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"I know this will cause you pain yet I will say it anyway - I love you." Yeah... I was suddenly wishing Pamela had missed and hit me between the eyes.**wŴw.NôŴe1woŔm.©(o)M**

"Very well, what can I do for you that would make you happier?" Inside of second. "Clever boy. Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Done. I can no longer read your mind." A few seconds passed. "This is annoying. Is this what it is like dealing with me - this 'not knowing'?"

"Yes and you proved it by the way," I murmured. Several more seconds.

"This is really annoying me. Pick something else." Pause. "What does it prove?"

"You love me," I grinned. "Love without freedom is illusionary. Freedom of thought is the basis of hope and hope drives all endeavors." A long pause. I was a bit curious about what was happening to my body.

"Please."

"No."

"I could give you a divine gift... speak in tongues... regeneration... long life?"

"Nope. Not happening."

"I still love you."

"Now I can say I love you and know I mean it."

"That's unfair... clever and insightful, but unfair," she teased me.

"What about the curse?"

"Re-forge my statue at the Temple and the curse will be lifted. Be your regular creative self when you do so." Pause - divine sigh. "I need to send you back now. Oh, and make love to the first woman you see. It is important."

"What? Why is it im..." and I felt the weight of my body and the throbbing of my temple.**wŴw.ŊôvêŦwŎŔm.ç(o)ṁ**

(Augurs don'ts and don't give a fuck abouts)**wŴw.nô©ê1woŕ(m.čôMŦ**

I didn't want to open my eyes - really, truly, deeply. I had been dared by both guys and girls to pick up a certain female at a variety of events, even when they came with company. I'd done it because I'm that kind of low-life. Being pre-ordained to sleep with some chick felt wrong to me. It was cheating. I sincerely wished she hadn't been touching my face.

Yes, someone was running their slender, feminine fingers over my forehead, eyebrows, eyelids, nose... yadda.

"Ishara, I must speak with you," the strange woman implored. My eye movement had given my wakefulness away. I pried open my lids and looked up into the face of a living ghost.

Her skin was albino pale with obvious veins and blue capillaries beneath the surface. Her ocular orbs were a deep milky white, with a tinge of light blue. I could barely make out the pupils. Her hair was whiter than Pamela's. From the structure and musculature of her hands and face... it was as if a perfectly healthy human woman's body was in a constant frantic battle against death.

My senses expanded to embrace more of my resting place. I was in Katrina's office on the sofa. Katrina was not present. Buffy, the 'senior', Pamela, Rachel, Krasimira, the super-pale chick and two House Guard I didn't recognize were nearby. Despite my head throbbing to the beat of fiendish jackhammers, I managed to sit up. This upset the lady touching me as my movement broke our contact.

"Ishara?" she pleaded.

"That's it. From now on its Yakko Ishara, Wakko Ishara and Dot Ishara. Let's end all of this confusion over this 'which Ishara are we really wanting to talk to?' bullshit. So, what do you want?" I groaned. "I'm claiming the 'Yakko' spot, by the way."

"Ishara?" she pleaded again. Was she protesting me taking the oldest Warner brothers' spot? Yeah, I was the youngest one of the pseudo-divine trio, but I absolutely owned the role of smart-alec.

"She is an Augur," Krasimira explained. "The poisons she takes to put her in a receptive state to the ancestors, goddesses and the spiritual currents of the universe leave her blind and deaf to the mortal world.

She communicates normally, but needs to be touching your lips to know what you are saying. Her name is Tadéfi and she has a message for you," she finished.

"Give me a sec," I put my thoughts together despite my pain. Buffy shoved a glass of water and three pills my way. I downed them gratefully. Buffy was clearly distressed.

I was getting the crap kicked out of me a lot and, in theory, it was her job to stop such things from happening.

"Buffy, we couldn't have foreseen Carrig coming after me the way he did. He slipped through the seams of very good security," I tried to comfort her.

"Pamela shot me on the Goddess/Dot Ishara's orders. She can only communicate with me when I'm in a near-death state," I said. "I have a new mission for you." I needed to keep her mind busy with things other than me. Buffy was action-oriented and I was giving her a doozy of a task.

