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The chain went on effortlessly. Her cuffs went on but weren't linked together. I put my towel around my waist. Rhada used hers to dry her long, thick hair. Chain in hand, we returned to the living room.

Wieslawa shattered the serenity of the moment. "What's the matter?"

[OKH] "Rhada, was he that sexually enjoyable?" the Polish Amazon inquired eagerly.

Saku's head whipped toward Wieslawa then to Rhada.

[OKH] "That... 'thing' is one of us?" the Ancient One snapped. Rhada flinched.

"She's not a thing, she is one of us," I responded with amusement, not anger. "Considering your lousy grasp of virtually every relationship you've been in, I count your input to be childish."

[OKH] "Childish?" Sakuniyas growled as she stood. It was 'everyone stands up' time. Except for Odette, who had missed out on the clues of upcoming violence. Saku glared at Wieslawa. "Are you as weak as this one?" she indicated Rhada.

"What are you talking about?" Wieslawa was confused. "They are just playing."

Now the naïve boot was on someone else's foot.

"She is his slave!" Saku yelled at Wieslawa. "How can you tolerate an Amazon being that way?"

"What?" Wieslawa looked to me and Rhada.

"That's right, Wieslawa," I met her questing eyes. "There are three Amazons in this room. Saku is not one of us, but you are. Tell me - who restrains the freedom of any Amazon?"

"No one," was her automatic response.

"Don't cloak your abomination in clever words, Ishara," Saku spat.

"That's Wakko Ishara," Delilah corrected her. I ignored Sakuniyas for the moment.

"Wieslawa, am I curtailing Rhada's freedom in any way? When she is with me, she is my slave and body servant. We engaged in combat, I won, so she services me," I explained.

"No..." Wieslawa mumbled. She was torn between 'this must be a joke' and 'redeem your honor, bitches'.

"That's right," Saku sizzled. "He has made an Amazon his slave." Wieslawa was about ready to switch sides (join with Saku) when the peanut gallery started laughing.

"What are you laughing about?" Wieslawa spun on them angrily, her English skills starting to break.

"Wieslawa, if Rhada suddenly screamed out 'help me' what would happen?" Odette snickered. That stumped her.

"What does that matter? She is supposed to be an Amazon," Saku countered in her loud voice.

"Sakuniyas, how do you think Rhada ended up here?" Timothy regarded our rude guest.

"Don't change the subject," Saku growled.

"This is the subject, Saku-luv," Delilah snorted. "This is Rhada choosing to be free. This is who she wants to be when she's with Cael. In fact, hers is the greatest display of fearlessness I've ever witnessed... and keep in mind the crowd we are running in."

That barb struck three different women in three different ways. For Rhada, it was what I'd been pushing her toward the entire night, yet it took a woman declaring it to make it real in her mind. Her choice to be my captive really was a brave thing. She was defying her conventions to do what her heart demanded. If I hadn't had my hands full, I would have kissed Delilah.

For Wieslawa, it placed her on the horns of a dilemma. Amazons strove to be free. She was honor-bound to see that Rhada was free, yet Rhada was choosing to be a slave... she was back to being undecided about this entire ordeal. Saku saw Delilah's statement congealing the resistance to her conservative ideals (despite her having broken them herself).

Sovann took the break in the action to stand up, stretch out and then sit on the floor between Timothy's legs, back to the sofa. He had on a light gray muscle shirt and blue-plaid boxers, so his actions were more than enough to earn him some 'girl yummy', despite the wide acceptance that he was gay. That left the middle spot on the sofa for me and I took it.

Rhada tagged along and obediently curled up at my feet. To stress the point, I gave the chain a gentle yank. It was enough to get her attention and tilt her face in my direction. Another short pull and she rose up on her knees so that I could lean forth and give her a fierce kiss. She was murmuring like a pantheress in no time.

Submission to me had not lessened Rhada's warrior spirit in the least. She was becoming comfortable in her skin, being both an Amazon and captive to my captor. Odette propped herself up so she could kiss Rhada on the shoulder.

"Do you want something to drink, Rhada?" Odette inquired. Rhada nodded.

