

*The characters Torvald Arend 'Tor' Svensen, Victoria Angela 'Vicki D'nan' (nee Connell) Svensen, Conrad & Cathryn 'Cathy' (nee Hunter) Svensen, Brett & Dana Lynn (nee Svensen) Kashnikov,, Roger, Gytha Louise (nee Svensen), Roger Jr. & Heather Delancey, Axel Torvald & Madelyn Svensen, Valerie Connell, Joseph & Harriet Connell, Barbara Caine, Richard & Wilhelmine Marie (nee Kurzweil) Delancey,, James William & Nancy Kurzweil, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito<sup>®</sup>, Leonard's Restaurant<sup>®</sup> and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission. Any resemblance to any fur or person, either living or dead is purely coincidental.*

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## **“A Loss Of Rights”**

By Kellan Meig'h

### Chapter 13 (or twelve plus one if you're superstitious)

The room was becoming light, the sun beginning to make its way through the window. The berserker yawned, sitting up on the edge of the bed and stretching out his back and arms. This was the part that he hated about missions on primitive planets; hard, uncomfortable bedding. Joe was still asleep, snoring softly, one arm hanging off his bed. Axel had gotten up earlier, dressed and set out in search of something to eat. His metabolism hadn't slowed down just yet so he was still eating just like a teenager. Torvald smiled, remembering that he had done that himself as a young fur.

Last night, Torvald had sat with the innkeeper, making a map of sorts of the surrounding area. This 'organized' civilization proper on this planet was not young, being over two thousand years old. Even though it was an old civilization, technology was the one thing that was not advancing fast on this world. He also wondered if time on this world was still running at an incongruous speed. It didn't seem possible this was the same planet they were marooned on with Kellan and Jim because according to what he had found out, his mate had been here about twenty four years. She had actually been missing for only eight of his years but the correlation didn't match well. Maybe the speed of time was yoyo-ing up and down wildly on this planet. The only thing he was sure of was this was all beginning to give him a headache.

“Good morning, Dad,” Axel greeted his father as he came back into their room and put some purple-skinned apples on a table. “I found these at a vendor's cart across the road. It's kind of a farmer's market thing going on over there.” Torvald picked one up and smelled it, the aroma being somewhere between an apple and a plum, with a spice note to it. He sliced it open to reveal a creamy white flesh and the fact that it had only two rather large seeds in it.

“There is a red apple that's almost the same inside that grows here,” the elder equine pointed out as he tasted the fruit, nodding to indicate the delicious flavors he enjoyed. “Kellan used some of them to make a cooked dessert with a fresh cinnamon type spice for us.”

“Dad, there's something you said last night that's been bothering me,” Axel said with a serious look on his muzzle. “You said Mom has been here twenty-four years. I was thinking, she may have changed a lot since we last saw her. She may not even know us when we find her.”

“Yeah, I have thought of that myself.” the huge fur replied. It was something he had given much

thought to. She had been taken from them, he was sure, and the thought that the being or beings responsible might have wiped her mind in the process kept bothering him. He knew if she was aware of it, she could have summoned for help a long time ago. Since she hadn't done so, the possibility of her mind being wiped was a very good one.

“Let me try one of those,” Joe asked, standing up slowly and stretching out his body. The coyote was looking pretty rough this morning from sleeping on the simple bed provided him. “I'm ready for breakfast if you two are,” he stated, taking a bite of his apple, smiling slightly as he enjoyed the flavors too. “So, tell me what you learned last night, Tor. I'm sorry I fell asleep last night before you came back up to our room.” The huge equine nodded, getting out the map he had drawn.

“We're here and the castle is here,” he began, showing Joe and Axel the route they would travel. “She has a prisoner with her that's on foot, so that should allow us to catch up to her by tomorrow morning sometime.” Axel nodded, wishing the map would show actual distances. “There are a few villages between us and the castle and another inn, ran by this innkeeper's brother.”

