

Tales of Nurigen

An Ordinary Day

“Her closeness and the musky scent of her body reminded him of the times they’d been lovers.”

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The empire had known about the intelligent life on the planet for quite some time, but it wasn't expected to advance enough to be considered worthy of inclusion into the empire. All intelligent life in the multiverse was rare and considered worth cherishing, but the billions who inhabited the small blue planet weren't expected to flourish.

“They're so like Ixir, it's scary.” Hol had once said.

The seeding of DNA had produced many version of the human type, but no others had developed into creatures with bright red blood and a high body temperature. Their blood showed through transparent skin, making them look grotesque. Not to each other though, that was one of the main problems. They liked each other quite a lot and the females were always sexually receptive. The result was seven billion creatures on a planet that was sustainable for only a fraction of that number. The empire had visited the planet quite a few times, especially after the detonation of nuclear weapons had been detected. It was known to be a rite of passage for primitive planets. They were either going to learn to live with the ability to destroy themselves, or they weren't.

“It's about 50/50,” Chlo had once told him, “they either overpopulate and die out, or go out in one great global conflict.”

Even if they did develop a space technology beyond simple chemical rockets, the odds still weren't in their favour. Their entire galaxy was being pulled apart by another and they looked likely to merge. Any planet they moved to was just going to be a stepping stone, they had to get to another galaxy to have any long term future. Sveta had once put their situation crudely, but accurately as;

“They're fucked !”

Not that any of that worried Delmus. He was hungry, thirsty and a little horny. For him it was just another ordinary day. It was cold, even for winter in the northern hemisphere of the planet. Chlo was dragging up local news channels onto the common channel and one was saying it was the coldest day of the winter so far. Delmus didn't mind, he rarely felt the cold or heat for that matter. It meant he needed a coat to blend in though and he quite liked wearing big swirly coats. His body temperature was usually a lot colder than that of the locals, but he could increase it at will. Luri used to use creams to make her skin tone match that of the planet she was on, but Luri had become a deity and gone off to hide, or sleep, or just ignore him. Now it was up to Chlo to make his skin look as horrific as that of the natives and she did a good job of it. He was an inch or so taller than was normal for a local male and quite a bit broader across the shoulders. No one seemed to mind though and many females had been giving him meaningful smiles.

Oh the females ! On his last visit there had been a photographer with her own apartment in the city he was in now. He had become used to her high body temperature, he even found it quite sensual. The things she's shown him that night.....

“All passengers on board Delmus. We are working inside a small take off window.” Said Gen'Dris over their private link.

Delmus didn't like Gen'Dris. He was the first and so far only inhabitant of the Pol'sitari System to become a member of The Damned. Delmus didn't really like anyone from that system, they were far too up themselves for a new member of the empire. Members for barely two billion years and they

were running their own DNA seeding experiments, and worse, Delmus had been assigned to help them.

“Get everyone in their seats,” said Delmus, “I won’t be long.”

“I fail to see why you require further time on.....”

Delmus didn’t bother listening, he knew there’d be minutes of the usual whining and moaning. The Pol’sitari System seemed to be inhabited by born bureaucrats and people who had a stick up their ass. The emperor, The Chalné, seemed to be converting anyone to be a member of The Damned these days, even brain dead bureaucrats.

“I’m going shopping Chlo.”

He liked linking with Chlo, there was rarely any hassle from Chlo. You could rely on her to pull you out of a difficult situation and give you the ability to buy anything you wanted on just about any civilised planet. Or fairly uncivilised ones, like the planet he was currently on.

“Thank you Chlo.”

A small gold coloured plastic card appeared in his hand, which he pushed into a pocket of his big swirly coat. That card would allow him to buy just about anything. All he needed was a four digit number which Chlo had just put on their private link. The planet’s entire economy seemed based on selling people things they didn’t really need, but many empire planets worked in much the same way.

“Conspicuous consumption.” Chlo had once called it.

Delmus liked the local shopping experience. The trolley to be wheeled around, the jostling with other shoppers, the flirtations in the aisles, even the long queue to pay. He knew one store fairly well, but he’d no sooner gone through the door when;

“We have very little time. Are you watching the pickup timer Delmus ?” Asked Gen’Dris.

Delmus wanted to reply with some very inventive bad language, but then he had a better idea, an idea guaranteed to drive Gen’Dris insane.

