop it, just call me Mister," he grumbled.

"That's not very original and could easily confuse any number of male patrons. How about we use something mission specific? We will call you American Super Spy," I suggested.

"Keep your voice down," he hissed insistently.

"Oh, come on Cael, that's too long. Let's break it down to the acronym," Pamela winks at me.

"Right, but let's keep that personal touch, too," I stressed.

"Absolutely," Pamela agreed with me. To the stranger, "How does Mister ASS sound to you?"

"Wait. Wasn't there a wrestler named Mister Ass?" I questioned. www.novOrM.com

"You are right. Billy Gunn!" Pamela shared my alarm.

"How could you ever forget the FAME-ASS-ER?" I faux-gasped.

"I'm ashamed of myself," Pamela owned up to her disgrace.

"What is wrong with you people?" the guy butted in. Pamela and I stared at him innocently.

"Okay, just call me whatever," he muttered, then caught onto our game. "I mean call me whatever name in common usage you two can remember."

"In?" Pamela said to me.

"Up?" I mused.

"Yeah," Pamela nodded. "It is a word in common usage, has a multitude of meanings so you are never really sure what it means... Up."

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