“Can we get a discount from him?” Joe asked, giving the huge warrior a sly smile.

“Very funny, Joe. I don't think so.”

“Dad, Joe, we had better go down for breakfast. The innkeeper said the food would be prepared shortly when I was down there earlier.” The young equine finished his apple and stood up, preparing to go to breakfast.

“OK, Joe and I will meet you downstairs.” He patted his son on the shoulder and began dressing while the young equine went to get them a table. While they dressed, the canid let his partner know his thoughts.

“Tor, I heard what you and Axel were talking about earlier, the possibility of Victoria not knowing you.” he stated. “I had thought about that too but I kept putting that thought in the back of my mind. Maybe she will still know you. Let's pray she does.”

“Yeah, I still have high hopes that she will know us, my warrior friend. That's why I want to catch up to her before we get to the castle, so we can get things ironed out before we meet with whatever royalty they have here.” Torvald was sure this was for the best; no need to get the royalty involved in their personal matters.

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Sir Marc was sitting on a log, watching his commander closely. After her recent emotional outburst, her squire along with him and Sir Jac had kept a close eye on her. They felt like they owed her that much, since she had spoke on their behalf to be inducted into the King's Royal Guard. In a way, she was like a mother to them, making sure they were eating properly and constantly commenting about their appearance when it was lacking.

Morri sat down next to Sir Jac, still nibbling on his dried meat. The squire noted that Miss Vicki was sitting by herself, food in hand but she hadn't taken a bite if it yet.

“Squire Morri, I worry that our commander is becoming mentally upset over her upcoming joining to

Sir Varn.” The badger, her next in command after the canid, pointed out. Morri nodded, agreeing with him only with reservations.

“If her intended mate indeed finds her, that will all change for the worse, I fear.” Sir Jac looked at him strangely while the squire elaborated. “She loves Sir Varn but I fear she loves this stallion greater. I am afraid there might be a confrontation between them for her affections.”

“I think you might be correct in that assumption, Squire. There may be a confrontation.”

They watched as Miss D'nan got up and wandered over to their prisoner, handing him her breakfast meat. She then walked over to the edge of the clearing, pulling her pendant from her tunic. They watched on as she held it in her hands and began praying, her head bowed, so quiet they couldn't hear her words. She prayed for just a few moments, then dropped to her knees, crying softly.

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Torvald stopped eating, listening carefully to the sounds around him. The canid with him at the table noted this, taking stock of what was going on around them in the room. Axel stopped in mid-bite, setting his knife back on the plate, listening to what he heard in his ears.

“Dad, that was Mom, wasn't it?” he asked carefully, not really sure or not since it had been a long time since he had heard her voice.

“I think that was her, praying,” the elder stallion replied, waiting to see if he heard her again.

“What did she say?” Joe asked, curious as to what the tigress would have been praying about. “Tor, could you hear what she said?”

“Yeah, I did,” the huge one replied. “She was praying I would find her soon.” He then bowed his head and grabbed Axel's paw before he said a prayer to her, hoping she could hear him;

*“Victoria, I have heard your prayer and I want you to know, we are trying to find you. We know roughly where you are and we will make all haste in reaching you.”*

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“Miss D'nan, are you still upset?” Sir Marc asked, hoping that her mind had been settled a bit by now. She had cried for quite some time this morning before ordering them to continue to move along towards the keep.

“Sir Marc, I am honored that you are concerned about my mental health,” she replied, stopping her mount so they could converse easier. “I was ...” She had to stop and compose her thoughts. “I said a prayer for my mate, my stallion, to find me.” The canid nodded, holding his mount close to hers. “I then heard him tell me he was coming.”

“Miss Vicki, do you wish to wait here for him to find you?” her next-in-command asked, still concerned for her mental well-being.

“No, we are traveling slowly, Sir Marc. He will catch up to us soon. I feel it in my heart.” She smiled a

wistful smile at her warrior, trying not show any weakness to him.