“If you’re worried, you can let Chlo fly the shuttle to the rendezvous point.” He replied.

There was a moment’s silence.

“That would contravene imperial protocol.”

Delmus grinned as he grabbed a trolley and walked towards the aisle that sold expensive wines and liquors. How to drive a bureaucrat crazy, wrap him up in his own rules and pettiness.

“Then have some patience, leave me alone and I’ll be back with some things you and the team will really enjoy.”

The shuttle was hovering between two buildings not far away, hovering about forty feet off the ground. It was fully cloaked and wasn’t about to get in anyone’s way. As to the pickup ? Delmus wasn’t silly, he knew there was quite a bit of time left on the window to get into orbit and be picked up by the Pol’sitari military transport. If they missed it, there were always imperial craft that would pick them up.

“Oops sorry.”

She’d deliberately run her trolley into him, it seemed to be a way of getting his attention. She was tall and her coat was undone enough for him to see she had a body that fitted nine points of perfection for that planet.

“No problem. I was day dreaming anyway.” Said Delmus.

“Having a party ?”

He did have five bottles of expensive fizzy wine in his trolley. Was that excessive for the seven people on the shuttle ? He wasn't sure, but he knew there was enough of the wine to get them all a little merry.

"Not really," he said, "just treating a few friends who've just finished a hard job."

Hard job ! The Pol'sitari seemed obsessed with running tests on the local inhabitants. Not that Delmus saw much point in it. They always picked rather odd people who lived off the beaten track and seemed to farm edible birds for a living. Hardly a fair representation of the planet's population, but as Chlo often said;

"Even if they tell anyone. No one will believe them."

The shuttle was picking up the latest group of Pol'sitari biologists and anthropologists who'd been prodding bird farmers. They'd even captures one poor local. The prodding and testing often seemed a bit brutal to Delmus, but he assumed it was in some way necessary.

"Are you staying nearby ?"

She was offering him a piece of paper with her name, Karen and phone number on it. A crude communications device that Chlo understood and could connect him with.

"I will be back here soon. I'll call you."

By the time he'd said his farewells to her the time was getting perilously close to the end of their pickup window and Gen'Dris was once again sounding agitated.

"Where are you Delmus ? We need to leave now. Chlo is worried about the plasma wake we'll create."

"Go and prod a bird farmer Gen'Dris, I've a few things left to buy."

"Buy !! Where the hell are....."

Delmus killed the link and looked for the aisle where they had the cakes. That was what the Pol'sitari would enjoy after their six months of poking mad farmers with needles and collecting disgusting amounts of their bodily fluids. Delmus picked the most expensive and colourful cakes, a system that had served him well on a great many planets.

"Did you see our offer honey ?"

The female looked quite elderly, but she was smiling at him and looking at his five bottles of expensive fizzy wine. As far as Delmus knew he'd reached the spot where he put the card in a machine and they let him take the things away. He hadn't bargained for more questions, but he'd often found that buying a simple cup of hot beverage could involve a dozen pointless questions on this planet.

"What offer is that ?" He asked.

"Eight bottles for the price of six. I can send someone for the other bottles and get them bagged up for you while you pay for your purchases. Would you like to buy the extra bottles honey ?"

It sounded a good idea to him, but the elderly guy behind him didn't look too pleased and started muttering about how long he'd been waiting.

"Yes please. I'll buy the extra bottles." Said Delmus.

The staff member sent for the wine hadn't been quick and by the time he was out of the store with several strong carrier bags full of wine and cake.... The pickup window had passed. Delmus found a dark alley between the store and the building next to it and moved his reality to the Pol'sitari shuttle craft.

"I know," he said, "I'm late, but you'll forgive me when you taste this wine. I even bought enough for the bird farmer to get a glassful."

The experimentation team were all in their seats and looking fed up. The shuttle rose gently to a height of about five hundred feet and then the main plasma engine kicked in and they were in planetary orbit in a few minutes.

"They waited for us." Said Gen'Dris.

The Pol'sitari System craft was cloaked, no one from the planet below would ever know that a half mile long military space craft had picked up a shuttle craft containing an experimentation team and one very confused bird farmer. The craft even made sure it didn't collide with any communications satellites or the rather primitive space station the locals had put into orbit. As they were moving away from the planet at half the speed of light, Chlo broke the news;

"Your plasma ejection killed the engines on one of the local aircraft." She said.

