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The second element was that women are past mistresses of not saying what they mean. They can hurt, confuse, or protect you in oblique ways. It took me a millisecond to piece the girl-politics together. I figured Katrina was playing softball with me so my poor brain wouldn't strain itself. St. Marie was my ally. Katrina was being publically contrary to me; thus when I took the post as she wanted me to do, I wouldn't be seen as being in her cornerW©.n0rëiwoRm.com

House Šauška pretended to support me so they would look good when I backed down – which I was bound to do if Katrina didn't support me (idiots). I had run off to summer camp instead of standing before the Council. They thought I was irresponsible, which I was, and didn't really care about the Amazon political system, which was wrong – I did care. That was why I sent Buffy in my place.

"How many people are in this department/unit/corps maybe?" I asked Konstantina. She weighed her words carefully and guessed wrong.

"There are only nine of us," she went for making the group sound insignificant. "Troika was the tenth. You would be her replacement."

"Cool," I grinned at Konstantina, "I accept St. Marie's appointment. When can I get a situational briefing?"

"What? You want to do this? Why?" Konstantina stood and took a step my waywv(w).n0v&RŴ@rm.coM

"I'm not going to be a smart Alec, despite your deception," I sighed. "The truth is Troika's group hasn't done shit to safeguard the Host."

"You know nothing of what we have been doing?" Konstantina snapped.

"Nice. I need to meet with a member of the Earth & Sky," I grumbled. "Do it – now!"

"That is not what..." she got out.

"Then you are not doing your jobs," I interrupted.

"Our JOB was to analyze the data provided by Executive Services for patterns concerning Secret Societies and third parties," Konstantina countered.

"You are kidding..." I responded. Silence. "Who initiates diplomatic contact?"

"The High Priestess, or now St. Marie," she replied. Implied was that all of this crisis was my fault.

"But, if they did ask, what would you do?" I kept at her.

"That is why you don't need to be Chief Diplomat of the Host. You don't know what needs to be done," Konstantina gloated.

"Oh... okay... I need six of your people for extended assignments," I said after taking a deep breath.

"I do not believe I can work with you," Konstantina stated.

"Okay. Good-bye," I dismissed her. She looked for help from Elsa and Katrina.

None was forthcoming. "Beat it, Konny. This meeting is only for those with decision-making ability and that has stopped being you." She wasn't a Head of House, thus on the Council. She snatched up her valise and stormed out, barely missing Pamela.

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"I'm betting something bad happened in Japan," I began.

"I will need five guardians, Elsa," I regarded the SD Chief.

"We don't have the Security Detail to spare for extended assignments at this time," she replied.

"Chose the best of the remaining security staff then," I responded. "I want to put an Amazon diplomat with the 9 Clans, Illuminati, Earth & Sky, the Ninja and Javiera's taskforce."

"Actually, Katrina, can you get Yasmin back here. Putting her with the Feds would be our best bet to stay ahead of their planning," I asked my mentor, friend and ally.

"Good choice. I'll have her here tomorrow afternoon," Katrina nodded.

"Next order of business; from here on out, the Diplomatic Corps sits in on all military/security meetings," I continued. "We need to know what to ask our partners in this conflict," I demanded.

"No," Elsa countered. "We can't have you bartering Amazon battle plans to other groups whose loyalty will always be suspect."

"If St. Marie says the information remains compartmentalized, then that is so. Otherwise, we are going to be much better off in this fight if we coordinate efforts," I made my case.

Katrina's nod led to Elsa's acceptance as well.

"Buffy, I don't want you to miss a meeting," I smiled at my 'First'."

"What? Where are you going to be?" Buffy worried.

"I need to go to Europe and find any surviving Arinniti heirs," I kept grinning.

"Really?" Elsa grumbled. "You NEED to go? Can't we send someone else?"

"Ah, come on," I pleaded. "I can do this. It's the Old World... Transylvania – full of quaint inns, cheap curio shops and packed youth hostels."

"Packed with young women," Katrina teased me.

"I promise, I'll play it safe this time," I kept begging. Yes – European babes looking for handsome, dark strangers on a secretive mission... note to self: pack extra condoms.

"Safe," Elsa sizzled. "In the middle of a battle, did you really stand on top of an enemy Humvee and drop a napalm grenade in knowing it was packed with men and ammo?"

"Maybe, kinda, well sorta," I evaded, yet still sounded guilty.

"According to preliminary reports, the explosion threw you five meters," she glared.

"Woot! Is that a new Amazon record?" I turned that frown upside down.

"Forty-six days, Bitch," Elsa snarled.

"Hold on," Saku, who had been leaning on the wall next to the door, spoke up. "Is he, or isn't he a member of the Council? If he is, who are you to talk to him this way? C  l "Wicklow ... Wacco ... whatever-Wo he is" Ishara acted bravely, if idiotically. Without his actions, the best outcome the Host could have gained was a draw.

At least give him the opportunity to defend his actions," she groused.