She could feel her stallion's closeness to her as she began riding again, trying desperately to hold herself together.

It had been a long time since she had been held in his arms and she was afraid he would no longer know her by appearance alone. This land had left an imprint on her; she had felt it change her, mold her into the female warrior that she had become. Vicki looked down at her pads on her hands; they were tough from a life of riding and fighting for the crown. She was very sure her claws weren't normally kept this long but for her own defense she had let them get long and sharp over time. A softwood scratching post mounted to the wall in her bedroom gave her a chance to both sharpen her claws and relieve her stress when she needed to.

And what of her family, if she indeed had a family? Would they recognize her and more importantly, would she recognize them? Twenty-four years is a long time to be away from her family and many things would have changed by now. The tigress thought of her parents, the ones that gave rise to her. Would she recognize them, would they know she was their daughter? Would they still be alive?

Watching the road ahead, she tried to put these thoughts out of her head but they continued to haunt her as she made her way back to the keep and her imminent meeting with Sir Varn. She had thought over in her mind what she would tell him about her mate, this tall, blond stallion, but the words wouldn't come to her.

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“Drop your weapon and step closer to me, highwayman,” the huge fur said firmly, shaking his head. “What makes your kind feel we are just unarmed commoners traveling this road?” he asked, disgusted with the situation. Axel had a bead drawn on the one in the brush that had a pistol in hand while Joe had the archer in the tree covered. Torvald had both pistols trained on the blond-haired man standing in the road in front of him that had just discarded his bow at the huge equine's insistence.

“You! In the tree! Get down here before I shoot you out of that branch!” Joe warned loudly, keeping a bead on the archer as he climbed down slowly from his vantage point. The young fur motioned for the pistoleer to join his compadre that had extracted himself from the tree, getting his other pistol in paw to reinforce his threat to shoot him. The one that Torvald had asked to get closer to him stopped just feet away from him, awaiting further orders.

“You shot me with your bow, now you'll help get your arrow out of my leg, please.” Torvald informed him, motioning at the shaft sticking from his thigh.

“My lord, are you sure you wish me to do that?” the man asked, his hands shaking slightly from fright. The stallion had his pistol right in his face, hammer back and the look on Torvald's face was a look of doom for the flaxen-haired man.

“Yes, I do wish you to do that. It hurts like hell just in case you might want to know.” He motioned again, giving the man a cross look. “Push the shaft through my leg 'till the point comes through, break off the fletching and pull it on through. Do it now before I end your life.”

“Yes, my lord,” he said in a shaky voice, preparing himself to do this deed. “You might wish to get a

bandage ready, Sir Giant. This might bleed badly.” The huge fur cut a place open on his leggings with his dagger that had been donated by the last assailant, large enough for the arrow to come through for the man.

“Do not worry about me, highwayman, worry for your own life if you do this wrong.” The huge fur's companions kept the other two at bay while the third one pushed on the arrow shaft strongly, causing the arrow tip to come out the other side of Torvald's leg. He broke off the fletching, brushing off any splinters that were present, gritted his teeth and pulled the arrow from Tor's leg. The man looked on in amazement as the injury healed over in just moments.

“You are not bleeding ...” the man stated, stepping back a few steps. “I had heard Miss D'nan was like this but I did not believe the tales.”

“What have you heard about Miss D'nan?” Torvald asked, curious to hear what had been rumored about his mate. The man looked up at him, spotting his pendant around his neck.

“You wear her symbol, my lord,” he stated, his voice wavering in fear. “Are you from her land?” he asked, swallowing hard from fright.

“I *am* from her land, bandit. Now tell me what you have heard about her!” the elder equine spat out tersely.

“I had heard that she was immortal, that she had survived having a sword ran through her more than once. Nothing can kill her, as the tales go.”

“Do you three have names?” Axel asked, keeping an eye on them closely.

