

Mendera Temple

Chapter 20 – Target 4

“Mo had never heard of death eating the departed, but it was biting hard into the screaming woman and pulling her to the ground.”

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Estrid looked angry, the first time he'd seen the fiery side of her personality in quite some time. Sikush quite liked that side of her.

“I should be elsewhere,” said Estrid, “Sevril is unpredictable and Tomma is goading her.”

It was the same story he'd heard for countless billions of years and numberless switches, the deities always argued and fought. Just as long as there wasn't open warfare ! Their skirmishes were already destroying entire star systems.

“Thank you for bringing Babak here,” he said, “I won't need him for long, but everyone else is busy keeping the empire secure.”

“I suppose you want me to take him back to Annill when he's finished ?”

He touched her hand and the fire went from her eyes.

“Annill doesn't seem to be in anyone's sights Estrid, but Babak and his garrison need to be back there soon.”

Estrid had pulled Babak and fifteen hundred of The Damned through reality and into bay 1 beneath the barracks on Mendera. There they waited for just the right moment, the moment when they knew the precise location of president Yukko and his advisers. The fact that the whole plan relied on Mo the slum runner appealed to his sense of humour.

“I'll wait in Kittara's house,” said Estrid, “come and see me when you need them returning to Annill.”

There was a slight swirl of air and Estrid was gone and he was alone. So much relied on Mo, he just hoped his old friend wasn't getting too close to the president.

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Kittara hadn't thought she'd learn much at the invocation college, but she'd been wrong. The book she was reading was mostly about focus and patience, two qualities she definitely needed to work on. Thanks to Luri and several shamans on the 3rd rift, she knew most demon languages perfectly and as on Mendera, any knowledge considered worthy, was etched onto metal sheets.

“You seem fluent in many languages that even our most advanced students find difficult.”

The tutor was a converted chaos creature, as were most of the teaching staff. He was smiling at her, but the dents in his skull looked horrendous. Once, a very long time ago, someone had pushed their fingers into his skull to convert him into a useful tool. He was also dead in any real meaning of the word. His circulation had stopped, he would no longer eat or drink, or at least not normal food. The creature was a shell to hold the chaotic essence, Kittara even picked up a slight smell of decomposition.

“Thank you,” she said, “I had known I was coming here for a very long time and I prepared myself.”

He clucked his approval at her and walked away. She could learn much from him and the other tutors, but she really needed to meet the people who had converted him, they had the real power.

Kittara read on, memorising an invocation spell she thought might be useful one day.

“Are you with us for long ?”

So far the other students had kept well away from her, leaving her with most of the advanced section of the library to herself. The female talking to her looked like a young high level demon, but she knew looks could often be deceptive.

“Until I’ve learned everything there is to know.”

“My father doesn’t seem to think that will take you long.”

So, Neosto’s daughter. Yes she could see the resemblance; she was getting far better at recognising family characteristics in demon faces. Unlike Mendera, the demon immortals did breed, Neosto must have fathered thousands of children.

“Sit with me for a while,” said Kittara, “and remind me of your name ?”

The young demon sat near her, putting the metal book she was reading on the table.

“My father always says that names have power over us and I should be careful who I give my name to.”

She was teasing her, she could tell by the look in her eyes.

“And you believe that ?”

“No, I think my father is talking rubbish, my name is Neola.”

The four muscular arms and height of Neola would have intimidated many, but Kittara was used to sharing her home with a deity and a dark angel. Her main thought was that she had found someone in Leng who wasn’t scared of Neosto.

“What do you think of this ?”

Neola pushed her metal book across the table and Kittara recognised the style. The writing was clear, in a friendly style and unmistakable.

“I have something by him,” she said, “your father gave it to me on my initiation day.”

Demon faces were hard to read, the tough texture of the skin meant fewer facial expressions. But Kittara saw the girl think hard before speaking.

“I’ve been told you have a temple full of metal books on Mendera.”

“Yes, it is the way we preserve knowledge that we wish to survive the switch.”

Neola smiled at her and then looked out of the window, seemingly observing the canal just outside.

“It is too nice to read indoors,” she said, “please come with me and we’ll sit in the outside garden.”

