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## **“Redemption”**

By Kellan Meig'h

### **Epilogue 3 - “Truth On A Quiet Street In De Pere, Wisconsin”**

The deep-hued melanistic tigress woke up, her sleep for the night ended by the neighbor's kalis barking at some perceived intrusion upon their territory. Looking at the clock on her night stand, it was almost seven in the morning. A Saturday morning.

She sat up on the edge of the bed and stretched, as only a feline could do. Rubbing her face to wake up further, she stood and stretched a second time to her full length for good measure. Looking at her naked white accented black and smoke gray figure in the mirrored closet doors, she shook her head. How had she let those last twenty pounds sneak up on her? Patting her slight paunch, she knew that she needed to get back into the gym to shape up again.

Her husband stirred, probably awakened when she got up from the bed. The copper-red chestnut stallion stretched a bit, then rolled over to face his mate.

“Angie, what time is it?” he mumbled, blinking his eyes to clear them.

“Um, seven on the nose.” she replied.

“What in blazes are those crazy kalis barking at?” he questioned, putting his wife's pillow over his eyes to shield them from the morning light.

“I don't know,” she offered, looking out the window to see if a khat was sitting on the fence, taunting the poor, dumb creatures next door. She turned to see if her hubby was listening, only to find him trying to block the light in the room with her pillow. “Thomas Alan Svensen, are you going to sleep in?” she asked as she sat back down on the edge of the bed.

"I'm getting up. No way I'm going to waste a Saturday if it's not snowing." He thought about what he had just said, then added, "It's not snowing, is it?"

"No, blue skies this morning but it looks very cold. There's a thick frost where the snow had melted yesterday." Angie stood again, picked up her house robe and put it on. "We really need to get that window fur back out here. Yesterday, I noticed that the window over the kitchen sink has one panel that must not be sealed correctly. It's frosted up in between the panes."

"That should be under warranty so I'll call him on Monday." Tom offered up. He pushed back the covers and stood, all seven feet worth of muscular stallion. Stretching out, he put his paws above his head and bowed his back, causing muscles to stand out in stark relief against his orange-red coat.

"Sore this morning?" the tigress asked.

"New undercover squad car." the copper-colored one replied. "It's one of those new Ford Fairlane Police Interceptor models. It's not as big as the Crown Vic I gave up."

"Sorry, Hon."

"Naw, it's no big deal, I'll survive. Vehicle Maintenance is supposed to remount the front buckets back two inches or so. Actually, every fur's squad car is getting the same treatment." The stallion put on some lounging pants, kissed his mate and headed downstairs to retrieve his morning newspaper.

###

Angie had slipped on some sweats and followed her hubby downstairs so she could fix him some breakfast. Tom had offered up his culinary services but she didn't want to endure his infamous jalapeño pancakes this morning. As she was beginning to put together some low-carb waffle batter, she noticed her neighbor, Miriam Stevens, headed toward their back door.

"Come in," Angie greeted her neighbor as she opened the door for the femme equine. "I've just started to make waffles for Thomas. Hungry?"

"Thank you no, Angela. I just made a big pan full of scrambled eggs for Frank and myself." the femme palomino-colored equine replied. "What I came over for was to return your last novel to you. I proofed it carefully so you can have that friend of yours . . . Kellan, is it? He can post it for you."

"So, what did you think of 'Redemption' as a whole?" the tigress asked as she went back to her work.

"Well, I hate to say it, but it sounds like this is the last story of the series." Miriam offered up as she sat down at the breakfast bar, playing idly with the USB Thumb Drive in her possession. Taking a cup of coffee offered after she had sat down at the breakfast bar, she continued. "It's just amazing, how you described places in Orange County, California that I know you've never been to in the what, the last twelve years that I've known you." She sipped her coffee, then added a bit of creamer. "And this 'Aslaug' character! She is just the total opposite of you. Tell me, is she your alter-ego?"