“I am Eric, that is my twin brother, Nedam,” the blond haired man said, indicating the shorter pistoleer, “And that is my elder brother Jimmi,” he stated, pointing at the archer. “Alas, we turned to thievery when the crown took our farm for taxes. We do not seem to be good at it, I am afraid.”

“Do you have horses?” Joe asked, hoping they could ride with them as they tried to catch Torvald's mate. He was fairly sure the huge fur would take them into custody, at any rate.

“We have horses tied up in the woods, that direction,” Eric replied, knowing what might just happen next.

“Let's you and I retrieve them,” Torvald suggested, getting off his mount. “Jeff, stand right here until I come back,” he said in English to the horse, the Frisian nodding his head to acknowledge the command. He marched Eric off into the woods which provoked a question from Jimmi.

“He does not intend to murder our brother once out of sight?” the elder brother asked, concerned for his sibling's life.

“No, we will not kill your brother unless he provokes us to.” Axel replied. This seemed to settle the man's mind a bit. “I believe my father will be taking you to the castle to be prosecuted.”

“In that case, kill me now and end it.” Nedam said glumly. “We will hang for our crimes otherwise.”

“Maybe my father can ask for lenience from the crown in your behalf. You might work off your sentences instead of hanging by your necks.” Axel suggested.

His father and the unlucky highwayman came back into view with the other men's horses, the elder equine taking not too much time at all to tie their wrists securely and put a rope around each horse's neck for them to hang onto while the horses were being led. Mounting Jeff, Torvald motioned for them to get back underway.

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In a meadow not too far south of the earthly trio's location, the wind kicked up momentarily, causing the birds in the trees to scatter. There was a loud electrical crackling noise followed by a few small bolts of lightning striking the ground from a cloudless sky. After a few moments more, a naked, red-headed female and a buckskin mare horse shimmered into view. The female got down on one knee, scanning their surroundings for assailants. She made a quick hand signal to the horse, telling her to be quiet. The female then listened closely to the wind to make sure they were quite alone.

“Dammit! Where's our bag at this time?” the female spat out, slowly standing and scanning about the area. The horse took a few steps forward, stumbled momentarily and then tossed her mane.

“It's in that tree, right over there,” the horse pointed out with her muzzle, walking up next to the female. She pawed at the grass a few times with her front hooves, shaking her head in disgust. “Hilda, this sucks.”

“What do you mean, 'this sucks'? I'm naked, in case you haven't noticed. No, Glenda, *this* sucks big time! I have practically no fur on my body and I don't have a tail!” the female retorted. “Why the hell did I have to be the hoo-man, anyway?” she mused, looking up at the bag that was suspended by a branch just out of reach.

“That's pronounced human, I believe, and if I remember correctly, you called dibs on the human form at the briefing.” The mare looked up into the tree, getting used to the strange vision characteristics of a horse. “So, how the hell are we going to get the bag down now, Hil? I can't just climb up there and get it for you like I normally would. I guess I'll just look around the meadow here and see if I can find a ladder for you ...”

“Just shut up, Glenda Jean McDermott! That's not funny at all!” the non-clad femme retorted as she assessed the situation. “Besides, horses on this planet can't talk anyway,” the naked female pointed out, putting her hands on her hips and scowling slightly. The female went over to the tree, looking it over carefully. She then began to carefully climb the tree, working her way up slowly to the bag in question. Once the bag was securely in her possession, she gently picked her way back down out of the tree. Hilda looked over to see Glenda sitting down on her haunches like a khat, waiting patiently.

“Glenda, honey, you don't sit down like that when you're a horse!” she informed her partner tersely, waiting until the mare stood back up. The female sat the bag on the ground and began to pull their equipment out of it, the saddle alone being bigger than the bag. “We should thank the boss for this dimensional shift bag. There's no way we would have gotten all of our stuff here any other way.”

“Um, what's with that saddle, Hil ... you're not gonna ...”

“Yes, that's what it for, Glenda. You're going to let me ...”

