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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 14 – “Reconnoiter and Discovery”

Richard Delancey pulled his Ford Excursion up into the driveway, placed the gear selector in 'P', set the parking brake and shut it down. Although home, his thoughts were still at work, wondering just where the glitch could be in the code he was attempting to repair. It had been a long day, digging through tens of thousands of lines of code, looking for that one errant snippet that was causing him grief.

He stopped at the mailbox on his way in from the car, retrieving the contents that looked to consist mostly of bills and junk mail. Unlocking and opening the front door, he made his presence known as he stepped into his home.

“Willi Marie, I'm home! You have some 'slpainin' to do!” he said loudly in his best Ricky Ricardo accent. When he received no answer, he sat his briefcase down by the door, hung his windbreaker on the coat rack and continued onwards to the kitchen. “Willi? Are you home?” he called out in a questioning tone.

“We're in here, my Son-In-Law.” Erich offered up.

“Okay, is there something . . . wrong . . .?” Richard stopped talking when he observed his father-in-law fussing over his mother-in-law and two other femmes that were obviously related to Iva Marie. All three were sitting at the table, motionless.

Iva appeared to be attempting to duck under the table, the femme equine next to her looked to be putting her paws up to shield herself and the eldest-appearing femme seemed shocked by something that had happened. It was clear to Richard that they had been taken by surprise by beings unknown.

“Huh?!? What's going on here???” the gray male blurted out, clearly confused by the situation.

The lion shook his head. “I do not know what spell is over them or who cast it upon them.” he offered

up. "This is Anna Schmidt, my mother-in-law and I am fairly confident this is her mother, Hilda Sorenson." he added, indicating the two femmes Richard was not familiar with.

"Oh Shit, Dad. What do we do now?" Richard asked, nudging the eldest femme to see that she was frozen stiff. Not cold, just stuck in that position and totally unresponsive to outside stimulus.

"Do you have Bethany or Mala's phone number?" Erich suggested.

The stallion nodded. "Give me a minute. It would be in Willi Marie's cell phone."

Richard grabbed his mate's phone from the breakfast bar and fished through the menus, finally finding the 'Contacts' section. It took just moments to locate a 'Bethany' with a seventeen digit number associated with that name. Pressing 'Send', he held his breath until the call was answered.

"Hello, Wilhelmine," the femme on the other end answered, obviously thrown off by her Caller ID as to who it really was on the other end.

"Hello, this is Richard, Willi Marie's husband." the equine male began, "I hate to bother you but we have a serious emergency. We think Willi has been abducted."

"Oh Hell NO!" the kurani blurted out as she materialized in the kitchen. Ending her call and closing her cell phone, she went to the table to examine the frozen femmes. "How long have they been like this?" Bethany asked.

"I don't know exactly, maybe three hours?" Erich offered up.

The feline-like sorceress nodded, then looked at the males. "Stand over there so I can shield you from harm." she directed. Once the two had moved to the desired spot, she put a ward up around them. "Here goes nothing," she muttered, walking over to stand behind the stricken equine femmes. She made a silent prayer to her chosen deity for intervention before she started.

The striped sorceress began to recite a convoluted incantation, causing a small tornado-like wind to whip up inside the home. She continued with her recital of a series of words that the males couldn't understand until at a crucial juncture, she waved her paws over the frozen three. There was a big flash of blinding light, then the trio at the table started coming out of their forced stasis.

"Wha . . . where is that sorry bastard Rafael Montoya?!?" Anna hissed, rubbing her eyes to clear them. She looked around to see who was still present, then asked some very important questions; "Where is Wilhelmine? Is she still here somewhere??"

"We fear she has been abducted." Erich replied.

"Don't worry, I know exactly where she is," the femme equine Agent offered up in a murderous tone. Anna stood, looked at the others with fire in her eyes and said just two words, a name, before she popped out; "Canton Hill."

"Oooh, that stallion is going to be toast when Anna locates his behind!" Iva offered up.

"What's going on? Is it something I should know about?" Richard asked.

“It's a long story but one you should know,” Bethany offered up, motioning to a chair. “Sit down and we'll try to fill you in.”

###

Conrad was sitting in a corner booth with his siblings at 'The Huddle', a sports bar near the motel they was staying in. The news reporter had moved on to other things but the former tiger was still staring at the screen in shock over the news that had just played out on the television.