“I was told never to remove the books from this room.”

“If anyone complains I’ll have them killed.”

Kittara now knew that Neola wasn’t much different to her father, but she picked up her book and followed her through a rear door and out into the garden. All of the plants were unknown to her, some had bright blue flowers, some even had dark black blooms.

“I must take some of these back to Chlo, she’ll start a new section of the palace gardens.”

“You are very good at taking things in your stride Kittara. If I found myself in Mendera City, I think I’d be much more shocked and amazed.”

Neola found them a bench that was shaded by a giant palm and they sat down.

“I am much older than you,” said Kittara, “and I’ve probably seen much more of the multiverse.”

How old was Neosto’s daughter ? Kittara knew they were fully grown in under two hundred years, so her companion was likely to be over a hundred, but not much over, a child in many ways. Neola was looking at the door they’d come through and then she stood up and looked closely at the nearby plants.

“I think we’re alone out here,” she said, “my father has no listeners out here, so we can talk freely. Most outdoor places are safe, but you must assume all indoor conversations are being overheard.”

Kittara wasn't going to take the comment at face value, so she resumed reading and memorising the spells in the book. Neola merely watched her and anxiously drummed her nails on the chair arm.

"There is so much I want to know. You have metal books on Mendera, we have metal books too, but Leng is destroyed by every switch. How can that be?"

Kittara knew she could never fully trust Neola, but she saw no harm in aiding her education.

"Were you aware that Leng wasn't always a demon city?"

Neola looked shocked, even for a demon. She shook her head and moved closer.

"There are very old writings in the temple, on something other than metal, but just as strong. Even Chlo doesn't know who wrote the pages, but they talk of Leng being on the abyss, a city that belongs to nowhere, but is on the edge of everywhere."

Neola was examining the surroundings again, no doubt looking for any potential spies. Kittara stopped talking until the young demon calmed down.

"Only a special few must realise the switch is coming and that knowledge must test their sanity. But there are several pages that suggest Leng isn't destroyed, but taken into the darkness. The city will be ruined, but then a new Leng is built over the ruins of the old city."

"Yes, yes that would explain so much." Said Neola.

"I am only guessing, but it is likely that the metal books in your library actually come from those ruins."

The door to the college opened and the tutor Kittara had talked to looked at them and walked a few paces towards them. He seemed to change his mind about approaching them and walked back into the building. Neola moved so close that she was almost sat on Kittara's lap, her voice almost a whisper.

"He always spies on me. I'll find an excuse to have him beaten."

Neola did seem to believe that every problem could be solved by beatings, but Kittara needed at least one friend in Leng, so she refrained from commenting.

"My father once told me that this isn't the real Leng."

She waved all four of her arms around, indicating the green gardens and the crystal clear waters of the canals.

"I was only very young, but I remember what he said. The real Leng is deep below our feet, very deep, many miles down. There is the ruin of the original city, but we can never go there."

"Did he give a reason why not?"

"He said it was the spirits of the creatures who had lived there. My father told me the sprits were very angry and vengeful."

The tales of vengeful spirits littered the multiverse, usually as a means to keep people away from places they weren't wanted. The problem was that on very rare occasions, there were genuine angry spirits.

"Now I know who converted the chaos creatures." Said Kittara.

"But..... My father converted the invokers."

"The recent ones maybe, but not the ancient creatures and the dents in their skulls weren't made by fingers. Somewhere in the ruins is the history of whoever converted the creatures and a few might still survive there. Getting into those ruins will be my next step after learning all I can here."

Neola was looking very scared.

"I could tell my father, he'd stop you. Make sure you never entered the ruins."

Kittara gave Neola her most friendly smile.

"That would be a pity."

“Why ? You’ll end up dead if you go there.”

“Because I was hoping you might go with me. Not now of course, but when you’re grown up and a fully-fledged princess of Leng.”

Neola actually hugged her. She was still very much a child and the thought of an adventure still excited her. Come to think of it, an adventure still excited Kittara and she was a very long way from childhood. One day Neola would have her own guards, perhaps even troops and Kittara might need them to visit the ruins.

“Thank you, of course I’ll come with you.”

