

## 1020

"B-a-r-a-q-u," I spelled it out for him. "It is a Sumerian name, but any religion that man practiced was a long, long time ago. In fact, the fate of Western Christendom as well as Islam is being decided in China as we speak, so get with the program."

"This 'Khante' situation? Strategically speaking, the Chinese should settle their hash soon," Up pronounced. "At the same time, the Russians will close in from the north and that's that," he sounded confident.

"Whatever," I shrugged. "Let's get a bit to eat," I suggested to everyone else.

"Up, don't send the police after us, or have someone tail us... please," Pamela requested as she stood. Up didn't reply, which was okay. We weren't expecting a truthful comeback.

Outside, the girls got all cuddly (YES!!). I had one final piece of business to perform. How were we going to find the rest of our company? I was going to use a United States espionage technique that (almost) never failed. I was going to pretend to be a Canadian. I borrowed Anya's phone for this call. Ring... ring...

"Bonjour?" a female voice murmured. She was so sexy.

[French] "Anais, it's Cael," I let that sink in.

"Cael? It is really you?" she sounded suitably shocked.

"I'm afraid so, and I need a big favor," I tried to remain upbeat.

"Oh... of course you do. Hang on a moment," she insisted. She was having our phone call recorded and traced. For some reason... okay, I KNEW why she didn't trust me. Forty-five seconds later, "Who is Anya and where are you calling from?" she spoke using The Force.

"Anya is a Bulgarian mechanical engineering student," I sighed. "She's petite, dark-skinned and we haven't had sex yet," I added the last bit as a plea for mercy.

"Give her the phone," Anais commanded.

"Anya, this is a former girlfriend of mine. She lives in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada and she is with the Gendarmerie royale du Canada, aka a Mountie," I told Anya before handing her phone back.

"Hello?" Anya cautiously entered the interrogation. Twenty questions later, "Hold on... I said... shut the fuck up!" she was screaming over the interruptions at the end. "Listen, I don't know who you are, but I saw Cael get the shit beat out of him, I saw a person killed and I've been shot at with automatic weapons. I've had a bad day. Are we clear?"

My name is Anya, I am Bulgarian. I'm studying Mechanical Engineering at the Czech Technical University in Prague," she informed Anais. "We are in Mindszent, Hungary. No, I will not give you my last name... why? Because people are trying to KILL ME! Didn't I make that clear earlier?" Anya gave me the phone back.

"Cael, what have you gotten that poor girl into?" Anais blasted me.

"Well... you remember one of those curses you laid on me - the one where you hoped I was trapped in a women's insane asylum and forgotten about?" I reminded her.

"Yes; the Freddy Krueger curse. I recall it vividly," she growled.

Anais wasn't going to hang up on me. She had anger issues and one of the things she adored about me was my willingness to put up with her rages in and out of the bedroom. She kept her fury bottled up at work, so sex with me had been a great release. Sadly for us both, I was a pig.

"You got your wish," I chuckled.

"I ended up working at Havenstone, where I'm one of two male employees in the entire corporation. My career has taken a few unexpected turns since we last talked."

"Thus you finding yourself in Hungary," she interjected. "Are you really in danger?"

"Did you hear about the Budapest M3 firefight yesterday?" I meekly provided. Pause

"Oh my God! You really are in danger," Anais gasped. "Turn yourself in immediately."

"It is not that simple," I replied. "This kind of trouble, the police can't protect me from, Anais. My father is dead. He was murdered two weeks ago. You can check that out. If you like, you can call US Federal Prosecutor Javiera Castello."

"Is she attractive?" Anais grilled me.

"Of course she's attractive. Every girl I meet adjusts twenty pounds toward their desired weight and ten years toward their twentieth birthdays," I griped. "It is a curse." No, it wasn't.

"What is sex with her like?" she demanded to know.

"I haven't had sex with her, Anais. She has me under investigation. The sex will come once she's put me behind bars," I evaded.

"Do you have a girlfriend now?" Jeesh, I had forgotten how jealous she could be.

"I'm engaged to billionairess entrepreneur Hana Sulkanen, Anais, but it is an arranged marriage," I kept paddling.

"You are getting married... to someone else?" she was incredulous.

"How about I explain this over dinner when I get back to the States?" I offered. "Anyplace in New York City - on me."

"Why don't you come to Quebec?" she countered. 'Because I like my freedom' was the honest answer. Thinking fast...

"I am currently working with a multi-national commission with the Republic of Ireland's UN mission. I have to remain on-call for various assignments," I wove my deception@w.nov@wrm.co@

"That's a lie. You just said you were working with Havenstone," she snapped.

"Check it out yourself. I have a certified diplomatic position with Ireland," I counter-trapped her.

"You are such a gifted liar, I don't know what to believe anymore," she sounded sullen.

"How about this: you send out feelers to whatever offices Ireland has in Canada and call Javiera - you can call Havenstone if you want. My boss is Katrina Love of Executive Services. If what I've told you checks out, would you please call my roommate," I requested.

I gave her my home number and asked her to relay whatever message Odette had given him to give to me.

"I miss you, Cael," she confessed. "You broke my heart and I hate you," she lied about the second half.

"I was the one who screwed up. I still have your boots and uniform in my closet. I had the suit cleaned and the boots polished," I replied.

"Why didn't you return them, then?" she grumbled.

"You swore out charges against me, Anais," I recalled. "Things I didn't want to go to jail for."

"Oh... sorry, but you had it coming," she insisted. Going to jail for bestiality would not have looked good on any transcript. I wasn't going to beat her up over that.

"I think we both screwed up," I allowed. Buckling under wouldn't have done. Anais didn't want a wimp. She wanted a guy who could forgive her.

"Still, I was the one who started it, so the buck stops with me," I took the romantic hit.

"I'll make some calls," Anais conceded. "If things check out, I'll be in touch. Prendre soin de mon amour," she signed off in the same manner she did when I was in college.

"Maybe she is not so much an 'ex' girlfriend?" Orsi leered. It was the old 'if he is sooo good that she still wants him back after a colossal screw up, I wanted a taste' expression.

"Do you think she will help you?" Katalin inquired. www.nov@wrm.co@

"She'll help," Pamela huffed playfully. "My grandson has plenty of ex-girlfriends. Most of them want him back, despite his colorful lifestyle. It is one of his more amusing qualities."

"Let's get something to eat," I tried to turn the conversation away from my past sexcapades.

"You are engaged?" Jolan didn't miss a beat.

"It is complicated," I sighed. "Let's just say I really like her, but she's seven years older, divorced with one young daughter and has a father who hates that I live and breathe."

"Do you have any male friends?" Monika joined the Cael Quiz Bowl.

"Yes," I replied with confidence. "My roommate Timothy and I are great friends."

"He's gay," Pamela pierced their disbelief. "He and Cael are true brothers-in-arms, I'll give Cael that much."

"Do you have any straight male friends?" Orsi was enjoying taunting me.

"Do Chaz or Vincent count?" I looked to Pamela. www.nov@wrm.co@

"They are straight males, but they don't really know you yet," Pamela failed to be of much help. "I think Vincent insinuated he'd shoot you if you dated any of his three daughters. It was friendly of him to warn you. I supposed that could be construed as liking you."

"Are all your acquaintances violent?" Anya seemed worried.

"Vincent isn't violent. He's with the US FBI," I retorted. Pause. "Okay, he carries a gun and shoots it... he's a law officer. They can do that." www.nov@wrm.co@

"You seem to be stressed," Orsi put an arm around my waist. "Let us ease your worries." Hallelujah!