"Obtain at least five of the bullet casings from the battle that took my Father's life.

Give them to Krasimira. They are to be melted down with the original statue and recast into a new symbol of the Goddess. We will be a melding of the old and the new," I ordered. Yes, I was sacrificing a priceless ancient artifact for a current political agenda. I'm reprehensible. Kimberly would be ashamed. "Now, who were the women whose names I gave you?"

"They are all deceased 'Runners', Ishara," the senior told me. Oh... that made sense.

"Tomorrow we induct them into House Ishara," I stated.

"Ishara, they are dead," senior repeated.

"Do you believe the souls of Amazons go to the houses of their ancestors after dying?" I posed.

That took a few seconds to soak in. My almost albino was getting truly distressed so I took her hand and put it on my lips as I asked the latest question.

"Oh..." the senior and Buffy both muttered.

"All those 'Runners' - their spirits wander aimlessly for eternity bereft of companionship and a place to call home," I told them.

"That is a crime," I continued. "Even as Ishara moves forward, we must be honest about our past. Those women earned a place in the Host. They were unduly denied their promised afterlife and we will start rectifying that tomorrow." Their looks broadcast their interpretation of my declaration: I was a wonderful child who had won first place for our team at the State Fair.

Now that she was back in the communication loop, the augur calmed down.

"You have a message for me?" I 'asked' her. Halfway through, I stopped enunciating.

"Yes, Ishara. My dead sister stepped back through the flames and told me you..." she began.

"No - stop," I told her. "Everyone leave." They honored my wishes and departed except...

"What are you still doing here?" I asked the House Guard who remained. Now that I had a chance to study her, I realized she bore the same cuneiform designation as Krasimira.

"I am her guardian. I am always at her side," the woman explained rather heatedly. She was certainly not a fan of the man in mankind.

"By all means - have it your way. Augur, your message is unimportant. Write it down and have it sent out as a memo for everyone in Havenstone to read. Someone may tell me about it. I'm horrible with my e-mail, so I probably won't read it myself," I growled. This shit stopped now. I stood and made to leave. The augur swatted out and grabbed my arm when she hit it.

"Ishara, you must..." and I lightly slapped her face. The guardian drew down on me.

"How dare you?" the guardian seethed**www.n0ve(1)woŕm.©(o)M**

"I am thinking the same thing - 'how dare you?'" I rumbled. "How dare you decide what messages she does, or does not, deliver?"

"Tadéfi has something important to tell you," the guardian growled. "Augurs died to bring you this message."

"Clearly the message isn't important enough for you to leave the room," I countered. "I took bullet to the head so I could talk to the Goddess Dot Ishara." I was going to enjoy calling my matron pain-in-the-cranium that. She was probably less amused.

"I'm about out of patience with you smug, delusionary superior sluts demanding things from me as if you weren't my underlings," I glared. "Get with the program, or get out." Though I had told her to get out, I was the one leaving. I needed clothes, a shave and a chance to get my bearings. I didn't need those two.

Tadéfi tried to speak again. I put my hand to her lips to stop her again then raised her hands to my lips.

"I do not want to hear what you have to say," I related. "If you try to tell me what you have been told, I will purposely ignore it and cut out your tongue for your insolence.

Your sisters died in vain because your guardian has decided what you say is not worth her leaving the room for us to talk in private. Sleep well with the dying screams of your sisters' agonies echoing in your mind and know your fellow Amazons have wished this fate upon you. Good-bye."

"How... augurs are sacrosanct and their messages are rare and crucial to the Host," the guardian sputtered.

"Didn't know, don't care and could care less what you think is crucial for the Host," I sighed as I started walking away.

"What is happening?" the augur wailed.

"Her visions are lacerations on her soul," the guardian howled. "Does her pain mean nothing to you?" Those two had to be incredibly tight, the guardian watching the augur scarred and worn down by the task she had been chosen for - and not being able to help.

"Not enough to keep me here," I answered at the door. "She's your buddy, not mine and I have a plateful of unhappiness already set before me." I opened the door.

"Is there a problem?" Krasimira inquired as I stepped out. She had a guardian too. Pamela was also close by and strategically placed to dispose of said guardian.