"Did they manage to restart them?" Asked Delmus.

"No, they aren't that easy to restart. The aircraft crashed, quite near the store where you bought the wine."

Delmus felt dazed by events. The experimentation team were busily drinking the wine and eating the excellent cake, even Gen'Dris was smiling at him. It was such an ordinary day, no one was supposed to die.

"How many casualties Chlo?"

"I'm still picking up local transmissions, but it looks like everyone on the aircraft died and a lot of people on the ground. The craft had just taken off, it was carrying a lot of inflammable fuel, there was a fireball when it crashed."

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Ten days went past and Delmus was carrying out his usual duties, which of course generally meant visiting unusual places. Everyone was treating him the same, even The Chaln  hadn't mentioned him missing the pickup window. It was a primitive planet and no one seemed to care.

"It's becoming an obsession; you need to forget about it." Said Chlo.

"If it had been a fight of some kind Chlo, I'd have forgotten it the next day. But all those people dead for no reason, just because I wanted some fizzy wine....."

He could have looked at the information on the common channel, but he'd asked Chlo to give him the details in person. He wanted her to show disapproval, he knew that, he had a need to make amends in some way. Chlo was in her original form and looking at him with some concern, but he really wanted condemnation.

"Delmus, it is a very primitive planet. Their technology is staggeringly unreliable, nothing electrical is shielded. In that city alone, they kill two hundred people a year simply by crashing their motor vehicles."

She was trying to help, but it wasn't working. He had a pain in his head that wouldn't go away and for the first time in a very long life; he was having trouble sleeping.

"Take me through what happened Chlo?"

"You can see it on the common channel Delmus, going through it won't help."

He liked her home, the furnishings were wildly alien, but comfortable. She'd invited him to her home on a number of occasions and he always felt at peace there. Delmus ran his hand over an exquisite statue and wondered what the planet Enfellan must have looked like in its heyday. The statue was only a copy that Chlo had produced from fractured memories, but Enfellan must have been a beautiful place.

"Tell me about that day Chlo?"

“Pol’sitari shuttles do create a plasma ejection and wake, but not enough to cause damage to screened electronics. I took into account the take-off time of the local aircraft when calculating your take off window.”

“So it was my fault Chlo ?” He asked.

“You didn’t design the aircraft Delmus, or the other electrical apparatus that stopped functioning.” Delmus walked back to his chair and drank some of the drink Chlo had given him. Other apparatus ! What had he done to that city ?

“What did the plasma ejection do Chlo ? Tell me everything.”

“Four of their motorised vehicles stopped moving, but no one was hurt. A few of their stores and a café were blacked out and a small office block had its computer network trashed. That was all acceptable to the mission and no one was hurt. The aircraft was more serious and something that could have been avoided.”

“How many deaths were there ?”

“A hundred and fifty passengers on the aircraft and a crew of five. The fireball killed a further forty five people on the ground. That could have been higher, but it was a very cold day and they were staying indoors.”

“Over two hundred deaths for wine and cake Chlo !”

Delmus hadn’t felt depressed since the days he’d been a thief in the City of the Lost God and a bad thief at that. He felt depressed now though.

“Five hundred die from murder in that city every year Delmus, stop torturing yourself. Think of the tens of thousands of lives you’ve saved on empire worlds.”

“There is no cosmic balance Chlo. I’ve seen the deities destroy millions of intelligent creatures and destroy whole galaxies. Just out of a fit of bad temper.”

Chlo drank her drink and merely watched him.

“I want to put it right Chlo. Can you do something ? Change time or reality perhaps ? I’ve seen you do that kind of thing.”

She sat there slowly shaking her head.

“For entire planetary systems maybe, but then I’ll have taken half a dozen time locks and the overwriting of the time line is done within a minute or so. This event was days ago and there are no time locks. It was a routine mission Delmus and you made a minor mistake. You’ll have to live with it.”

“Could the emperor change the reality ?”

Chlo was out of her chair and sitting on the arm of his, digging her nails into his face as she glared at him.

“No Delmus, No ! Mention this to either of the eternal and you’ll be taken off active duty, perhaps for several millennia.”

“There must be a way Chlo ?”

“You’d need someone capable of altering reality with a precision that is beyond my skills. Only a deity could do it and you used to know a deity rather well.”