“I just got screwed,” he said to no fur in particular. “I don't believe it. I'm so totally screwed.”

“What?” Gytha asked, noting he was stunned by something.

Axel looked around to see that nobody was paying attention to them. “That golem impersonating Conrad didn't get killed. He's in the hospital, all busted up.” he explained to his sister.

“... And?” she added, clearly not catching the significance of that information.

Dana nudged her sister. “Since it's now known that our brother was injured, Conrad can't go to the Bowl game this year!” she stage-whispered.

“Oh . . .” Gytha nodded. “Yeah, um, I guess you can't take his place until Quillam heals up a bit . . .” she said more as a statement than anything else.

“Right.” Conrad agreed. “Now I'll have to stay in disguise . . .” The gravity of the situation sunk in. “Um, what the hell am I supposed to do until I can go back to being Conrad Svensen? I can't go home because everyone in the neighborhood will think Cathy is cheating on me.”

“Well, how about this?” Axel put forth. “I know you can play piano decently, so how about working for me as John Parks, my new keyboard salesfur?”

“If I can stay at your place, I guess that would be okay.” Conrad replied. It was clear he was not happy with the situation but it would have to do for now.

This whole thing upset Conrad to no end. It was a foregone thought that he wouldn't be at this year's Superbowl. As much as he had wanted to go, this turn of events had put a damper on that. Hopefully, Cathy could come to see him once in a while during his time in disguise. That was one thing that needed clarification, though. Would Jenna keep him in this form until he could switch back with Quillam?

Taking a bite of a french fry from his plate that had just been delivered, he pondered what could possibly go wrong next. It was a forgone fact that it was when, not if.

###

Torvald sat patiently in the driver's seat, waiting until Victoria had carefully read the contract that the stallion had inadvertently signed. It had flashed through the tigress' mind as they had arrived at the hospital concerning the possibility that Lucifer might had added some 'fine print' that would grant him some outlandish claim to them.

“Gah! I know it's in here somewhere!!!” the femme feline spat out in frustration as she read the tiny print

on the front of the contract. She adjusted her reading glasses and continued. "It's not on the front side, as far as I can see." she muttered in disgust as she turned the paper over.

"I'm sorry," Tor offered up, leaning his head against the driver's window. "I don't know what came over me, to actually sign that blasted piece of paper." he added. This might have been a very grievous error on his part, if there was some fine print that screwed them over.

"Ah, I found it," the tigress stated, carefully reading section thirty-seven a second time. "It says that we, meaning specifically you and I by name, cannot go after a specified list of Dark Agents and Operatives. That list will be supplied by Lucifer himself."

A manila envelope fell from out of nowhere into Victoria's lap. She opened the packet, removed the pages inside and began to read them. She carefully looked over all seventy-five pages, nodding and 'hmm'ing as she went, surprised by some of the names on the list given them.

"Well?" Tor asked.

"It's a list of one thousand, one-hundred and ninety-four beings on various named or numbered planets and-slash-or realities. It says on the front page that Willi Marie or Judge Talmadge will be able to tell us where these realities exist. Just as an aside, the Vice-President and a four-star General from our home world are on this list. How do you like that?" she offered up while she put the list back in the envelope, folded it and put it in her travel purse.

"Geez, I effed up big time." Tor said reverently. He was confused, however by the slight smile that he observed crossing his mate's muzzle.

"No, Lucifer effed up big time." the tigress retorted, grinning and nodding. "The contract specifically says we can't go after them. It says nothing about letting the other members of the Amendment Foundation go after them."

"Hey! That's not part of the deal!!" a disembodied demon's voice piped up through the vehicle's radio speakers.

"You wrote this jacked-up contract yourself," Victoria offered up, smiling widely because she knew contracts well. This one was seriously flawed in their favor.

"Wait a minute! Can't we talk this over?" the voice of the Prince of Lies asked. "You know I'm bound by that contract, just as you are."

"Nothing in our contract says I can't give this list to the others." she pointed out.

"You have me there," the Devil stated as he popped into their back seat. "Look, let's just forget that contract, okay? As long as you agree to leave my willing Agents alone, I'll leave you alone." Before the tigress could state her thoughts, Lucifer continued. "Just to clarify what was talked about earlier, I have had nothing to do with all of this. I specifically told that idiot Zagam that he could not recruit the two of you but it is apparent that he thinks otherwise."