“Not on a bet, lady, nuh-uh. You got to be the human so I got stuck with being the horse. That's bad enough without letting you ride me like some dumb pack animal.”

“Then why have you here at all? You're supposed to be my mount so I can get around on this screwed up backwater planet.” Glenda sat back down on her haunches again, giving her partner a disgusted look.

“Well, why couldn't you have just brought a real horse to ride?” Glenda asked, giving her friend a scowl.

“Because a real horse would most likely bolt during that phase when you get disoriented, right before transport proper. I would end up with half of a horse, which is real hard to keep alive, let alone ride.” That information seemed to bother Glenda, since she had several horses of her own back on their home world.

“OK, I guess they should have let me known you were going to ride me during our briefing. I'm going to have to file a formal complaint with our superiors once we get back, you know.” the buckskin mare pointed out. “Not against you, but against our briefing staff. I should have been told why I needed tack, that's all.”

“Well, do what you have to do, but for right now, just let me get this saddle on you and we'll try to catch up to them before it gets too late.” Hilda stood with the saddle but her partner was still looking at her, shaking her head.

“You're not saddling me without a saddle blanket first, lady. Go fish.” This made the flame-haired female set the saddle down, go back to the bag again and after almost climbing inside it, Hilda finally pulled out a nondescript brown saddle blanket.

“OK, it's made to look like simple woven fibers but it has a layer of thermo-adjusting Microcushion™ inside and it's moisture wicking. Any complaints?” Hilda removed the tag from it and put the tag back in the bag.

“Naw, that blanket sounds like it should be fine.” The mare stood again, letting her partner put the blanket and saddle on her. “Hmm, remind me to get a few of these blankets for my horses when we get back home, will ya?”

“Be quiet and let me finish here,” Hilda said, cinching the saddle's girth strap. This caused Glenda to look at her crossly.

“Hey! It doesn't need to be that tight!” she pointed out. “Loosen it a bit, please?” she asked, looking at her partner with a pleading, puppy kali look.

“OK! OK! I'll loosen it just a pinch,” she replied, backing it off just a bit. She then picked up the halter, looking it over before trying to put it on her partner. Looking it over some more, she made a discovery.

“There's no bit,” she stated, giving it another looking over.

“No Duh, lady, it's a hackamore. I'm not putting up with a bunch of metal in my mouth for you to yank on.” Glenda gave her direction on how to employ it, based on her experiences back home before setting the ground rules. “Now look, here's the deal. You just set the reins over the horn of the saddle or hold them lightly for show and just tell me what you want until we're around others. Then use the reins and your heels lightly. OK?”

“Oh, All right,” the female replied, finally putting on some clothes herself. Her clothing made her appear to be dressed like a brigand of this world, armed with a pistol and a long sword in a baldric. Hilda removed a set of saddlebags from the dimensional bag, then closed up the dimensional bag and put it into one of the saddlebags. Tossing it over the back of the saddle, she then mounted the mare, getting the reins in her hands.

“Um, you do have the retrieval beacon, right?” the four-legged female asked, looking back at the small femme on her back.

“Got it right here,” Hilda replied, pulling the amulet from her tunic. “I just push these gems in the usual order and we'll be back home in just a few moments.” This seemed to reassure the mare a bit.

“OK, which way, Hil?” the mare asked, looking up at her rider and waiting for commands.

“To your left, through the trees to the road.” was the reply. Hilda readied herself, nodding she was fine to her partner.

“All right, just don't expect me to trot much with you riding on me. Gotta conserve my energy,” Glenda retorted, headed in a walk towards their destination.

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Willi Marie and her husband, Richard Delancey had come to visit Gytha and her husband, Roger. The two males were brothers, which made things confusing at times when they would explain family relationships. Willi Marie had really come over because she was concerned about Gytha's mental health since the incident at the elder Svensen's home right after Torvald, Axel and Joe left to search for Victoria.