"No, she's based upon a very close, dear friend." Angie replied. She put a bit of batter in the waffle iron to see if it was hot enough, then poured herself a cup of coffee. The iron seemed ready to go, so she scouted out her measuring cup to make the 'perfect' waffles with. "You know, the next time Joan Elfsborg comes to visit, I'll have you over to meet her. I really think you would like her."

"I dunno, Angela. She sounds too rough-edged to me."

"Oh come on, Miriam. I think you two would get along famously." Picking up her cigarettes and lighter, Angela motioned to the side door.

"I thought you were giving those up?" the equine questioned.

"Meh. I know I should quit because it's a bad habit. I smoked back when Thomas and I were first married and I did quit for him and my oldest son but things got just too stressful about twelve years ago, right before we moved into this house. I took up the habit again, hoping it was just temporary. So much for that."

"It took me years to break the habit." Miriam admitted. "When I worked for Lockheed-Martin up in Rosemont, my work area was on the other side of the building from the smoking area. Took almost my entire break to get there and back. I quit smoking because it just wasn't worth it. That was sixteen years and two husbands ago."

"Well, I'm glad that you found Frank." Angie put forth. She lit her smoke, took a deep drag, then continued. "I was afraid that after your second husband Donnel Hunt died in Desert Station Keeper, you were going to have a nervous breakdown."

"It was close." the mare admitted. "Then this Frank Stevens came along, right out of the blue. Gah, he's so energetic, he lifted my spirits and made me smile again." Miriam got a very far-off look on her muzzle, then continued. "Who would ever think that I would marry a lion? Not me, anyway."

"He makes you so complete." the tigress offered up. "Come on, it's too cold to stand around out here and gab." she suggested. Stubbing out her smoke in the ashtray she kept convenient on the side porch, she let them back inside.

"So, what are you doing today?" the femme equine asked as she sat down at the breakfast bar again.

"I'm going up to Dick's Sporting Goods in Green Bay this morning. I need a new pair of cold weather boots." the feline replied. "I just hope they have some Sorrel pac boots left in femme's size seven."

"I need to get a new pair of mittens, Angie. Would it be okay if I tag along?"

"Sure, as long as you won't be scared by my driving. Thomas says he would have to give me a ticket for unsafe driving in the snow if he were to spot me while on duty."

"I should be okay with your driving, since Frank can't drive worth beans in the snow, even though he's from here. I'll be ready to go when you are." The mare thought for a minute, then added, "While we're out that way, that clothing store in that strip mall on Shawano Avenue has all of their jeans on sale, half off."

"You're talking about Marcie's?"

"I know you like the pants selection there." Miriam thought for a moment while she sipped her drink, watching the tigress make waffles. "Angie, where did you come up with that idea of hyoo-mans, anyway? It's a weird thought that creatures, sentient beings, could have evolved from orangutans, gorillas and chimpanzees. And no hair on their body? That would be really weird."

“I know some furs have allowed themselves to be fully shaved, but I think that's just a fetish thing.” the striped femme allowed.

“I did it on a dare in college. Everything except my mane, tail and eyebrows.” the mare admitted. “It was early spring and I nearly froze to death! I just couldn't get on enough clothing to stay warm!”

“Wow, I would have never guessed you for being that reckless as a young adult.” Angie smiled at her neighbor, then continued. “Sometimes, I would get my fur shortened. Not a lot, just enough that it would make me feel cooler in the summer.”

“That is not like a full shave job.” Miriam pointed out.

“I suppose not.” the tigress agreed. “Listen, you're sure you won't have a waffle? They're low-carb because Thomas and I are both watching our weight.”

“Not this morning Angela. I need to go get ready to go into town with you.”

“Okay, I'll call your cell phone when I'm ready.”