The berserker spoke up. "Why don't you stop him, since you said yourself, you have a vested interest in us?" Tor put forth.

Lucifer shook his head. "That's not how it works, stallion. Eventually, you will in any case have to face off against him again. I just hope that when that time comes, you will have the good sense to do it on your home turf and not his."

"That's your vested interest in us." Victoria put forth. "We're going to destroy Zagam for you."

Lou smiled. "Well, if you did happen to accidentally do that one little thing for me, one of you could sit on the Malefic Council in his place." the evil one offered up.

"No, I think I like this contract better." the tigress countered, waving the document in the air as best as she could with her braced limbs. "I'm not sure I would like the furs on the Council, anyway."

"It's not about liking them, my dear tigress," Lou retorted, "I barely tolerate those idiotic buffoons myself. What it *is* about is controlling what happens on the mortal plane." He smiled as he added, "I think you would make a very nice addition to our ranks because you have a level head and you do know mortal law to a degree. Besides, you're very easy on the eyes."

"Is that what I would be? A decoration at the table??" she shot back with a look of shock on her muzzle. Shaking her head, she continued. "No, I think we'll just stick with the current effed-up contract."

"Now look, Victoria, you're making it very hard for me to help the two of you." the evil one put forth.

"You know, I think we have a problem here." Tor put on the table. "We've destroyed Zagam's mortal avatar once already. Where's our seat on the council?"

"Hold on just a minute, stallion." Lucifer stated loudly. "You didn't destroy him completely so ergo, no seat. You have to kill Zagam's essence by preventing him from leaving the scene of his mortal avatar's death."

"I knew there was a catch." the tigress brought up. "How do we kill him completely?"

"You have to 'anchor' his essence to his body." Lou suggested.

Victoria gave the Prince of Lies a crooked smile. "Pray tell, how do we do that?"

"Your feathered acquaintance Constantine can instruct you in the proper procedures to do that." Lucifer replied. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have misguided souls to collect."

Without a sound, the Master of Evil just disappeared.

"I hate when he does that." Victoria muttered while she shook her head in disgust.

###

Cathy Svensen and her now-larger retinue of beings finally arrived at the town now known by the name of the biggest inn, Whitehall. It had been a very long ride and the lioness was ready for some warm, filling food, a hot bath and a soft bed.

Once their horses were bedded down, they made their way over to their night's destination. Sir Morri held the door to Whitehall while the femmes entered the establishment, then Sir Marc and Sir Jac took up

positions on either side of the doorway, providing protection for their new dignitary. While Cathy and Amanda took seats at a table, Morri got the attention of the keep.

“What can I do for you?” the somewhat overweight innkeeper asked.

The soldier sat his helmet on the bar and replied, “I am Sir Morri of His Majesty’s Royal Guard. I request two rooms, one to sleep three guards and an adjoining room for two female dignitaries. Your best.” the red-headed male requested.

“And who are these so-called dignitaries?” the Keep retorted. “I don't give up rooms for just anyone, especially on some lowly Royal Guard's say-so.”

“I will vouch for the two females with me. Their credentials are of the utmost caliber.” Morri stated firmly. He then leaned over the bar and continued in a low tone. “And lest I remind you of whom you are speaking with. I will have you hauled up in front of The King for sedition against The Crown if you continue to show no respect. We are King Andath's right hand and as such, to disparage any one of His Royal Guard is to disparage The Crown directly.”

Sir Jac had been following the conversation so it was his thought to have the Keep meet the lioness for himself. He went by the table, quietly asked Cathy to come with him and escorted her to the bar.

“... If you think I'm afraid of ...” the proprietor stopped arguing with Morri when he observed the femme catamount's armor with the Thor's Hammer embossed prominently in the breastplate. He quickly came out from behind the bar, knelt on one knee at Cathy’s feet and bowed his head. “Forgive me, M'Lady. I had no idea you were directly related to Miss D'nan. Please allow me to put you up in my best room.” He paused for a moment, then added, “At no charge to M'Lady, of course.”

The femme feline looked to Morri for direction. He smiled ever-so-slightly at her, nodding to the Keep.