They picked up their books and began to walk back into the college. As they almost reached the door, Neola held Kittara by the arm.

“Don’t trust Silky Kittara, she spies for everyone and has told my father everything she knows about Mendera.”

So Silky was keeping her options open. Sikush had guessed as much, but it didn’t really matter, they’d told her very little.

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Chlo was disappointed with the New Keo defence of Vargrist, it was very half hearted. The Kivar fleet had thrown out huge amounts of chaff to confuse the ground based missiles. Empty weapon pods, old food containers, even wrecked space craft. It had all been thrown into the atmosphere of Vargrist by compressed air rams. To the defenders below it must have looked like the entire empire had come to exterminate them. Any missile battery daring to lock onto the fleet had been destroyed by concentrated Ion fire.

“Even their support craft are deserting them.”

The New Keo fleet must have seen the Kivar were battered and barely matched them in numbers. But they’d also seen three quarters of their once invisible fleet, wrecked and left as lifeless derelicts. Seeing so much death had its effect. Not that all the New Keo fleet ran, some of the light fighters were causing casualties. Several Kivar craft burned up in the atmosphere, their crews burned alive while still trying to fire their weapons.

“Their support craft are mainly civilian,” said Chlo, “they have no inclination to die for any cause.”

The tankers, the maintenance craft, the supply craft, they were all heading away from the battle.

Someone in New Keo command must have decided to teach them a lesson and several support craft were fired on and destroyed by their own side. It only served to create further chaos and fairly soon the New Keo fleet was in full retreat. Not that Sweyn had any intention of allowing them to escape.

“Pursue and destroy,” he said, “I don’t care if we’re here for days, we destroy them all.”

Chlo told Mo that she now had the location of President Yukko fixed precisely and that he should withdraw to a place of safety, or at least relative safety. She also started to display images of the bunker on the screens in bay 1, so that Babak could prepare the fifteen hundred for the attack.

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“The president will see you now.”

There had been more searching, more detectors being run over his body, but thankfully no more being asked to bend over for an internal. Then a fed up looking public official and six heavily armed guards had taken him to see Yukko.

“We’re going deeper ?” Asked Mo.

The guard were the presidential elite, Mo didn’t think they did scared. But they looked very apprehensive and one actually pulled back the safety catch on his blaster.

“Has he been fully checked for transmissions.”

The public servant now looked very scared and he simply nodded at the soldier who was obviously in charge of the guard detail. The soldier then turned to Mo and managed a weak smile.

“Not a good idea to ask questions about the president’s location. I’m sure you understand sir.”

“Yes of course, I’ll be quiet until we reach where we’re going.”

“Thank you sir.”

They seemed more relaxed and the safety catch was re-engaged. Chlo had been keeping out of his head, just feeding him the essentials, but he knew the New Keo fleet had been routed. In front of Mo was an elevator with armoured doors and the public servant had pressed the button several minutes ago. Mo would normally have asked about the delay, but he didn’t want to make any comments that might be misconstrued.

“We should cover his eyes.”

“No. He’s here by personal invitation of the president.”

They entered the elevator as it arrived and Mo was turned to face the wall, as the leader pressed a code into a door panel. There was a sensation of falling and they were descending fast, very fast. Surely they had to reach the bottom quickly ? But no, several minutes went by and they still dropped like a stone. Brakes seemed to come on and Mo felt his knees buckling, but then the elevator stopped and the door opened.

“We need to hurry, the president only has a limited window to see you.”

They had to be four or five miles beneath the surface and nothing had been done to disguise the fact that it was a deep level bunker. Mo was hurried through several chambers full of frightened looking people. Some were carrying cases, but most seemed to have arrived without any luggage. The great and the good of Vargrist, brought into the relative safety of the bunker. Mo wondered if there had been a compulsory political donation required to gain access to the bunker.

Another set of armoured doors, with a red light shining above them. The public servant now looked more relaxed.

“The president is meeting his advisers, he shouldn’t be long.”

They waited while Yukko discussed the defeat of his fleet with his advisers. In his head Chlo was telling him to move away from Yukko, but he could see no way of accomplishing that. The light went off and there was a slight click as the door was unlocked.

“Hurry please.”