###

Thomas smiled from the aromas wafting about as he came into the kitchen, dressed in 'Saturday winter outdoors casual'; flannel-lined jeans, flannel shirt with a thermal undershirt and a pair of insulated leather & rubber pac style hoof-boots. He was walking kind of funny which made the tigress note that one boot was missing the laces.

“Break another lace?” she asked, instinctively reaching for the drawer where they kept the spare shoe laces.

“Yeah, did it again.” the stallion replied. “You know, I guess I must be using my hooves to help lever the wood up onto my chopping block. That's the only thing I can think of that would cause the laces to fail right here,” he added, pointing out the exact spot where the laces always broke on him.

“Oh, this is the last pair,” Angie commented, giving her husband the laces so he could fix his boots. “Can re-lacing your boots wait until after breakfast? Your waffles are almost ready.” she informed him.

“Anything can wait for a plate full of authentic Angela Marie Svensen's home-made waffles.” he stated. “Hmm, guess I'll have to go up to Dick's Sporting Goods and pick up some laces sometime today.”

“I'm going there this morning so I can get you several pairs of those laces that have the Kevlar filaments in them.” the femme feline offered up.

Tom picked up the USB stick and looked at the sticker on it. “Is this 'Redemption?’” he asked.

“Yeah, Miriam just finished proofing it for me.”

“Mind if I read it before you have Kellan post it?”

“Sure, go ahead.” She smiled at him, then continued. “'Redemption' is the last one in the set, in case

you're wondering. I've had a new story poking around in my head, about humans and aliens with a lot of family values mixed in."

"You mean aliens and mythical creatures descended from primates, right?" His serious look that he was giving her dissolved into a smile. "I know whatever you decide to write, it will be good."

"I'm glad you think so." Angie replied. "Now quit jabbering and come fix your waffles, they're hot off the griddle."

Thomas set to work buttering his waffles and adding a bit of no-sugar syrup to them. Placing a few strawberry slices on top, he fixed a cup of coffee and sat down with his mate at the table.

"So, this new story. Anything you want to share?" the stallion asked.

"Not yet." the tigress replied.

"Are we going to be in it, too?"

"As humans, I think. A minor role." Angie let him know. "That's all I'm going to tell you, though."

Thomas smiled, nodded to himself and continued to enjoy his breakfast.

###

Frank Stevens looked up from his paper, listening to the sounds coming from somewhere outside the back of his house. Smiling, the lion put down his tabloid and went to the kitchen. Confirming what he thought as he peered through his kitchen window, he poured up two cups of coffee, slipped on his boots, put his winter coat on and headed outdoors. He used his pinky finger to trip the latch to the gate in his side fence, then approached the stallion in the next yard that was chopping wood.

"Morning, Thomas." Frank greeted his neighbor. "Cup of coffee?"

"Thanks, friend." the tall one offered up as he took the steaming mug offered. "Cold enough for you?" he added.

"Nothing like De Pere, Wisconsin in the winter, eh? It's not bad, though. Just a balmy ten degrees above zero." the felid came back. "So, can you feel our hard-earned money being spent at an alarming rate?"

"With Angie and Miriam together on a Saturday, our credit cards must be on fire by now."

"Yeah, I think you're right." Frank commented. "How did that Council Tool Velvicut axe work out for you after you sharpened it?"

Thomas nodded. "It handles nicely." the stallion admitted. "Just think; I almost took it back before I gave the edge a working over. Good eye, Frank."

"I thought the angles on the edge looked wrong." the leonid offered up. "My uncle's family were pretty serious participants in those lumberjack games that were so popular a few decades back. You know, they used seven pound axes in competition. I think yours is only a four pounder."

“I could use a bit more axe weight myself. Sure would help with splitting down the hardwood, anyway,” The stallion mused, pulling up a section of elm for Frank to sit down on. He then sat down on his chopping block and continued. “Frank, did Miriam ever go on this 'I think I'm overweight' kick?”

“Not in the last eight years we've been together. Why do you ask? Is Angie doing that?”