Luri, his lover for a period of time so long that it was almost impossible to comprehend. The people of the empire had said things were too far in the past, then that had been shortened and now the word ‘soofari’ was used to mean anything over eight hundred billion years ago. Luri had been his lover for at least five soofari, if that even made sense. Luri was now a deity, converted into one upon the death of her father, the famous God Tomma-Goran.

"I haven't seen Luri since she became a deity. Estrid hinted that I hadn't seen the last of her and that Luri would be a part of my life in the future, but that was a long time ago."

"A few ages of the temple, that's nothing to a deity, they often sleep for far longer than that. If you really want to alter the events of the day, you need to find Luri."

It made sense, they had been important to each other, the longest relationship there had ever been between members of the empire's immortal warriors, The Damned.

"How do I go about finding her?"

Chlo was thinking, he could almost see the concentration on her face. It was rare and slightly disconcerting that the problem actually required the AI that ran the entire empire, to stop and think.

"The multiverse shrank to nothing since you last saw her," said Chlo, "and then expanded again.

Very little from the past multiverse is left. There are the tribe of the Uah-Trin who still fish on Lake Misogon and the Shrine of the Tree of Life is still there. You may gain access to Luri by using both of those options, but it may take a very long time."

"A lot of Soofaris."

Chlo laughed at him, but she stopped glaring at him and relaxed.

"I hate that gutter speak, but yes Delmus a whole lot of Soofaris. Your best option is someone who knew Luri very well, can go anywhere in the multiverse and owes you a favour."

He knew who she meant, but it wasn't someone he wanted to ask.

"You mean Sveta?"

"Why the glum face. You saved her life, she'll probably be glad to help. If she can of course, there are no guarantees."

"It's just that Sveta can be a bit intense. We were quite close once, but then she started training the new recruits and we drifted apart."

Chlo was grinning at him.

"Bad break up huh?"

"Brutal. I still have scars on my back from her talons."

They both laughed and Chlo poured them both another drink. The day was progressing and Delmus was due to be part of the imperial guard on a visit by The Chaln  to an outlying world.

"So you think Sveta is my best way to find Luri?"

"Probably your only way."

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It was several days before Delmus found himself in Mendera City and with some time to spare. He'd been to the academy on Leviathan and been told that Mistress Sveta had gone home for the day. He quite liked Mistress Sveta, the name conjured up meanings the student had definitely never intended. She still lived in Kittara's old house and Delmus hadn't been there for..... well it was a long time. No one actually knocked on doors in Mendera City, not unless they wanted to be arrested and beaten by the mercs who policed the holy city. He stood in the street outside and asked Chlo to see if Sveta would see him.

"She said yes."

Chlo moved his reality to the walled garden at the rear of the house. Sveta was feeding the creatures who inhabited the large ornamental pond that filled a third of the garden.

"They make ideal pets for me," she said, "if I forget to feed them for days, they don't die."

The pond was new, as were many alterations to the house. But enough remained the same to remind Delmus of Kittara. He could almost hear her having one of her rants about the clerics, who made up the bulk of the population of the holy city, Mendera City.

“Have you time to eat with me ?” She asked.

“Just as long as we don’t have to hunt and kill it first.”

She was grinning at him. She was beautiful, even the pure white hair and talons didn’t diminish that. At first the wings had put him off a little, but he’d grown used to waking up with them wrapped around him. Memories of Luri had killed their relationship, they were both on the rebound from Luri, in one way or another.

“I’m civilised now, I use spoons and even plates these days.”

The meal was excellent, but they both knew they wouldn’t be sharing a bed that night, those times were well and truly over.

“I need your help to find someone.”

“I know, Chlo pre-warned me about who you wanted to see.”

He’d let some of the alcohol work on his system, he felt mellow and relaxed. Normally he’d have resented Chlo telling people his business, but now he didn’t mind.

“Will you take me to her ?” He asked.

Her talons were tapping on the table, glinting in the low lights around the kitchen. Not a sign that she was annoyed, but that she was considering something very seriously.

“I have never been there, but I know where she sleeps. Taking you there, disturbing her.... it may mean your death.”

“But I know Luri, we were lovers for longer than many galaxies exist, far longer.”

“This isn’t Luri Delmus. Now she’s Lurisia-Goran, a deity and a powerful one too. Some of the old Luri will still be in her, but she won’t appreciate being disturbed.”

Feelings were surfacing, feelings that were probably inappropriate for an immortal warrior.

