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They acknowledged Mamitu had, through foresight, prepared the Host for what had to be done. For Aya, it was destiny that had put me in her path; she and her sisters trained for the hostage scenario multiple times, so she was a logical choice for my training. She had been training with the bow when I was giving her the inner strength and confidence to hit the target.

Training, not mutual good fortune, put her at the range to make that shot. Whatever part luck played, that bolt that had saved my life and paved the way for Aya's rise to leadership had been a part of her training as well. Amazons didn't deny luck, nor did the put any trust in it.

"Hi, so who are the rest of you?" I addressed the Fatal Squirts while rearming.

"I am Mosa Oya," the tomahawk holder identified herself.

"I am..." the third member got out before we were propelled back into that 'never too distant' No-Man's Land. A girl, a stranger in her early teens, came up and shoved Aya hard.

"You are nothing special," the older girl growled at my buddy. My 'daughter' barely avoided sprawling in the dust.

The intensity was palatable. Aya had no chance of beating this girl. Not only did her opponent have every physical advantage, she had three buddies as well - correction: two buddies and a twin sister. Amazons built lifetime bonds around these foursomes. Aya and company backed down, despite her obvious shame. She had just won an honorific as a child - unheard of before this. It was Amazon tactical thinking, not fear, that ruled Aya's mind. I was so proud of her.

"What's your name?" I inquired congenially of the newcomer. She flashed me a look of anger laced with teenage hormones, then turned and stormed away... actually, she only started to storm away. Her behavior had played right into my hands. I was an adult. She wasn't a full-fledged member of the Host, nor was she a child anymore. I had asked her a question and she had been disrespectful to me. Her bad. Still, I doubted anyone expected my leg sweep.

The bully hit the ground hard - no rolling with the blow for her. My foot smashing down on her diaphragm drove the fight right out of her. I wasn't done. The twin rushed in - my thunderbolt left sent her flying back from whence she came. Amazons despise child abuse as cruel and socially cancerous, yet no one else was rushing in to stop me.

Even her other two friends were obeying both basic Amazon battle philosophy and conduct. Two young teens versus me was stupid... and I wasn't alone. I had four Squirts plus two other women close by who saw nothing wrong with a cooperative pummeling. I lifted my foot a centimeter from the girl's chest.*(w)wW.N.r.eIWcoM.COm*

"Let's try this again," I spoke softly. "I am Cael Ishara. You have disparaged my house by putting your back to me after I, an adult, politely addressed you. In fifteen seconds your sin will pass beyond your ability to address and your actions will be viewed as your family's unwarranted insult. My sisters will seek vengeance against your sisters with the added advantage that your sisters won't know what's going on. Now, what's your name?"

See, I could have gone straight to Step Two - the House on House vengeance. Me kicking her ass was merciful because after five, or six members of her house were jumped, one at a time by three, or four, of mine, those ladies were going to be truly curious why their youngster had been so fucking rude in front of so many fucking Amazons to the HEAD of a fucking First House.

'Honorific' Aya still had no status except that of a child. Dumb Bunny was passed her 12th year test, so she was of her House, thus the insult. Despite my 'fantasy' assumption of the role of grunt, everyone knew that Cael Cabbage-head was Cael Ishara, Head of House Ishara. I was the only accepted male Amazon in existence, the only possessor of a 'five o'clock shadow' in camp, I was armed and I was so armed while walking among their children.

She could not have possibly mistaken me for another. Her eyes showed that truism too. Her wrathful 'how dare that male!' morphed into 'oh fuck, my older sisters are going to be tossed down stairwells, jacked up in parking garages and they were going to be caught totally flat-footed when it happens... and it is all my (the girl's) fault'.*xrwW.(n)oVélvor.m.cO@*

In theory, St. Marie could deny my feud (we were at war), or warn the girl's house of my request... but why would she? The crime couldn't have been more obvious and the Amazons were way past making harmful shit up about me.

"Zarana... Zarana of House Inara," she gasped.

I switched foot placement, pivoted, reached down to arm-clasp my left with her left and ended with me pulling her effortlessly to a standing position*www.n.vetwδ@Ml.©om*

"A pleasure to meet you Zarana Inara. I am Cael Ishara, but you may call me Cael if you wish," I gave her my award winning smile. "No one will ever doubt your courage in my presence," I added.

'Lead with the left jab, then catch them with the right hook'. As true in interpersonal relationships as in boxing. I had beaten her handily seconds ago and now I was applauding her bravery. Again, I wasn't a Head of House calling attention to her virtue... but I was.