Tom nodded. “She thinks she's around twenty pounds overweight.” He sipped his beverage, then continued. “She's just slightly round below the waist, like any femme her age is. She's only one-forty-five, exactly what she weighed when we got married.”

“If you don't mind me saying so, Angie looks just as good as she ever did in high school.”

“I knew you would say that.” Tom commented. “I guess I need to indulge her and allow her to start working out at the gym.”

“Maybe we should join her.” the felid stated. “I've got a little paunch going on myself. Too much time behind a desk after that last promotion.”

“Hey, you're out in the street almost as much as I am.” the stallion pointed out.

“You're right, I am.” Frank sipped his drink, then asked a question. “So, how are those Fairlane Police Interceptors? I heard I'm losing my Dodge Charger. Too old with too many miles, so says the fur in charge of the motor pool.”

“They're not bad, not bad at all.” Tom replied. “You'll want the bucket seats moved back, though.”

“Is it that tight?”

“If I still had to wear a uniform, yes.” the stallion confirmed. “I barely fit right now, only if I scoot my waist holster from the back and around to my hip.”

“Gah, I hope I'll like my new ride.”

“You will, Frank. At least it's still a rear-wheel drive and V8 powered.” Tom offered up. “Say, why don't you two come over for dinner tonight, after the game. I'll grill you a Porterhouse steak and Angie is making a big vegetable lasagna. There will be plenty for you and your wife.”

“We will take you up on that.” the lion confirmed as he stood up and took the empty cup from his friend. “Well, I'm going to go home and watch Green Bay utterly destroy the Ravens.”

“John Jr. says he's sure they will kick some ass today.”

“You're going to watch it, too?”

“You couldn't stop me.” Thomas stated. “This is John Conrad's first season as Head Coach of the Packers. Eleven and zero with one game left before the playoffs. This game. The team says this one is for him.”

“Tell him I wish him luck.”

“Will do, Frank.”

“Catch you later.”

Thomas watched his neighbor go back inside his home so he looked at his watch. Making a calculation, the stallion knew he had about another hour to chop wood before the pre-game show started. Plenty of time for a quarter-cord of wood.

###

Angie tried on a size seven Sorrel Classic Pac with her standard Thorlo cold weather socks, finding it to be just a bit snug on her foot. “*The company must be making them in a different factory,*” she thought to herself. The salesfur had brought her some size seven and a half boots when he had brought the sevens, so maybe this was normal now. Slipping on the larger pair and lacing them up, the fit was perfect.

“You always buy the Classic Pac boots,” Miriam observed, looking at the insulated pac-style hoof-boots while she waited.

“Creature of habit.” the tigress retorted. “Miriam, do you think I look overweight?” Angela asked while she re-laced the boots just a bit tighter.

“I envy your figure.” the equine replied. “I think you look just right.”

“I’m twenty pounds heavier than I was twelve years ago.” the femme feline admitted.

“Angela, I have to tell you that I’m very envious of your figure. I need to lose about thirty pounds myself.”

“Well, I looked better at one-twenty-five.” the tigress admitted. “It’s Joan who’s aged very well. How she keeps that figure of hers, I’ll never know.”

The equine touched her friend on the shoulder. “Angie, you look great. Is there something more to this that you might want to talk about?” she asked.

“Well, maybe tonight, after the game.” she replied. “You and Frank **are** coming over for dinner, right?”

“Yeah, you know we will be there.”

“Listen, you’re in for a treat.” the white tigress offered up. “John Conrad and his wife are coming over for dinner and Joan called, saying she might drop by, too.”

“So, I’ll finally get to meet this Joan and her doppelgänger Aslaug that you’ve wrote so much about.”

“Miriam, you will like her.” Angela stated. She then looked at her watch and nodded. “Well, we had better get our rears in gear. The game starts in an hour.”