“I don’t want to see her, I need to see her, for many reasons. Will you take me ?”

“Yes, but we can’t leave from this reality. We’ll need to go to the first rift and from there we’ll move to the reality where Luri sleeps. The entire journey will be dangerous, for both of us.”

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Sventa refused to take him until her latest intake of recruits had graduated. That gave him nearly half a year to brood on the events of that day. Chlo helped to hide his obsession, but there was talk about it among The Damned. Delmus visited the planet on numerous occasions, went to the homes of those who’d died. In one particular street he’d become such a regular visitor that some of the locals greeted him as he walked by.

“Imprinting yourself on the area won’t help Luri alter reality.” Chlo had told him.

Then one hot and dry morning he was stood next to Sventa at the well of souls and preparing to use the well to enter the 1st rift. They were both dressed in the full uniform of empire and well-armed; the rifts could be dangerous places. Sventa activated the rift gate and they were stood in the ruins of a small town. A ruined village had been on the site for a long time, but then a town had been put there by the people of Ixir. That town flourished for a while, but the 1st rift is very hard on people and their technology. The descendants of the people of Ixir still roam the rifts, but no one would recognise them as the children of Ixir anymore.

“I hate this place.” Said Delmus.

“The great city is still there, but no one lives there. The humans are spread across the rift now, surviving in small tribal groups.”

Delmus knew Sventa’s knowledge of the rift was better than his. She needed to know where the people of the rift lived. She still hunted them for food, as she had for billions of years.

“The demons keep to the dry lands north of the mountains,” she added, “but there are very few of them these days.”

Sventa walked along a road that no longer existed, but she knew where it had been. Down from the town to the bottom of a small valley and then up to where the gates of the City of the Lost God had been. Nothing remained of that city, not a single stone or brick to show where it had been. A city fought over for countless billions of years, by vast armies of humans and demons. Now it was gone, apart from the darkness, some of that still clung to the stones of the deep caverns.

“This way.” Said Sventa.

She was keeping to such a straight course that bushes were scraping her wings, but she unerringly walked to where the darkest and most powerful shrine had once stood. She knelt on the stony ground and felt for the darkness deep below.

“Very little remains, but it will be enough.”

Delmus had no idea what the dark angel was talking about. She seemed to be coaxing and encouraging something to come up out of the ground. She was talking to it as though it was a child. “There you are my pretty. You can trust me; you know I’m as old and wicked as you. Come to me.” Like wayward children several small shadows rose from the ground and entered Sventa’s body. Still she purred and coaxed until two more shifting areas of darkness came to her and merged their essence with hers.

“That is it,” she said, “there is no more; no one else will ever be able to use this way out.”

“Way out of where ?”

She looked at him as though he was being exceptionally stupid.

“Out of everything of course. This is a one way trip Delmus, there isn’t enough to bring us back. Unless we can wake Luri and she agrees to help us, we’ll never return.”

Delmus put his hand on his sword, as if preparing for battle.

“I still want to go.”

Sventa spread her wings to their full twenty foot span and flapped them. Then she held him and wrapped her wings around him. Her closeness and the musky scent of her body reminded him of the times they’d been lovers. This was different though, she seemed to be protecting him with her wings. They seemed to fall through the ground and then reality fell away and they were beyond even the grey between worlds and moving through something that he couldn’t see or feel. His ears brought him the sound of quiet voices, but he couldn’t understand the language they spoke.

“Don’t listen to them !” Shouted Sventa.

“Sventa, you brought us here ?!”

“I had to, it’s where she is.”

He knew where they were, even though Kittara had refused to say much about the place. Delmus was certain that they travelled through the great darkness of the abyss, the final exit from the worlds of their existence and the entry into..... no one knew what. Kittara had spoken of beings that slithered over her body, but she’d refused to say more. He did know that Kittara had barely survived the great darkness.

“We are almost where she is.” Said Sventa.

They were falling again and they hit a solid stone floor at a speed that would have killed many. Sventa took most of the force and seemed unconscious. Delmus pulled himself out of her embrace and carefully folded her wings out of his way. She was breathing, but her back and wings were covered in cruel claw marks.

“Did you bring us to hell Sventa ?”