“We will accept your kind offer,” Cathy put forth. “Please stand, kind Sir.”

The man stood up but kept his head bowed while he nervously wrung his apron. “Thank you M'Lady. You must be directly related to Miss Vicki D'nan, for only a relative would dare wear her house emblem so brazenly as you.”

The badger said something into Cathy's ear very quietly, making her nod in agreement before she spoke up.

“I am Lady Cathryn Svensen, Miss D'nan's Daughter-in-law and as such, I represent her house in these lands.” the catamount stated at Sir Jac's whispered instruction. She then ad-libbed, “My entourage would like an evening meal, your finest.” That made Morri smile.

“As you wish, M'Lady Cathryn.” the man blurted out. “Please be seated and I will have your meal for you shortly.”

The Keep scurried off to put together a meal for his honored guests so Sir Jac escorted Cathy back to the table. Once seated again, the lioness asked a question that had been bothering her.

“Sir Jac, why did my emblem affect the Keep in such an odd manner?” she asked, tapping her breastplate.

“That was your Mother-In-law's personal emblem.” he replied. “Only Miss Vicki could give permission for another being to display it. Also, you carry that particular style of curved sword, which only she carried. That says much of your affiliations with her. I would doubt any brigand would be foolish enough to treat you wrongly.”

###

The lioness was relaxing in a hot bath, trying to unwind and rid her pelt of the day's grime. Her assistant had conjured up her favorite fur wash and shampoo for her and had done something to keep the water hot for her. Cathy still missed her home and hubby but she did have to admit, Amanda had been watching over her and keeping her relatively comfortable.

“Cathryn? I need to speak to you. May I come in?” the femme sorceress called out from the next room.

“Yes, come in.” the catamount replied.

Once the multicolored femme had entered the room, she sat down on a stool that sat next to the tub and gave her charge a nervous smile.

“Cathryn, I need to talk to you about something.” Amanda admitted. “I feel like I'm in over my head here. I really feel like I need assistance so I need to leave you alone for an hour or so while I go seek out another sorceress for help.”

That thought seemed to upset the lioness. “Well, I guess that would be okay,” she replied, very hesitantly.

“I have a way for you to summon me if there is an emergency.” the sorceress stated. “Here, put this amulet in your palm.”

Cathryn took the bauble proffered and placed it in the palm of her left paw. Amanda put her left paw over the lioness', then put her other paw underneath. The large piece of jewelry glowed momentarily, then the calico femme removed her paws and put the amulet around Cathy's neck.

“Do not remove this for any reason whatsoever.” Amanda admonished her. “It is a Darekal Seculinim. By holding it in both paws and stating “I summon Amanda,” you will recall me back to you. Just be sure to have a six-foot square area in front of you clear of all objects. That's for my safety.”

“You're sure this works?” Cathy asked while she examined the amulet.

“I'll bet both of our lives on it.” the sorceress replied. “Your bath will remain warm until you're done and I've whipped up some warm, fluffy towels for you to dry off with. I don't expect to be gone long, not over an hour or two at the most.”

Cathy looked up to say something only to notice Amanda was disappearing from sight. Looking back down at the amulet again, she really hoped that the device would function if she needed it.

Her bath essentially over with, she drained the tub, got out and began to dry off with the towels provided to her by her benefactor. Cathy kept thinking about the situation and it did bother her. That demon Zagam had decided to use her as a bargaining chip against her In-laws' organization. She knew in her heart that the Amendment Foundation's work was important to all furkind, especially all of those unwilling Agents on both sides.

Putting on the camisole, underpants, evening dress and robe provided for her, the lioness sat down at the dressing table and began to brush her hair out, still trying to keep from thinking about what had transpired. Her mind was preoccupied, however by the thought of what might be going on back home and more importantly, would she ever get to go back home herself.

###

Jennifer and Dr. Bruce Peyton were standing in the hall outside the counterfeit tiger's room, discussing his situation. The sorceress was particularly upset because this was not going as she had planned. While they talked, they were paying some attention to the elevators because the Immortal Couple was due at any time.

The elevator came up, the doors opened and an elderly femme tapir nurse exited the cabin. The doors slid shut, the bell 'dinged' again, the doors opened and Amanda stepped out in hospital scrubs.

“What are you doing here?” Jennifer asked when the femme feline joined them.