Advisers was an odd term that New Keo had used for centuries, to describe all their political and military leaders. As the door opened Mo saw a room full of the entire command structure of New Keo. Then the explosions and the screaming started.

“Save the president !” Someone shouted.

There were now members of The Damned in amongst the president’s men and they obviously weren’t taking prisoners. There was a quickly growing number of dead bodies on the floor and a lot of blood. The presidential guard though was loyal and effective and they still held a defensive wall around Yukko. Mo’s guard detail ran off to protect the president, but the soldier who’d pulled back his safety catch remained. He gave Mo a long hard look.

“This is your doing, I just know it.”

Mo was always being underestimated, in fact he deliberately cultivated a harmless old persona. He easily took the blaster off the soldier and held the business end to his chin.

“Yes, you were right all along kid.”

Mo fired the blaster and the soldier’s head exploded, adding to the growing layer of blood and other body waste on the floor. Mo went back through the doors and looked for somewhere safe to hide.

The mass of people were crowded in front of the elevator and some appeared to have been crushed in the panic. To his right was a heavy upright of some kind of titanium alloy, which Mo decided was the best protection he was likely to find. As he was trying to curl up behind the support pillar a blaster shot caught him on his shoulder and he lost consciousness.

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“Destroying the New Keo command is our first priority,” said Babak, “then we’ll pick up Mo and his people.”

Bay 1 was designed to hold over a hundred thousand troops and Babak and his fifteen hundred seemed almost lost at one end of it. Chlo was projecting a view of the bunker and Mo as he walked through the door and into the war room. The image solidified and they could have been in the bunker, Babak even seemed to smell the sweat from scared bodies, but he knew that was a common illusion.

“Move off when ready.” Said Chlo.

Babak stepped into the image and to the people in the bunker it was as if he’d appeared out of nowhere. The screaming started when The Damned followed him through and the killing began. Sikush had called it settling old scores, but Babak was a warrior, he knew the enemy command structure was fair game. They’d try to spare the civilians, but with so many of The Damned crowded into the bunker, there were bound to be non-combatant fatalities.

“The president first,” shouted Babak, “Yukko has to be killed.”

The presidential guard were good and Babak saw one of his men brought down by an Ion weapon. Just as he was running to join the fight he saw Mo kill the soldier with his own weapon, before dropping it and walking out of the room. Babak let Chlo know that Mo was alive and heading away from the action.

“I see him.” Said Chlo.

Babak ignored the New Keo soldiers and trusted to billions of years of toughening to protect him from the constant blaster fire. He used his sword to kill the dozen guards between him and Yukko and then he plunged his weapon into the president’s body. He stabbed into him another three times, until Chlo confirmed that Yukko was dead. Then Babak helped his team to finish off the other members of the New Keo command. No prisoners were taken and by the time Chlo had confirmed all targets were dead, the command room was awash with blood. Babak walked back out of the command rooms and was appalled by the carnage in front of the elevators.

“Looks like the elevator was destroyed from above.” One of The Damned said.

Something had been dropped into the elevator shaft, perhaps Yukko had enemies in his own government. The blast had added to the death toll from the panic and very few people were still alive and those that were, were hiding in corners.

“Look for Mo and his people,” said Babak, “and hurry, we need to leave soon.”

Chlo knew where they’d been when Mo had last seen them and quite quickly Maarika was brought back. She looked very scared and her eyebrows had been burned off during some kind of incident in the bunker main levels.

“It’s chaos up there,” she said, “a coup of some kind is taking place and the soldiers are killing everyone.”

“Do you know where the rest of your colleagues are ?”

Maarika collapsed into a sobbing heap on the floor.

“Dead, all of them dead.” She said.

“You’re certain ? You actually saw the bodies ?”

“Yes, some kind of grenade was thrown into the room.”

Babak had her taken to Mendera, then he wondered why Mo hadn't been found. He linked with Chlo and the news wasn't encouraging.

“He felt pain Babak and then he passed out. He didn't seem to be far from the doors to the command room.”

The Damned looked again, but fifteen hundred were too many, they just kept getting in each other's way. Babak sent most of them back to Mendera and just kept a dozen of the elite with him.