She didn't answer, it looked like she'd be unconscious for quite some time, she might even be in a coma for all he knew. There was a diffused light coming from orange stones in the walls. It revealed that they were in some kind of vast cavern, with steps not far away. The only sound was Sventa breathing and the distant sound of dripping water. It was hot, not hot enough to burn, but hot enough to be uncomfortable for most living things. He adjusted his body temperature and lifted Sventa over his shoulder. He wanted to climb the steps, but he wasn't going to leave the dark angel behind. It smelt of damp and mould, that surprised him as he walked up the steps.

"Are you awake yet Sventa ?"

There was no answer or movement from the creature he carried over his shoulder. Her left wing was dragging on the ground, so he pulled it up and held it with his other hand. They must have looked like very bedraggled adventurers to the creature they found at the top of the stairs.

The skin of the creature was dark black, the surface texture definitely reptilian. A long tail flicked irritably at the cavern wall, dislodging a constant avalanche of small stones. It had four powerful legs and two muscular arms that ended in dangerous looking claws. It might have been asleep, but the tail indicated it was awake, as did the flickering of the two red eyes. Delmus gently put Sventa onto the ground, he saw no reason to risk both their lives. There was no sign of returning consciousness from the dark angel, but she was breathing regularly.

"Hello Luri." Delmus shouted.

Delmus had seen other deities, in fact he'd seen all the other great deities. Tomma-Goran had been large, but his daughter was even bigger. The creature was a good hundred and fifty feet from nose to the start of the tail. The tail was still twitching and added another forty or maybe fifty feet to the length of the creature. The head was like any other deity's head he'd seen, but the two horns seemed longer and the teeth looked sharper.

"I need your help Luri and Sventa is hurt."

The red eyes flicked in the direction of the bundle on the floor and then back at Delmus. He walked towards the deity and sat on the floor, the dampness quickly making him feel soggy and uncomfortable.

"You owe me Lurisiana !" He shouted.

He knew it was dangerous to annoy her, sleeping deities tended to lose their higher functions. Luri was probably operating at the basic level of liking things that were pleasing to her and hating things that weren't. Sevril-Narge the great bug goddess had destroyed an entire galaxy because someone had woken her up by surprise.

"Luri, it's me..... Delmus."

The head changed first, the features melting to become more human. Then the vast body shrank down to the size of a normal human female. The eyes though remained the colour of hot embers and they shone with a deep intensity. She approached him and Delmus stood to meet her. Arms were around him, normal soft human arms, arms he'd once known very well.

"Delmus, it has been a while." She said.

"It certainly has."

They kissed for a long time, but eventually Luri pulled back and looked at Sventa.

"I must heal her, the claw marks of the dark wraiths can be fatal. Then you can tell me what you want me to do."

Luri was inspecting Sventa when she suddenly looked back at him.

"How did you get here ? This place is impregnable."

"It wasn't easy Luri, it wasn't easy."

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Delmus assumed the empire would be involved in the changes to reality for the small blue planet, but Luri hadn't even brought Chlo with them.

"Chlo would just ruin everything with rules and logic." Said Luri.

The empire, or rather Chlo, used benign probes to examine the multiverse; she could even use them to examine past and future time lines. The multiverse was extremely good at dealing with paradoxes, it ignored the smaller ones and carried out running repairs on anything too large to ignore. But still, no sane person would set foot in the past and risk the consequences. Tread on a bug and it might be the bug that infects the tyrant, who might destroy half the world. Every kid in the empire knew the potential catastrophic chronoclasm that time travel could unleash. It was a very, very bad idea.

"We're actually there, when it happened, aren't we?" He asked Luri.

"Yes, you're still in the store and buying your fizzy wine."

It felt strange visiting his own past, his mind simply wouldn't accept the concept. He wasn't a deity, time for him had always moved in a nice orderly and linear fashion.

"It is a beautiful city Delmus, I can see why you like visiting it."

She'd put them on the roof of a particularly high building that was close to where the aircraft had crashed. If he'd had the right device he could have watched himself leave the store and the aircraft take off, but he had no screen or other optical devices. This was Luri's day and no empire technology was allowed.

"Those will be blamed." Said Luri.

She was pointing at a flock of birds that were circling the river below, large heavy birds with brown plumage.

"A few of those flying into one of their hydrocarbon powered engines, will destroy it." She added.

He could see the aircraft now, climbing and turning towards the river. He couldn't see the Pol'sitari shuttle but he knew it was there and waiting to take off.