“Jenna, I have a problem and I need your help.” Amanda replied. “Can we talk in private?”

“Yeah, let's go in this closet.” the otteress offered up.

The trio went into a linen storage room, then Jennifer put a ward over the door, preventing their conversation from being interrupted. She then turned to her contemporary and crossed her arms while she waited for Amanda to explain herself.

“Look, don't do anything rash, please?” the femme feline asked, giving the otteress a pensive smile.

“Just from that statement, I'm not sure I'm going to like this. Spit it out.” Jenna replied.

“I fracked up.” Amanda stated. “I did some work for Zagam and now I'm feeling like I'm in over my head.”

“Okay, I might be able to help, since he is my employer, so to speak.” the elder femme commented. “Tell me, what did you do that you think was a screw-up?”

The calico femme sighed. “Well, I helped him kit-nap Cathy Svensen and now I'm . . .” She was interrupted when Jenna began to shout at her.

“YOU!! You kit-napped her!! Why, I ought to . . .” Amanda erected a ward around herself that Jenna bumped into, momentarily derailing the otteress' offensive action.

“Hold it! Hear me out!” Amanda begged as she backed up against the wall behind her.

“Where is she? Is she safe??” Jenna hissed, trying to punch a hole in the ward to get her paws on the feline. It was clear she was pissed off by this situation.

“I gave her a Darekal to summon me with.” the femme feline sorceress offered up.

“That's all fine and dandy, but is she safe?” the otteress asked again.

“For now, I guess.” Amanda said softly. “Look, Zagam wanted her as a bargaining chip so we stashed her on a planet where her Mother-In-Law has been before. Cathy is being treated like royalty with three of the Royal Guard at her beck and call.”

“Well, nonetheless, I need you to take me to her.” Jenna stated. “I need to have a golem stand in for her on this planet because of some interference with my plans from some sentient. I had a golem stand in for Cathy's hubby but he's injured now and every fur expects Conrad's wife to be at his side.”

“Oh . . .” Amanda said softly. “Okay, I had better take you to her, then.” Jenna lifted the ward on the door for Doctor Peyton, right before the two femmes disappeared from sight.

###

Canton escorted Willi Marie back to the house at a leisurely pace, stopping in the washroom just long enough to move some clothes from the washer into the dryer. That project done, they were crossing the kitchen when his cell phone 'booped' for direct connect.

“Canton, we have a visitor on the way.” the disembodied femme voice stated, one that was familiar in some way to the sorceress.

“Where?” he asked once he removed his phone from its holster so he could use the two-way feature.

“Um, middle of the kitchen, I think. Rafe concurs.” the femme offered up.

Canton pushed Willi over to the wall, then conjured up a heavy steel collar that he readied by opening it. The femme that was materializing in the room, just scant feet from Willi Marie was completely unaware of her pending plight.

The male was using his magic to slow the other femme's arrival so he could safely spring his deception on her. At first he seemed concerned with the situation but after the incoming equine had materialized sufficiently to be recognizable, Canton smiled as he snapped the collar around her neck. He then spun her around to face him as he hugged the femme lovingly.

“Damn you, Canton Hill!” Anna spat out. “Why the hell were you slowing down my arrival, anyway?” she added. Once it was clear to her that he had collared her, she became indignant. “You sorry bastard! You take this damned d'heshma off of me right now before I . . .” Canton kissing her stopped her tirade.

“I love you too, Sweetheart.” he replied to the femme in his arms once he broke their kiss.

Anna gave the stallion a crooked smile. “Why the hell did I ever marry you in the first place?” she mused.

“Grandma?” Willi spoke up, sounding very confused. “You were married to Canton?” she questioned.

“Grandmother?” Canton queried, looking very confused by this information. “You're Wilhelmine's grandmother?” he asked Anna.

“Oh, let me introduce you properly.” the elder femme sorceress offered up. “Canton, this is your Granddaughter, Wilhelmine Marie Delancey. Willi Marie, this is your maternal Grandfather, Canton Rexall Hill, my first husband.”

“Granddaughter?” Canton said in a very confused tone, looking back and forth between the two femmes, raising a finger as if to make a point, only to shake his head in confusion and let it drop to his side. He let go of Anna, backed up against the kitchen counter and rubbed his muzzle to clear his head. Looking at Anna again, he continued. “Wilhelmine is my, uh, your . . . Our . . . Granddaughter?” he asked to clarify the situation.