"Some crushed ice would be nice... thank you," she added. Odette hopped up to fulfill her errand. Timothy decided to restart the 'On Demand' movie the gang had been watching while Rhada and I were busy. It was Captain America: The Winter Soldier. Guaranteed to have the Amazons groaning over the unrealistic combat maneuvers while ogling the man-candy.

Rhada started out by placing butterfly kisses on the side of my knee. From there, she began making 'washing' motions with her hair on my shin. I looked down to see her sneaking peeks up at me. Damn, her actions had been silent appeals for attention. I ran my middle finger's nail along her eyebrow from nose-bridge to cheek then repeated the stroke several more times.

I would catch up with the Black Widow later.

"Do you think you could dress up like that woman (the Black Widow) for Halloween?" I asked my captive. Oops. Indian Amazon - what was Halloween again? We cleared that hurdle and a few more before I finally sent Rhada home. Finally I could lie down... but sleep didn't come.

(Bitter fruits)

"Hello, Iskender," I rose from my seat at this Turkish breakfast eatery called Sip Sak. We hugged, then took our seats. He was incredibly jittery, much like a man about to rush into a battle that had already expressed its savagery.

"First off, He wishes to profess his gratitude by bestowing the title of Magyarorszag es Erdely Hercege upon you, Cael. Do you accept this down payment on the debt we owe?"

I stared at him blankly. The first, second and third words finally registered = [Magyar] Hungary and Transylvania. The last one?

"He has declared you Prince of your Peoples, the Ten Tribes," Iskender seemed exceptionally excited to deliver the news, so I plastered on a 'happy face'.

Was I expecting a Mongolian-Turkish horde to come riding out of Kazakhstan to place me on some throne? No. This was an 'atta boy' in silk ribbons. I was a non-Altan urag (Temujin's extended family), non-Mongolian, non-Turkish nobleman...

"Well," I chuckled, "I don't think you wanted to meet solely in order for me to feel better about myself."

"Of course not," Iskender nodded. He pulled out a white crushed-hemisphere shaped device. One tap and the thing began humming. I felt my eardrums tingle. "I am glad you are with us," he grimed. "He wants you and the Amazons to not lose faith in the Earth & Sky. Everything is going according to plan."

Those were two bad things: the old refrain rang true once again - I was an idiot. By taking Genghis Khan's 'down payment', I was joining the Earth & Sky with all the attendant benefits and flaws... things like: when Temujin 'asked' me to do something, he wasn't really asking. I was on his team now. I couldn't beg out of the honor I had just accepted.

Those who rebelled against the Great Khan had a lousy survival track record. How was I going to explain this to Katrina... or St. Marie... or my Aunts, who had a nice, cushy villa waiting for me when I joined the Illuminati? The other bad thing - Temujin had already put in motion an Earth & Sky operational plan before the Seven Pillars hit us early yesterday.

This had to be a panicked-feigned retreat on a strategic scale.

"That must be some plan," I prodded him. I might as well try to get something good out of this quagmire.

"The first part is the most critical to you and your allies in the government," he began.

"The first phase began fifteen years ago. We began to secretly inoculate the Turkish and Mongolian peoples of Mongolia, the Siberian Autonomous Regions, the Turkish states of Central Asia and the northern and western provinces of China. We also penetrated the People's Republic's healthcare apparatus - mainly in the field of vaccines," he was definitely pleased with this 'plan'.

"Vaccines for what?" I inquired quietly. That question made him happier.

"Anthrax," he leaned in and whispered.

"Anthrax?" I tried to keep the gibbering terror out of my voice.

"Yes," Iskender nodded.

"As the Communists scurried about like headless chickens when their atheistic state died, we stole their research and a few of their research scientists. By the time our old foe, Russia, took that government's place, the evidence had vanished. The Soviets had weaponized Anthrax and thought they destroyed all the data, which worked well for us," he informed me quite happily.

"What kind of death toll are we looking at?" I gulped.

"We are looking at reducing the Han population in the key provinces to 30% of the total population. You see, that is the solution to the attack. Once we create outbreaks in the designated zones, the Chinese will inoculate the Han first."