"Will they believe those creatures flew into both engines?" He asked.

"Yes they will and I won't even need to destroy the engines. A few feathers of the right kind, placed in a few of just the right places. The only thing to stop the engines will be the plasma wake from the shuttle that is just taking off."

He saw the bright shimmer of the shuttle's plasma ejection, but only because he was looking for it and knew where it would be. To any of the local population it would just look like a glare of sunlight on a cold morning. The aircraft engines stopped and Luri supported the stricken craft, easily enabling it to glide down the course of the river.

"Surely they'll see the engines aren't damaged?" He asked.

"The authorities will be our allies, they hate mysteries. The public will want a simple answer and they'll find a few feathers and say the birds destroyed the engines, even though there are none flying near the craft. Eventually the miracle plane will be put in a museum, but the engines will never be put anywhere the paranoid conspiracy theorists can get a look at them."

As they watched the aircraft glided down onto the surface of the river as though it was making a perfect landing on dry land.

"The crew haven't used the ditching button to close valves and openings, but I can keep it afloat until everyone is rescued."

"Surely they'll realise this can't be just good luck?!"

He could see the passengers leaving the fuselage of the craft and walking out onto the wings.

“Some will realise the official story is nonsense, but the majority will accept it. This is a strange planet. Tell someone a fairly ordinary story about a disaster and they’ll think up all sorts of nonsense to explain it. But give them a good news story and they’ll accept the most implausible explanations.” Boats were heading towards the craft and as Luri had promised, it showed no signs of sinking.

“Thank you Luri, are you staying around for a few days ?”

“Yes, it’ll be nice to see Mendera City again. I intend to avoid Chlo though and I’d advise you to do the same. She’ll have details of the lives we’ve changed today and the potential paradoxes. Children fathered by people who should be dead, you know the sort of thing. She’ll drive us both crazy.” She kissed him and moved their realities to his quarters in the barracks of The Damned, in Mendera City. A few seconds and they were both too naked and too involved with each other to worry about paradoxes.

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It was cold again. Delmus knew the small blue planet had a summer in the northern hemisphere, he’d just missed it. In his hands he had a huge bunch of flowers, which he knew were appreciated by the local females. He’d easily found the address, he had visited the area before.

‘Apt #34 – Home of Karen Armstrong – Killed in the fireball that followed the crash of flight xxxx.’

Only now the fireball had never happened and reality was beginning to knit itself over the cracks and flaws created by Luri tinkering with the events of that day. Her bell didn’t seem to work, so he rapped his knuckles on the door.

“It really is you..... come in. Did you have trouble finding the address ?”

He gave her one of his lopsided grins.

“Terrible trouble, I had to go to hell and back.”

“You must have taken a wrong turn and ended up in Newark.”

Karen was grinning back at him. She was wearing a skirt and a light coloured top, the chill wind was making her shiver. He stepped inside and followed her into the lounge.

“I know it was a long time ago that you gave me your number, but I’ve been out of town on business.”

He took off his big swirly coat and threw it onto a chair. Karen had vanished into the kitchen, but quickly returned with a glass of chilled fizzy wine.

“I know you like this, you bought quite a lot of it.”

“Thank you, I was surprised you agreed to see me.”

She was giving him an odd look. Not a look of nervousness, he was used to getting those. She seemed wary of telling him something.

“I wouldn’t normally invite someone I don’t know into my home, but we met that day. You must have heard about it ? The day the miracle plane landed safely on the Hudson.”

“I did read about that, nice to hear some good news for a change.”

She took the flowers from him and picked up his coat.

“Thank you these are beautiful, I’ll put them in water and check how dinner is coming along.”

She’d gone, his coat flapping behind her like a sail.

“Sit down and get comfortable,” she called, “I hope you like Thai food ?”

Delmus had no idea what Thai food was, but he knew his body could cope with any food he was likely to be given. He sat down and took a sip of the wine and it was delicious. They’d never chilled the wine he’d bought, he’d remember that mistake. Karen was back in the room and filled his glass.

“I know this is going to sound crazy,” she said, “but I thought anyone I met that day just had to be nice. Thinking about it, that whole day felt kind of..... magical. Does that sound crazy to you ?”

“No it doesn’t. I feel the same way.”

He drank his fizzy wine and listened to Karen Armstrong tell him about her day and for the first time in nearly a year; he felt at peace.

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~ The End ~

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