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MESSENGER

OF

THE

GODS

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I thought my scar was itching again. I say ‘scar’ in the singular as the long red and purple line that ran from my neck, just below the left ear, diagonally down and across my chest and abdomen, and then the length of my right leg to below the ankle was an ugly mess of tortured flesh. The irony was that I had put it there myself by tumbling from the howdah of a war elephant. My fall had taken me onto and across the great battle sword attached to the elephant’s tusk and thus had opened me up – literally – from head to toe. Had a team of physicians and surgeons been on hand, the scar might have been a relatively neat suture line.

It was definitely not a neat suture line. There had been no needles, no threads of silk, no artery clamps; only red-hot embers to cauterise the many pulsing blood vessels down the length of my body. I was lucky to be unconscious at the time and do not recall any of this. I was told much later that I bucked and jerked with each placement of the burning embers, despite being senseless. Consequently, my scar has all the ridges, craters, wrinkles, folds, bulges and puckerings that can be seen on those who have been severely burned. It was still an angry-looking slash, as it was still mending, awaiting the day when my body’s healing processes would see it take on the normal colour of skin, albeit somewhat paler and less elastic in nature.

The healing process may seem a good thing; the damaged body is repaired, reshaped and taken back, as much as possible, to its original strong and healthy state. Except it isn't always that pleasant. There are burning sensations that accompany inflammation, tearing sensations that can come from a careless movement – a cough, a laugh or a sneeze – as well as unscratchable and irritating tinglings beneath the surface of the scar and an almost ever-present itch at some spot along its entire length.

I was lying on my back and looking down the length of the bedsheet across my waist to where the itch on my right ankle was located. I was just about to cross my left leg over my right and scratch the spot with my toenails when I saw a small bulge in the sheet move. The itchy sensation moved with it. With a shock, I realised something – some animal or insect – was in the bed I shared with my beloved, Ruth, and was furtively making its way up my leg. In Hind, I knew this could be very bad, even fatal. I gingerly raised the sheet an inch or two to peep under the cover, and my worst fear was realised. There, above my ankle, I could just make out the shape of a four-inch scorpion. A small shiver of horror ran down my spine.

There was just enough light in the room for me to note its dull grey body, its six reddy-orange legs, its two large pincers and its slightly raised and painfully deadly stinging tail. I gently lowered the sheet, keeping its weight upon my toes, rather than letting it settle on the ugly little beast, so as not to startle it and possibly cause it to unleash its sting into me.

My first concern was for Ruth, who was lying naked and asleep beside me. We had made very slow and gentle love to each other earlier in the night, with her taking the superior position, as she had on all previous occasions. My healing wound did not allow me to take a more dominant or vigorous role in our lovemaking. I knew my genitals would still be moist from the experience.

I was concerned that any sudden movement would cause the

scorpion to whip its stinging tail into my leg. I slowly turned my head to Ruth's side of the bed and whispered, 'Ruth. Ruth,' as softly as I could. No response.

The scorpion moved a little further up my calf. Beads of sweat started to form on my forehead.

'Ruth. Ruth,' I whispered again.

The scorpion crept slowly upward, finally stopping just above my knee. I could feel its tiny, pointed feet moving over my skin, gently pricking me as it went. I began to break out in a real sweat, all over my body.

'Mmmh,' mumbled Ruth, still half asleep.

'Don't move. Don't say or do anything suddenly,' I said, trying to make my whisper sound as real and as urgent as the situation. 'Just lie still, very still. There is a scorpion in our bed.'

Ruth did not consciously move or make a sound, but her minute, startled reflex sent a small ripple along the sheet. I felt the scorpion scuttle quickly up the inside of my thigh, only to stop in what it possibly thought was some kind of protective and bushy camouflage.

Fear and horror of its current location kept me absolutely frozen.

The sheet lay only partially across my pubic area, and I was able to observe much of the scorpion's activity. Slowly, its stinging tail came down into a less threatening position and it seemed to begin investigating its surroundings. After a moment, the little beast stopped moving around and settled with its head against the base of my penis, its pincer claws closed but placed around the flaccid flesh in an embrace. I began to feel a slight rasping sensation against the surface of the skin there.

Is it feeding on, or cleaning, the residue of the love Ruth and I made earlier? I wondered. From the little movements around the scorpion's mouth, I suspected the former. It was not a pleasant idea.

I became aware that ever so gently, ever so slowly, Ruth was sidling over to the edge of the bed. The scorpion continued its oral

activity, but I could feel its sharp little feet and pincers periodically moving their way around the warm and still slightly moistened environment it was hiding in.

Gradually, Ruth removed the sheet from our bodies and let it lie beside me without provoking the creature. With frequent pauses, she moved her legs over the side of the bed and her feet onto the floor. It was when she lifted her buttocks and attempted to stand that the mattress rippled with the movement. Immediately, the scorpion's tail went up into striking position, and I braced myself for the sting of death. It did not come. Instead, the scorpion changed position so that it now lay across my very shrunken penis. All I could do was look down the length of my torso at this vile creature. It seemed to be staring back up at me angrily as it tried to disentangle its legs from my pubic hairs.

The creature had several eyes, two large ones in front and five smaller ones sitting further back across its forehead. From either side of the head reached two pincers, miniature versions of a lobster's claws that, along with its forelegs, were still entangled in my pubic hairs. This seemed to agitate the creature, as it struggled to release itself. Its tail came up yet again.

I was in a state of silent horror when I felt the movement in my bowels that accompanies intense terror. I had experienced these sensations before going into battle at Gadaraghatta a few weeks before. I looked across to where Ruth was quietly removing one of her slender throwing knives from its belted sheath. She usually wore the belt across her chest, but it was now lying on her bedside table.

Uncontrollably, my bowels made a sudden deep gurgling sound. The scorpion's tail arched. Its stinger rose further and was about to strike when a flashing blur sped over my penis. There was a sharp sting and a woody thump. The scorpion had disappeared, pinned by Ruth's throwing knife to the side of my bedside table, its legs and pincers waving angrily around in the air.

I looked down again at my manhood to see a tiny drop of blood welling from the small nick made by Ruth's throwing knife. A great, rumbling fart trumpeted from my bowels.

I had just got off very, very lightly.