“Well, Conrad, Cathy and Grandma Connell saw Mom too, so I wasn't imagining it,” the taller filly stated as she prepared some coffee to go with the paw made cake Willi Marie had brought. “Little Heather even said 'Gramma' a bunch of times when Mom was present. It must have been our prayers that brought her there, something like when Dad would do a partial teleport to show some fur something in the past.”

“I had given some thought to that,” Willi Marie stated, looking at the pictures on the wall of her sister-in-law's home. There were a few up there that she knew she wanted to scan and print out for her home.

“You know, maybe they won't be gone long,” Gytha mused as she started the coffee pot. “Dad never was one for messing around much. He would go on a mission and complete it as quickly as he could.”

“That's the way he always seemed to me, too.” Willi acknowledged. “You may be right.”

“I hope Mom comes home before Dana has her first baby,” Gytha mused out loud. “It's not fair she had

to miss my children being born.”

“Yeah, it's not fair.” Willi agreed. “Um, I brought my Valkyrie's spear and armor for Roger to see,” she told her sis-in-law. “I know Roger wanted to look at them once you had mentioned their existence to him.”

The tall, blond equine femme went out to her mini-van, retrieving the weapon in question along with her breast and back plates. She brought them inside for Roger to examine at length closely, since he had not laid eyes on them before. She didn't warn her brother-in-law about some of the characteristics of the spear, however.

“Yeouch!” he shouted as the spear shocked him firmly. “Wow! That thing packs a punch! Why didn't you warn me about this?”

“I'm sorry, I forgot to mention that to you,” Willi replied, giving him an innocent smile. Gytha was cracking up, however.

“Wilhelmine Marie Delancey, you did that on purpose!” the ruddy colored filly suggested, smiling at her husband who was still shaking his paw. “Sweetheart, put on a pair of nitrile gloves to handle that spear.”

Once her brother-in-law had went to get some gloves, Willi Marie picked up the spear from the couch where Roger had dropped it and looked at it in the sunlight. Feeling somewhat sad for them, she bowed her head and said a prayer for her adopted family.

*“You know I do not pray often but I hope you hear this prayer. Please watch over Torvald, Victoria, Axel and Joe, please do not let harm fall to them. I wish there was something I could do to help out and if there is, please show me how I may be of help.”*

Gytha looked up to see Willi Marie, her armor and her spear shimmer out of sight ...

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Torvald's troupe were busy with a quick meal, hoping to get in a few more miles before the sun set over the ridge. They had covered a number of miles before deciding to eat, all in hopes of catching up to the tigress. It may have been Axel's stomach growling loudly that had inspired the inevitable break in the ride.

“I'm guessing we're about five to ten miles behind your mom,” the elder equine stated, looking at his paw-drawn map. “We may catch her before noon tomorrow if we keep up this pace.”

“You're pretty sure, Tor?” Joe asked, looking at the map and imagining distances from one place to another.

“Yeah, I think so. I'm basing it on the speed her prisoner would be walking versus our speed by horse.”

“I hope we get there soon, Dad. This saddle on Milly is a real butt breaker.” Axel was still trying to get comfortable on a log while he consumed his light lunch.

“Son, it's just the fact that you rarely ride a horse that makes that saddle uncomfortable. Just ask Joe, he'll tell you.” This made the coyote smile.

“Yeah, if you ride enough, your butt eventually molds to the saddle.” Joe then looked over at the huge fur and winked, bringing a smile to Torvald's mug. “I don't think there is such a thing as a comfortable saddle. Maybe if you and I ever go on a mission, Axel, I'll bring the Bowtie beast.” That made Torvald crack up.

“Joe, think just how out of place the beast would have been on this planet,” the berserker pointed out. The coyote nodded, agreeing with his friend. The beast would have been very out of place here.

“It might have been fun, though ...” Joe was smiling, the thought of them riding that huge, smelly, noisy beast into a small village. “That would have made a lasting impression. You know Victoria would have gotten a kick out of the beast, too.” Joe saw Torvald smile a wistful smile as he nodded in agreement.