"Your sister shares your warrior's heart."

"I... I... I don't know what came over me..." she started to give me a respectful head-nod. I hooked a finger under her chin to stop her.

"Are you going to reconsider your approach for dealing with a male Amazon, Zarana of Inara?" I bridged the awkward moment. Bing! I had turned a humiliation into a learning moment.

"Yes," she smiled at me. "Yes Cael Ish... Cael."

"I swear by the All-Mighty, if I find this one crawling into your sleeping bag, I'm going to be very disappointed in you," Delilah ambushed me. Wa-ha?

"Oh, come on!" I protested. "She's thirteen."

"Fourteen," the other twin, bleeding lip and all, puffed herself up.

"Not helping..." I looked at the twin.

"Vaski," she supplied. *What?Www.novétw.r.m.çOM*

"Vaski? Really? That was Grandmother's name - it is Magyar-Finnish," I wondered.

"We are almost related," she conjured the improbable out of the impossible.

"No you are not, young lady," Delilah serpentine^d her way to the front of the crowd. "You are not family now and you can't attempt to be for four more years."

"Who would you be?" Zarana challenged Delilah. Man, those two kids were punky.

"An honored guest," Priya provided. "I hope another lesson in manners will not be necessary."

"I'll do my best," I volunteered. Priya had been addressing the twins; not me. Taking the hit was a bit of comedy to diffuse the moment.

"Some of you need to eat," a camp counselor stated. Another crisis down and the sky wasn't even dark yet.

"Cáel!" and here we went again. Thank you, Ishara, it was Europa, the strange one - meaning the one I understood the most.

(Night and Day)

This place kept getting more and more wonderful. There was one safe road that rolled out of the camp's front gate (there was no wall - the gate was ceremonial) and disappeared off toward the closest state road. Scheduled trips were made to the closest blip on the census data where they bought stuff (irrelevant) and were 'seen' by the locals (the important thing).

If anyone investigated, there was a legitimate summer camp 'out there'. The counselors weren't friendly, but they worked with 'troubled' kids, so keeping the small talk to a minimum was excusable. Sure, they only saw women - usually the same ones each trip during a given summer. The camp held nearly a thousand people, so the all-female thing was dismissed as a quirk.

That was the second layer of deception. We had already learned that the first layer was the idea of a camp for girls in the foster care system. The third layer was all the visible 'props'. This went beyond the typical craft centers, juvenile obstacle courses, and a dozen other distractions. (The only 'real' one was the stables. Amazons loved riding horses and being assigned to tend to their care was a high honor.)

Thirty meters inside the gate was a bridged gulch. After dark, the bridge supports were removed turning a clear shot into the center of camp into a waiting death trap. If there was any doubt, the gulch, so comforting and protective, was a blast zone as well - designation: The Barbecue Pit. I couldn't find it, but I was sure there was an altar somewhere to the matron goddess for this summer camp, the Goddess Paranoia.

The sleeping quarters for everyone? More props. Campers would go in, mill around for ten minutes, then curl up on their bed... the ones that warmed up to 98F/36.7C degrees in the shape of human bodies. Then the campers went down the shafts beneath their bunks and dutifully shuffled along the one meter high underground tunnels to their mesa-based domiciles. Again, once in the cliff-side barracks, they had two chimneys, a tunnel back to the dorm building and a cleverly designed, nearly invisible front exit to choose from.

Pamela took it in stride, Delilah was a bit peeved by the 'excessive' security. Virginia... we'd already dragged her through her dorm tunnel to her cave to sleep it off. For me... the tunnel's dimensions made it a tight fit. Amazons can be pretty strong, but they don't have shoulders as wide as mine, nor are they normally over a meter/eight (six feet for us Yankees).

I would have complained, except I had a sneaking suspicion that Pamela had a trowel to give me so I could 'widen up' a twenty to forty meter stretch of tunnel the moment I opened my mouth. As the last portion of the instructional tour, we were directed to get our grub before it was gone because the sadistic chefs loved to watch the eight year old workhouse orphans fight over who got to lick the pot instead of starving.

Not really. The victuals were actually very good. I had hopes of more bonding time with my Epona ladies, yet no sooner had I cleaned my tin plate and dinnerware, I found someone else who craved my attention - Sophia. She was hot for my touch and by that I meant she wanted to punch and kick me around for a bit, all in the name of fun.

"Since you are my guest, I will let you choose our weapons," Sophia decided.

"I choose hyperbole," I gracefully flowed from sitting with one leg down and the other bent to standing.