## 945

"Her bodyguard told me to ignore Tadêfi, so I am," I muttered. I hurt. The pain-killers had yet to kick in... and I'd just come out of a coma. Fuck'em. $@w\mathcal{W}.n@veIw\mathbf{0}\mathcal{R}M.@\mathcal{O}\mathbf{M}$ 

in... and I'd just come out of a coma. Fuck'em. $@w\mathcal{W}.n @veIw\mathbf{0}\mathcal{R}\mathbb{M}. @o\mathbf{M}$ If Ishara wanted me to nail that girl, she was going to have to step up on her level of assistance

aimed my way. I accepted that she had her limitations, but so did I.

"Cáel Ishara, is that precisely what she said?" the Keeper was being diplomatic.

"No... what do I call you?"

"Krasimira, Cáel," she answered. "I do not believe it was Tadêfi's intent to be ignored. May I mediate?"

"No," I replied. "I will talk with Tadêfi alone, or not at all. Quite frankly, half the time you women open your mouths, I want to kick you off the roof of this building. Either I see some damn humility - your words, Krasimira - or I carry on the Amazon tradition with Ishara and her legion of former 'Runners' while the rest of you are throttled by your pride."

Do note that the Executive Services floor was very active and several members heard my statement loud and clear.

"May we please try this meeting one more time?" she requested. Her bodyguard nearly choked on Krasimira's gentle, conciliatory tone.

"I could not consider myself an Amazon and deny the Keeper's suggestion on this matter. Let's give it one more shot," I conceded. All I was asking for was 'nice'. I wasn't deluded into thinking Krasimira was suddenly my fan. She was simply acting on the enlightenment that her ancestors and goddesses had revealed. We headed back into Katrina's office.

As with any divine direction, she knew she had two choices - harm, or heal. She had accepted responsibility that to heal her people, the spirits had chosen a male. Liking me had nothing to do with it. Being true to her oaths and nature as an Amazon were the acting forces here. Amazons survived, first and foremost. They feared nothing, not even change.

Her fellows had denied the need for change based solely on pride and Krasimira recognized that

have been much happier if we had been more alone. The room had become crowded with ghosts during my short absence. Krasimira, who was following, bumped into me.

"Ishara?" she whispered. As unfortunate as that was, Tadêfi's blind eyes following the fixed stares of all the ghosts in my direction was worse. I squeezed my brain for an appropriate bit of trivia that

would put my depression on its butt. There was this movie by M. Night Shakalaka-ding dong (or

now. Back in Katrina's office, the guardian was trying to calm her nearly hysterical charge. I would

something like that) about a boy who saw dead people.

The hero - the man trying to help the boy - he turned out to be a ghost as well who didn't figure that out until the end of the flick.

But, it got better. Using the numerous ghostly gazes like searchlights pinning down an escaping convict, Tadêfi ran right into my arms.

That was a pretty remarkable feat - a blind girl in an unfamiliar room covering four meters

flawlessly.w\(\hat{W}(w).\(\tilde{n}\)\(\omega \text{r}\)M.\(\omega \text{om}\)

But, it kept getting better. All the ghosts started to yammer, clambering for attention. Tadêfi began to

weep piteously. I had to wonder if this was Ishara's penalty for keeping my mind free of her meddling.

No one else seemed to understand what the fuck was going on. Krasimira was the augur wrangler,

not in tune with the spirits herself. She was also the Supreme Litigator, which necessitated her being

able to interact with the mortal world on a constant basis, so I couldn't hold her lack of spiritual mojo

against her.

My instincts were telling me that screaming and yelling was pointless. The cacophony was incredibly vexing, but I could deal. Tadêfi couldn't. I was looking at this dilemma from the wrong angle. Instead of taking on the hundreds, I would take on the one. I placed one of the augur's hands on my lips

My hope was that since I could interact with the restless dead, my flesh could act as a buffer to their insistent beseeching of us for recognition of their numerous appeals. My first song was one of the melodies sung to me by Oneida's kin while I fought off her Death Pledge. Bit by bit, a tiny fraction followed by the greater whole, I pulled Tadêfi back from the brink of insanity.

"My ears work better than my lip-reading," I chided her playfully. The ghosts hadn't stopped their

Eventually, she began mumbling a different refrain into my chest.

then placed my hands over her ears.

pleas for attention. It was the sonic and tactile sensation of my song upon her fingers and the fluctuation of my lungs in pushing forth the music that allowed her to focus on her mortal coil.

As we sang together, eventually with her teaching me a few new ballads, we shut the world out.

Once our shared reality collapsed down to just the two of us, the babble diminished then finally faded away.w@w.(n)óve $\mathbf{l}wp(r)m.co\mathcal{M}$ 

"No, we have to have sex first," I replied. Whoops - shit-storm. What followed was a blur.

"May I relay my message now?" Tadêfi requested.

"I can't have sex," Tadêfi murmured. "The touch of a man would corrupt me." Plus.

"She is an augur," her guardian declared firmly. "She must remain a virgin." Plus.

"Cáel Ishara, augurs cannot be..." Krasimira's tongue became tied.