"C  l, do you wish to defend your actions?" Elsa looked to me.

"Nope. I'm good. Hell, I barely remember even being there," I joked.

"You are lying!" Saku yelled at me.

"Oh, my apology. Ladies, this is Sakuniyas. She saved my life... five times this morning." I returned the favor, introducing Katrina, whose office Saku recognized, and Elsa, whose title she wasn't familiar with. There was no 'Security Detail' in her days with the Host. Buffy and Daphne though.

"How can she be your 'First'?" Saku was confused. "Is she a he dressed like a woman?" Buffy got angry while I laughed. See, in Amazon lingo, 'First' implied we were lesbian lovers.

"No. The romantic attachments are real enough. There is no accepted title for a female lover of a male Amazon leader."Ŵw.n0v&RŴ@rm.coM

"Her?" Sakuniyas pointed at Daphne.

"Buffy doesn't speak our native tongue. I have volunteered to translate for all members of House Ishara. I have sworn oaths to Buffy, Helena – our – House Ishara's Keeper of Records, and C  l on this matter."

"I don't care how you saw the fight, C  l. I didn't save your life. I was going to kill those men anyway. At best, you distracted them so that they were easy kills," Saku glared. "I do not know why you run away from glory and honor. It makes no sense to me."

"Saku, I don't care if people think I'm brave, or cowardly. For those who matter, I do the best I can and try to deliver on my promises," I explained.

Clearly the universe felt my life was too explicable – thus the newest arrivals.

"C  l?" a voice called from the door. It was Tad  fi, the Augur, and Sikia, her guardian.

"Are those two yours as well," Sakuniyas scoffed. Too bad she wasn't talking about the ladies.

"Yeah... yeah, I ah..." I didn't dare say 'afraid so'. "Yes. Boys, girls, or a boy and a girl?"

"Excuse me?" That was Katrina.

"Yes, C  l." Delilah finally felt safe in speaking. "You've got Miyako knocked up with a baby girl. Let's see what you did this time." I couldn't spare Delilah a dirty look because getting into physical contact with Tad  fi was more important to me.

Sikia raised one of Tad  fi's hands so that when I reached them, her fingers touched my lips. There was a hidden social benefit of being blind and deaf. You can be effortlessly shameless. The Augur's right hand was on my lips so she could 'hear' me with her fingertips. Her left hand snaked around me, coming to rest on my left ass cheek and pulling our bodies together.

"I have missed you inside of me," she purred. Woot! Who was going to kill me first? Buffy, or Elsa.

"How about we go out on a date first?" I suggested. Yes, I was dodging sex because... I had other sex to catch up with. Odette, Libra and Brooke, Buffy, Oneida and ... Dot Ishara save me... Rhada.

Plus... Ulyssa and Nadia (my Sunday Night thing), Marla (who had threatened to come to NYC), and Nicole Lawless, my lawyer. For the moment, I was trying to limit my Amazon exposure.

"I am not sure what you mean, but I willingly place myself in your hands," Tad  fi kept being sexy.

"The Augur will give birth to a daughter. The one next to her will give birth to a son," Saku made her undead prediction. She curled her lip cruelly as she gave the second bit of news.

"The first son to continue the Vranus legacy," I wrapped my free hand around Sikia's waist. "Yakko Ishara will live again with Tad  fi's and Miyako's daughters.

The line of Vranus has been watched over by Dot and it honors her for that line to continue, Sikia," I assured her. After all, the birth of a son was dour news under normal circumstances.

"I would like to meet my sister-mother if possible, C  l," Tad  fi requested.

"That is a good idea, Tad  fi. She is in need of some comfort and insight," I answered.

Her agreement was given as the phone rang. Katrina got my attention via Pamela. It was Iskender, my friend with the Earth & Sky, and he wanted a meeting in the morning with a hint that it was way more than a welcome back. After he hung up, I found myself waiting for Elsa and Katrina to provide me with the Amazon marital update, but that never came.

The final issue was Sakuniyas' request to raise her own one hundred member fighting force. If anyone had thought she would be put off by being denied full-blooded Amazons, she gave them no sign of disappointment. When we were on the elevator going down, I asked her why.

"Her," she shot Buffy a look.

"Quite frankly, the full-bloods haven't impressed me as much as those born of other mothers. Many of these new women have the look of starving dogs," she added.

"We are not dogs," was Buffy heated rebuttal.

"She means it in a different manner than her words would indicate," I rubbed Buffy's arm.

"I want women who are desperate for blood and glory. I don't want killers. I want butchers. I want warriors schooled in the art of atrocities and every form of barbaric actions ever imagined. I want us renowned for such savagery that foes flee before battle even begins," Saku explained.

"You want psychotically deranged berserkers?" Daphne murmured.

"That is the essence of what I envision – yes," Saku nodded. Delilah looked suitably impressed/scared. I had to wonder how House Anat had lasted as long as it had. Becoming extinct was not even an issue. The last of them had drowned in a lake of enemy blood. Insanely brave until the bitter end.