“She is Iva Marie and Erich's daughter.” Anna confirmed.

Canton smiled, then he seemed to get upset once it had sunk in for a moment or two. “Dammit!” he spat out as he looked at the two femmes further. “I kit-napped my own flesh and blood Granddaughter!!” the stallion said in a tone that sounded as if he loathed his very being at the moment while he face-pawed himself. “I can't believe that I did such a stupid, heinous thing as to kit-nap my very own granddaughter by some demon's request!!”

“You had no idea who she was!” the elder femme offered up to the stallion.

“I should have known better!!” Canton retorted, now seeming to be very upset by all of this. “I can only guess that Wilhelmine is a member of The Consortium, too. Gah! Now I'm screwed for sure once this gets back to them!”

What was going on at the moment was upsetting Willi Marie, to the point that Canton and Anna both looked at her when the dampening bands 'fell through' her arms and landed on the floor at her hooves. The young femme smiled nervously and shrugged her shoulders in embarrassment.

“Oh Great!” Canton blurted out, motioning towards the young sorceress. “By the looks of it, Wilhelmine is a Grand Mistress, too! She probably sits on the Review Board or some other board, so I know for a fact my butt is toast now!” he stated as he began to pace the floor. “Now I've really went and done it! I kit-napped my own Granddaughter, no fur bothered to tell us she was pregnant so I endangered my future Great-Grandkits . . .” He looked at Anna and blanched. “I had Rafe freeze you and who else when Wilhelmine was kit-napped?”

“Iva and my mother.” the elder femme equine offered up.

“Oh, Double-Great!” the stallion muttered. “I can never show my sorry muzzle around my family ever again . . .”

Willi Marie walked up to her grandfather and made him face her. “Grandpa, tell me why you kit-napped me in the first place,” she requested, making him look her in the muzzle.

“I am so ashamed.” the stallion stated, closing his eyes and hanging his head in shame. “My small group, The Alliance, needed some operating capital. We were approached by a Dark Agent with a simple proposition; kit-nap you and hold you here for a while as a bargaining chip in some negotiations with a group called The Foundation or something like that. We were paid generously and I liked the fact that we were to treat you with kid gloves, no harm was to come to you.”

“Well, you haven't harmed me, other than taking me from my home against my wishes.” Willi offered up.

“That's not the point.” Canton retorted. “I had our family members kit-nap you. That is wrong in itself but we were doing so for personal gain. That is very wrong and you should know that, my dear, sweet

Granddaughter.”

Wilhelmine hugged the gray stallion. “I won't bring this up with The Consortium if you don't want me to. It was all a misunderstanding, anyway.”

“Um, Willi? That might be a problem.” Anna put forth. “Bethany already knows you were kit-napped.”

Canton was almost beside himself. “This isn't going to go very good for any one of my group. I just know The Consortium will throw the book at us.”

The elder femme motioned to the table. “Why don't we just sit down and talk this out calmly, after this d'heshma is removed from around my neck.”

“I'm leaving that right where it is,” Canton retorted, shooing the femmes towards the table. “It's for my own protection at the moment. When I'm sure the situation is defused, I'll take it off, my dear.”

“Suit yourself,” Anna commented, taking a seat held for her. She looked up to see a familiar femme equine coming into the house from the back porch. “Looks like our lunch might be here?” she mused.

The honey-chestnut mare stopped once she made her way to the kitchen. “Canton, It's a good thing I trusted my intuition and picked up a few extra burgers and orders of fries.” she said while she unloaded an arm-load of bags onto the table.

“You did good, Amber.” he replied. “Oh, I would like to introduce you to our guest properly. Amber, this is Wilhelmine Marie Delancey, my Granddaughter. Wilhelmine, this is your Great-Aunt Amber Lee Hill, Tank's wife.”

Amber gasped. “Your Granddaughter?” she asked carefully. “We grabbed a family member? Oh No . . .”

He nodded in return. “Amber, I am so ashamed. Maybe I can take the heat for all of us and . . .” His sister-in-law interrupted his train of thought.

“Canton, let's sit down and eat first before we decide what to do.” she offered up. “Besides, I have a new family member to get to know.”