"You go, Tiger," Pamela tossed out there.

"Tadêfi, where are you right now?" I began my rotation of responses. "Why does she have to be a virgin? And, thanks Pamela. That was less helpful than normal."

"I aim to disappoint, Cheetah," Pamela smirked. I couldn't see her face, but I knew she was.

She - Tarzan. Me - Cheetah, the Immortal baby chimpanzee. Just what I needed.

"It is the law," the guardian moved to separate  $us \mathbb{W} \mathbf{w} \otimes .n \hat{o} \mathbb{E} \mathcal{L} w o \check{\mathsf{R}} m.c(o) m$ 

been corrupted, why did the spirits continue to surround her after Cáel's touch?"

"Keeper, this cannot be allowed," the guardian changed her focus.

"She must not be touched by a man," Krasimira stated. "Not having intercourse is implied. If she has

"I agree in that this is your choice to make," Krasimira countered. "Without knowing the missive, you

other entity. Consider what the task of guardian truly is before deciding."

must decide what your charge may, and may not, do. Your oath is to her personally, not to me or any

The convoluted decision: what was the chief duty of a guardian - the message, or the messenger? The augur could convey urgency yet was powerless to act without the guardian's permission. She had to trust her guardian with the basics of life. The guardian... she had to trust what could not be sensed, or even fully understood.

"Dot Ishara told me to have intercourse with the first woman I saw when I woke up," I said.

"Why... why this condition?" the guardian returned her gaze to me. I could have been a dick.

"If you hurt her, I will kill you," the Amazon threatened.

"First off, Tadêfi, would you like to fool around?" I might want to get my potential sex partners

permission before proceeding. You know; not be a rapist.

"I don't know what you want, but if this is what we must do," Tadêfi acquiesced.

"First time sex is going to be painful, so be prepared," I cautioned both young women.

"If you..." the guardian repeated her threat.

"Cáel, you should give daily thanks I don't leave a trail of dead bodies everywhere you go," Pamela declared with malicious menace.

tested, damn it." Wow, was that totally ass-backwards, or what?

girl. I couldn't ignore that weirdness.

retort I pulled off my loose shirt.

As a side note to life: I was going to receive a serious beat-down the second my sexual tryst ended.

"So many pretentious bitches - I tell you, my ability to tolerate your forgiving nature is being sorely

Two pernicious women: Buffy - I had been damaged by someone who wasn't her. There was no way she'd forgive me for that. And Pamela - I had sent Estere away to escort Libra instead of keeping the assassin close. Without a doubt, I had taken Pamela away from some odious errand conducted on my behalf, yet without my knowledge. Yes, some serious torment was headed my way.

"Wait," I called out. "You can stay if you join us." Yes, I was angling for a three-way with a women who wanted to make line drives with a five iron using my nuts for golf balls... and the blind and deaf

Back to the girl at hand. Back to being the 'me' I wanted to be. Oink! With torturous reluctance, the

I knew what was coming and had planned ahead. I'd slept with women whose mantra was 'I hate you' even as they let me fuck them. Trying to make sense of sex guarantees you being alone, staring into the bottom of a glass, come the bar's closing time. It is a wild, passionate beast, so take

what comes your way and hold on tight. For the gratification of the guardian's forthcoming blistering

I offered up a finely chiseled physique, laced with scars, in front of a woman who loved physical conditioning and martial challenges, including the residue of the painful outcomes. The scrub-pants came next as the lady bit down on her stammering. More scars on my powerful legs. My hospital booties were no obstacle, so I subtly positioned myself as I took them off to present her my most masculine image.

had to save the day - by throwing her naked body at me.

"Bang, bang," came the whispered voice of Pamela from the shutting doors. "Looks like Bass."

Bitch. Couldn't she see this was clearly mutton, not seafood? Oink. Bow-wow.

Gruff, gruff... I was the big, bad wolf about to poach her little lambie and the skilled Amazon huntress

"Do you think I would violate either one of you if the Goddess hadn't directed me to?" Yes, I would

and, yes, that was giving her an unprovable explanation for the coitus she was about to partake in.

"If you misbehave, I will hurt you," the guardian threatened me as her jacket, then gun belt, fell to

She didn't care if I was lying. She couldn't deny a Goddess. She HAD to do this as a divine mission. I'm sure that's where her mind ended up as the last of her clothing came off. The next step was having the guardian help me undress the augur, Tadêfi. I was guided to this tactic by the realization

that helping Tadêfi keep her clothing neat and orderly was part of her minder's job.

It turned out she'd never seen the augur naked before. Still, it was perfectly natural to look at another person and wonder what they looked like with less clothing on, or naked. Having worked in close proximity to Tadêfi for some time added a 'girl next door' mystique. A new tool in my arsenal was the conspiratorial lure of the 'silent' partner.

"Sikia," she responded. She was of a dusky complexion that spoke of mixed African and European heritage, yet wasn't African-American ... Angola, or South Africa maybe.

"What is your name?" I asked the guardian. Referring to her as 'the guardian' was getting tedious.