“I don’t want to miss this one.” the femme equine offered up. “I have money riding on this game.”

###

That evening, with the Green Bay Packers now 12 – 0 for the season and heading into the playoffs, Angie was checking on the vegetable lasagna's progress while Thomas prepared the gas barbecue grill. They had the kitchen window that overlooked the back patio open so they could talk while they worked. Tom had been on the phone so as he put it in his pocket, he gave some information to his mate.

“John Conrad is on his way.” he offered.

“Good.” Angie replied. “Any word from the filly?” she asked.

“Not yet.” the copper-colored stallion offered. “You know her, though. She will just 'show up', as usual.” Tom then turned to greet his neighbors that had joined them. “Miriam, Frank. Just let yourself in. Angie's still fussing over that lasagna.”

“Mmmm!” the femme equine put forth. “You know, I've tried to make that recipe and I fail every time. I don't know what your wife does that makes it so good.” she related to the stallion.

“She puts a pinch of goodness in it.” Tom chided, trying to suppress a smile.

“Well, I've tried that, too.” Miriam stated.

Frank had been into the house and he returned with three cold Modelo Negros for them. He opened his, took a long pull on it, then he commented on the game.

“What a game!” he stated. “And that last play. I could not believe that insane catch in the end zone!”

“Yeah, that was some catch.” Tom agreed. “That's the new stallion that they recruited from John Conrad's old stomping grounds. John Jr. went to school with his father.”

“He is good.” Miriam agreed. Before she could add to that, Angela got their attention through the window.

“Hey all! John Conrad's here and he brought a few more furs with him!” she said with an excited tone of voice.

They went inside, through the kitchen to end up in the huge family room. Miriam stopped in her tracks when she observed the furs in the room. Furs that seemed very familiar in some odd way. Angela was behind her so she stood next to the femme equine, put her arm around her neighbor and introduced her to the furs that were assembled in the room.

“Miriam, this is Torvald and Victoria Svensen,” she said, indicating the huge honey-chestnut stallion and his tigress mate, “And this is Virginia Parks and her husband John Parks, Senior,” she continued, pointing out the two tigers, one of them a white tigress. “And this is John Conrad Svensen, his wife Cathy and their kits, John Conrad the Third and William Arend,” indicating the younger tiger, his cougar mate and their two little tiger/cougar mix young ones. “Everyone, this is Miriam Stevens, my neighbor. She's Frank's wife.”

Miriam turned to Angela, totally gobsmacked. She had observed the distinct resemblance between all three femme tigers. “Angie, what's going on here? Those stories, those weren't just an idea from your fertile imagination?”

“Not from my imagination.” The melanistic tigress went to stand with her 'sisters', allowing her friend to see that besides coloration, they were identical. The two stallions stood next to one another, showing that they, too were twins in the literal, besides coat. Angie then spoke up again.

“Miriam, you remember that we moved in here about twelve years ago. That's because there were literally too many of us, due to a major accident at the end of a job we took to raise some operating capital for Redemption Ranch.”

“That ranch is real?” the equine femme asked.

“Look it up on the Internet, if you want.” Torvald stated. He then gave Miriam a business card. He then walked over to greet Frank. “Hey, good to see you again.” he said as he hugged the lion.

“Good to see you again, too.” the felid replied. “Have you heard from Walt? I was hoping that he would bring his family out for Christmas this year.”

“Um, Frank,” Miriam began, hesitantly. “Frank, is there something that you might want to tell me?”

“Yeah, maybe I should.” he replied. “I, um . . . I used to be known as Frank Hellyer, a tiger. Tor and Vicki had to find a place for me to exist peacefully, since I couldn't go home to my parents. Too many of their friends and neighbors would have questioned my reappearance. Well, Tom told Tor about your moping around after Donnel died so we all thought this might work out. I'm glad it did, since I'm so hopelessly in love with you.”

Miriam slowly sat down in a chair, her mind blown. “I . . . I need a stiff drink.” she said softly.