“He has to be here. Find him !” He shouted.

They pulled every dead body into a position where they could see the face and Chlo did a full DNA scan of the room. It was a large area and quite a few bodies were just lumps of bone and gristle, but they found no trace of Mo. Chlo found his blood behind a pillar, but there was no trace of his body.

“He may have been blown apart near the elevator,” said Chlo, “it's very sad, but he did know the risks.”

They left, returning to Mendera and Estrid, who was waiting patiently to take the fifteen hundred back to Annull.

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“Of course you'll need to go into the darkness, it's essential.” Said Neosto.

This was a different Neosto to the public one. Gone was the bluster and threats, the constant need to control through fear. The private Neosto reminded her very much of Sikush, apart from the fact that he was physically so huge and imposing. The smell was odd too, not necessarily unpleasant, but the demon emperor had a strong smell that was definitely non-human.

“I'll also need to visit the ruins of old Leng, the real Leng.” She said.

His eyes narrowed a little, obviously the tutor had reported her conversation with his daughter.

“Yes that too would seem to be essential, but after you've learned all that we can teach you.”

His private rooms were immense and there was no chance of them being overheard. Neosto had been totally transformed by privacy. Plus he seemed to be resigned to eventually giving her whatever she wanted and that still perplexed her. He almost seemed to be looking at her sympathetically.

“You do understand Kittara don't you, you must have an idea ?”

There were ideas in her mind, a few long lost memories. But they kept floating out of view and it was like trying to concentrate on seeds being blown in the wind.

“An idea of what ?” She asked.

“Think Kittara, you must have most of the pieces now.”

Her mind was full of confusion and it hurt when she tried to focus her thoughts. Was there a deliberate block in her mind ? If there was, then it had outlived its usefulness and Kittara let herself drift off. She entered the place in her mind that had been her safe place on numberless occasions. She focused on hovering near the flame and using that focus to get beyond the headaches when she tried to remember.

“Do you see Kittara ?” Asked Neosto.

Yes she finally saw. Why the Genova had always found her so fascinating, why Estrid had formed such a bond with her, even why the sentinels never screamed when she entered Mendera. The answer was there in front of her, it even explained her bond with Luri. Now the answer was there it wouldn't move out of focus, it dominated her consciousness.

“I see,” she said, “did they all come to Leng ?”

Neosto stood and went to a corner table and poured her a drink. It was a small act of kindness, but she was grateful for it.

"I don't know Kittara, unlike Sikush I'm not an eternal and I have no knowledge of past switches. You could ask him, but when does he ever give a straight answer when it really matters?"

They both laughed and Kittara enjoyed her drink, the intoxicant taking the edge of the facts that still hung right in the front of her mind.

"I know some came here," he continued, "it is written on the ancient tablets, but I don't think all came. They did all go into the darkness though, that part is essential."

"Have you ever been there?"

Neosto held her hand and lowered his head so that he could look straight into her eyes.

"No I have never been and I have no wish to know what exists there. Certain knowledge is meant only for a few and you must never tell anyone about what you see there."

She nodded, knowing that her journey into the dark was her fate, her curse and hers alone.

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Mo wasn't unconscious for long, barely ten seconds, but the bunker had become a hell in those few seconds. The main problem was that he wasn't feeling too good and someone was kicking him, or at least it felt like someone was kicking him.

"You're one of them ! You bastard !"

He shook his head, trying to clear the fog that was blurring his vision. There seemed to be a young boy kicking his stomach. Mo looked and realised he wasn't kicking him, he was jabbing him with a piece of broken metal and with each push it was going deeper into his body.

"Stop it."

His voice sounded so weak and the kid took no notice and if anything stabbed him with extra force. Mo tried to pull himself out of the way, but the floor was so slippery. Mo had seen his own blood on many occasions, too many occasions. But he'd never seen quite so much of it and he'd never realised how slippery it could be.

"Help !" He shouted.

There was a lot of noise coming from somewhere near, it sounded like The Damned were involved in a major battle. A New Keo woman looked straight at him, her eyes full of hate. Mo realised he'd have to save himself and he made a huge effort to get to knees.

"Fuck off you little bastard !" He shouted.