There had been a knock at the door earlier, so Angie had went to answer it. Knowing her neighbor would need it, she came back with a bottle of Jim Beam and a glass. With her was the latest visitor that the young Svensen kits had surrounded, giving that fur hugs. The little ones then led the visitor over to Miriam, who was setting down her glass after a knocking back a generous shot of whiskey. Miriam looked up to see a femme equine, platinum blond in coloration with a nasty scar across her muzzle.

“Hello.” the blond femme bid. “I'm sometimes referred to as Joan Elfsborg or Coach Larsen but those are just my cover names. My true name is Aslaug Larsdatter. Nice to finally meet you, Miriam Stevens, a friend of my friends.”

Miriam promptly fainted.

###

Miriam could hear voices, some that seem to be calling her name. One voice, one that she was not familiar with, seemed closest. It was a femme's alto voice, one with a German accent to it. She opened her eyes to see a palomino-colored femme equine looking back at her with genuine concern.

“Miriam? Can you hear me?” the femme asked.

“Uh, yes, I can.” Miriam replied. “Who are you?” she asked.

“I'm an extended member of the family, Wilhelmine Delancey.” the taller femme explained.

“From the stories . . .” The Stevens femme was mulling this over. “You’re a sorceress.” she blurted out.

“Yes, I am.” Willi agreed. “The called me when you didn’t come around right away. How do you feel?”

“I’m a little shaky.” she admitted.

“That’s understandable.” the sorceress agreed. “Here, let me help you to sit up.” That was when Miriam realized she was on one of the family room couches. Once sitting again, she looked around. It was not a dream, the gathered furs were the ones that she had just met. Wilhelmine spoke up again, getting her attention.

“Angela should have briefed you first.” she stated. “It was not the best way for you to meet everyone, with no warning beforepaw.”

Victoria sat down next to the still-recovering femme. “Miriam, we’re all sorry we shocked you like this. Tor and I were talking with Frank and we decided that we want you and Frank to come out to the ranch and celebrate Christmas with us this year.” She then added this snippet. “Well, looks like you’re a part of our family now.”

Miriam looked around the room at the furs assembled. Giving some thought to it, maybe this will be a new adventure for her. An adventure with a bunch of nice furs that she felt like she already knew. There was something she wanted answers to, however.

“Angela, those novels. If they are true, why did you write them?” she wanted to know. “And I want to know this, too. Were all of your adventures really that bloody?”

The dark tigress shrugged her shoulders. “Well, it was our idea, collectively. Victoria, Virginia and I wrote them down, our closest recollections of our lives in service to the Gods. I took point fur and pulled the stories together and our friend that we rescued, Kellan, posted them under his name. It was our hopes that other Agents would read these writings and realize they were true and contact us. We have been contacted as of late by furs, Agents, wanting out because of the stories.”

“Were they really that bloody, though?” Miriam asked again.

The white tigress chimed in. “We toned them down quite a bit. We didn’t think that they would be believable if we really told how bloody the incidents actually were.” Virginia admitted. That thought made Miriam just a bit queasy.

###

That night, after a wonderful, filling dinner and a long evening of visiting, Miriam lay in her bed, listening to her beloved hubby snore softly while she replayed the events of the day. It had started off as normal as could be and ended on the strangest note she could think of. She still wondered what she did look like when she opened the back door to the Svensen’s home to make a quick trip next door.

It was her intention to get that jug of white lightning her grandfather had brought to her from his home in Kentucky. Miriam, however was surprised by Varghöss, sitting on Angie’s back porch. It had not dawned on her that the huge wolf even existed. At least he had only licked her and slobbered on her, nothing more before Aslaug had shown up to call off her beast.

The equine femme looked over at her nightstand to see that carving that Aslaug had given her. It was a paw-carving of a femme equine and a male felid, standing side by side. The detail, while not very intricate, had given the piece the character that made it unique. Obviously it was meant for her and her hubby because of the subject matter presented.