The boy dropped the metal spike and ran, straight towards the woman who'd been giving him the stink eye. Mo was on his knees and the room was still spinning, but he concentrated on his wounds. His right shoulder felt numb and the blaster had cauterised the wound. It was a bad wound, but he knew Chlo had healed far worse. His stomach was the problem, the kid had penetrated right into his guts and the blood was flowing fairly quickly. So he either bled out or suffered a slow death from peritonitis, neither really appealed to him.

Then Mo realised the woman was moving towards him and all his other problems seemed minor, she was picking up a dropped Ion blaster. There was a blaster quite near to Mo, but it was just out of reach. He lunged forward and missed the weapon, his head hitting the floor hard, sending fresh wisps of fog to obscure his vision.

"Look at me," the woman said, "I want to see your eyes when I kill you."

Mo didn't give up easy, but as he looked into her eyes he realised he hadn't long to live. Then he saw death coming for him and realised the stories he'd heard in the slums, when he was very young were true. It was coming through the bunker wall, death was coming for him.

“What are you laughing at ?”

Mo hadn't realised he had been laughing, but seeing death claim the woman made him smile. She'd been so busy aiming the blaster at Mo that she hadn't noticed death coming up behind her. Death was dressed completely in black, only showing a pair of sharp talons. There were wings though; Mo could see the tips of wings poking through the gown. Mo had never heard of death eating the departed, but it was biting hard into the screaming woman and pulling her to the ground. The boy began to scream too, but one look from death made him stop.

“I think you're here for me.” Said Mo.

Two dark eyes looked out at him from under a hood and then death bit out the woman's throat and drank her hot blood. Mo waited, there was nothing else he could do, but the pain in his stomach was getting worse, so he hoped death would come for him fairly soon. Just as he thought it had lost interest in him, death moved towards him and lay across his body, the hood pressed right against his face. Lips kissed his, open mouthed and oddly sensual. Mo hadn't expected a kiss, but something about death seemed feminine and vaguely familiar. He reached up and held death and felt its talons grip him tightly.

“I'm ready.”

The room began to fade, the pain eased and Mo was kissed once more, before vanishing from the bunker.

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Kittara helped Silky out of her dress and saw the bruises and blemishes from a thorough beating.

Silky also had a large bruise under her left eye, which she'd told Kittara was a very rare occurrence.

“He never normally hits my face.” Silky had told her.

The bruising was the usually black and blue, with edges of yellow, exactly the same as with humans.

Kittara had a bit of sympathy for Silky, but she was also keen to learn about all the creatures in Leng.

“I didn't know converts could bruise,” she said, “how do you heal, isn't your tissue dead ?”

“We don't heal like you, it takes special creams and spells. It's not fast either, some of the bruising goes deep and will last a year.”

Kittara moved close and couldn't resist prodding a particularly purple bruise with her finger.

“Ow !”

“Sorry.”

“It was nothing more than I deserved.” Said Silky.

There were the listeners and Silky was being careful, but Kittara had decided that the invoker deserved some pleasure to make amends for the beating. She pushed Silky onto the bed and caused a squeal that was a mixture of delight and pain. Kittara pushed Silky's thighs apart and enjoyed the musky tang that seemed to come from all of the creature squirming beneath her. Not just from her genitals and her breasts, it seemed to ooze out her skin pores. The intoxicating perfume began to rouse Kittara. Sventa could use her pheromones to enslave a whole room full of people, male and female. This was different, far more subtle, but just as intoxicating.

“Oh yes, deeper, deeper.”

Kittara pushed her tongue in deep and the taste was different, far less salty than with the women on Mendera. The taste was vaguely the same, but also different, not better or worse, but different.

Eager to explore Kittara moved her tongue out and up, wondering if Silky would have the bundle of nerves that was wonderfully sensitive. She used her tongue to explore and found not one, but three small bumps, all in a row and each seemed as sensitive as the other. By now Silky was writhing about

and obviously enjoying the attention. Kittara looked up over Silky's stomach and between her breasts.

"Are there others?" She asked.

Silky looked down at her, her face sweaty and her eyes slightly glazed.

"Other what?"

"Sensitive areas, your body is new to me, it's..... wonderful."

Silky's head flopped back onto the pillow.

"My breasts are sensitive, but what you mean are also at the bottom of my back."

Kittara kept using her tongue, but reached her hand around, across Silky's perfect buttocks and then into the slight crease at the base of her spine. Yes, another bundle of nerves and judging from the way Silky was squirming, just as sensitive as the ones she was licking. How lucky converted females were, or perhaps they were a later addition? Kittara was dying to ask Silky, but she thought the invoker wasn't in the right mood for a discussion about her anatomy. Kittara pushed her finger between Silky's buttocks and pushed it deep into her body and was rewarded by another loud squeal. Kittara decided that she was really going to enjoy her years in Leng.

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Mo knew that death wasn't the end. It wasn't about faith, he'd been to numerous events at the temple, he'd seen the essences of the departed tracked to their new identities. The thing that surprised Mo was that not only did he remember being Mo, but his new identity seemed to have a bedroom exactly the same as his. Mo pulled himself upright in the bed and felt pain just about everywhere in his body.

He wasn't dead, which was a surprise as he distinctly remembered being carried off by death. There was no one else in his room and his bladder was desperate to be emptied. He pulled back the bed clothes and was pleased to see that although he was naked, everything he treasured still seemed to be there. The centre of his stomach was a little bruised, but the open wound was gone and he was no longer in pain. Mo let his long legs fall over the edge of the bed and sat there for a minute or two. There was no feeling of nausea and the room hadn't spun around, so he carefully stood up and headed towards his bathroom.

"Sir, you're not supposed to be up, she will be very annoyed."

"Don't be an idiot, I need to pee."

Mo pushed his way past the panicky servant and into his bathroom, pulling a bathrobe off the hook as he went. Most of his servants had seen him naked at one time or another, but he had no idea who this 'she' was, perhaps Kittara?

"How long was I asleep?" He shouted.

No answer the silly girl had obviously gone off to report that he was out of bed. Mo always prided himself that he could go days without emptying his bladder, so he knew he'd been in bed for some time. He washed the sleep from his eyes and went back into his room, to find Sventa sat on the end of his bed.

"So you are the she my servants are so scared of."

Sventa smiled at him and gave him a hug and Mo realised why death had seemed to feminine and so familiar.

"Back into bed Mo and I'll apply a little more healing, then you should be fine."

He lay on the bed and Sventa moved her hand over his stomach and then his shoulder. He felt warmth and a slight pain, but then the pain was replaced by a delightful tingle as the tissues healed.

"Who sent you to me?"

“No one, I just felt your need for help.”

It was an odd answer, they'd never been good friends and often went millennia without seeing each other.

“Just like that, you felt I was in trouble ?”

“Yes, just like that.”

Mo was too grateful to press her further, but he knew she wasn't telling him the truth, or at least not all of it. He felt wonderful and it was so tempting to go back to sleep, but there things he wanted to know.

“Do they know I'm alive ? Mendera I mean ?”

“No, I've been with you for the last seven days and they probably think you died in the bunkers.

Once I leave here I will let Chlo know you're safe.”

Seven days, no wonder his bladder had been complaining. Mo remembered waking to find someone pushing a metal spike into his innards, he wondered if this was his chance to live a quiet life.

“I want Kittara to know I'm alive, but do you have to tell everyone ?”

The dark angel pulled the bed covers back over him and sat beside him, even held his hand.

“You can't vanish Mo, you're a legend on the rifts and legends don't simply vanish. Luri and Delmus will pay visits to Tandalla, others who know you will pass through.”

She smiled at him and it was difficult to believe he'd mistaken her for death.

“You have friends on Mendera Mo, people who care for you. You can't just vanish !”

“Very well, tell Chlo I'm alive, but I want to write a letter to Sikush tomorrow. Will you wait and deliver it for me ?”

“I've been here seven days, an extra day isn't a problem.”

“And my people, the ones who were in the bunker with me. Do you know if they survived.”

“No Mo, but I'll find out and let you know.”

He started to fall asleep, wondering how he was going to word the letter to Sikush. He wanted to remain friends, but he'd done his last mission for the empire.

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