Now she understood her neighbor's unexplained absences. They were off taking care of business of some sort. And somehow it made her feel safe, just to live next door to the Svensens and to be their friend. The femme equine also looked forward to spending Christmas at Redemption Ranch. She just knew it would be a great adventure.

There was one thing that bothered her about the whole thing. Angie had said “Redemption” was the last story arc. There was one more, Miriam mused. The story that would explain how Tom and Angie came to be. Somehow, her neighbor didn't say yes or no to the idea when she presented it.

###

The others had went either to their respective homes or in the case of John and Virginia, their temporary accommodations at The younger tiger's domicile. Tom and Angie were still visiting with Tor and Vicki, discussing the evening over some paw-made mead and cinnamon bread.

“Miriam seems real nice.” Victoria brought up. “She did ask me if we were going to write the story about the job and the accident that occurred. What do you think, Sis?”

“I don't know.” the dark tigress replied. “It's been almost thirteen years, now and I still get the willies just thinking about it. We were so close to buying the farm several times.”

“I'll second that.” Tom offered up. “That was one messed up job all the way around. Totally jacked up from start to finish.”

“I think we all agree on that, Brother.” Torvald stated. “But, Miriam has a point. It did happen so maybe we should put the story together.”

The foursome discussed the logistics of the story at length, deciding on the point in time that the story would originate and just how much of that job to include. The mead flowed freely, followed by some ice-cold Modelo Negro to wash it down with. Eventually, the two stallions wound down. Or became inebriated, whichever way it was looked at. That point was reached when Tom motioned for Tor to get up and do a chest bump.

“I've got it,” the honey-chestnut equine stated as he staggered to his hooves. Tom made it to a vertical position and the two of them moved the coffee table out of the way to make more room. Victoria looked at her sister and shrugged, knowing what was soon to expire. Angela returned that shrug, nodding in understanding. This most likely would not end well.

The males stood chest to chest, then they stepped backwards three paces, very carefully. They then went full speed ahead, taking a little leap at the end. They collided in mid-air, grabbing one another for support as they came down. Amazingly, they stayed upright.

“I've had enough.” Tor put forth. “You'll have to help me find my bed.” he stated.

“You're drunk.” Tom suggested.

“No more than you are.” the lighter-hued stallion retorted while he was being guided to the stairs.

“Watch the steps.” the copper one slurred just a bit.

“I got it.”

“That's not a step.”

“Is so.” Tor offered up.

“Not a step. We're two feet from the stairs.”

“I was practicing.”

“You're loaded.” Tom pointed out.

“No, we're loaded.”

“You're the one practicing the stairs.”

“What stairs?” Tor asked, right before a stumbling sound was heard. “Oh, those stairs.”

“Yeah, those stairs. You are drunker than I am, Tor.”

“Am not.”

“Are so.”

While the males made their way upstairs, Victoria went to the kitchen with Angie and helped her to put together a hangover remedy for their stallions. They were sure it would be needed in the morning. While they worked, the ruddy tigress nudged her sister to get her attention.

“So, we put the whole thing in the story?”

“Yeah, why not?” Angie shot back.

“Okay, then. We start with the day Gytha went through the books for us.” Vicki suggested.

“Yeah, that's the best place to start.” Angie concurred.

They poured up some of the remedy, one of Jenna's recipes, into a pair of carafes for transport. Each one taking a carafe and two mugs, they went upstairs to finish putting their drunken hubbies to bed.

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Once the lights had been turned out, the others had drifted off to sleep while Angela found slumber to be evading her at the moment. Laying there in her bed, her hubby's arm draped across her waist, she began to look back at their lives together. Had it been that long ago that her stallion had approached her, bringing Conrad's stuffed kali back to them? What a long, strange road it has been, she mused. A long, strange road.