“Hopefully, she will be happy to tears when she sees us,” he stated, taking another bite of his dried meat. “I just hope and pray she knows us by sight.”

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The tigress was looking at the clearing, assessing it to see if it was defensible. The outcropping behind it had no easy access and the stream to the downhill side would give away approaches from that direction.

“That's it, Sir Marc. My mind is all jumbled up and I cannot concentrate on the road ahead. We will make camp here for the night and begin moving again early in the morning.” She hung her head, admitting personal defeat in the matter. The words that she needed to tell Sir Varn had still eluded her for the entire day. All she wanted to do was to tell him just how terribly sorry she was and that he shouldn't take it personally. He was a prime catch that any female would want. All she really wanted was his forgiveness in the matter, nothing more.

“Miss Vicki, I will see to it you are not disturbed if you wish,” the canid warrior suggested, thinking a little quiet might do her a world of good. She did seem to be preoccupied at the moment to him.

“I would appreciate that, Sir Marc. You seemed to have read my mind.” She smiled at him, a tired, exhausted smile. He was probably the most thoughtful of her guard, always thinking about other's feelings.

“Please sit and rest, my leader. I will see that camp is set for you.” He bowed to her, a courteous gesture, and went to see about their preparations. Morri tied his mount to a shrub and came over to her, kneeling in front of her.

“Miss D'nan, does your stallion grow nearer? Is this why we have stopped?” he asked, concerned for her too. “Would you wish I take Old Mallet-head and go look for him?” he knew his mount had the endurance to go about twenty hard miles in his condition right now without a problem.

“No, that will not be necessary, my squire. I feel him to be very close to us.” She looked at the moon rising, full and bright. “I feel he will most likely keep moving to find me, since he will be able to see to

travel.”

“Ma'am, I will stay up tonight for a while, in the off-chance he should arrive after dark.” She nodded, squeezing his hand as a gesture of friendship.

“He will be a tall, blond stallion that wears a pendant like mine. Please wake me if he shows.” She let her assistant go to tend to other things while she sat down on a rock, looking at the stream nearby. A strange memory came to mind, of bathing in an ice cold stream, using that soap root that only grows eastward of the castle in the foothills. Why she thought of that, she didn't know. To her knowledge, she had never done that before.

She took out one of her pistols, opening the frizzen to dump out the powder in the flashpan. She then used a circular jag to extract the ball, then she dumped out the powder from the barrel. Reloading her firearm, she then did the other one, just to keep them fresh should she need them. Nothing like pulling the trigger and getting nothing if you let your powder draw damp.

She sat at the edge of the clearing, thinking about her imminent meeting with her true mate. It had been so long since he had held her in his arms that she felt strangely bothered by this thought. She knew he must love her to have looked for her all this time but did she still love him as much?

Thinking back, the only things she remembered clearly were things that had happened to her on this world, from the time she awoke on the road, in that berry bush. There must have been a time before this but her memories of that time were not accessible to her, no matter how hard she tried. Looking at a small animal, maybe a pronghorn rabbit drinking at the stream, she feared her inability to remember may be the thing that may drive him away from her. *If she could just somehow remember ...*

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The tall palomino-colored femme equine had been following the road that she had come across, heading in the direction to the hoof prints and shoe prints in the dust. It was late, after sundown but she continued, the moon providing plenty of light for her to travel by. She had noticed up ahead a ways, the possibility of a campfire off the side of the road. As she grew nearer, she could hear their voices, the language unfamiliar to her but they sounded friendly enough as they talked and laughed.

Willi Marie was not real keen on just barging into their camp, especially since she could make out the fact they were armed. She looked down at her spear, her personal piece of defense, not wanting to lay it down. Getting it in a two-pawed grip crossways in front of her to present less of a threat, she walked slowly into the light, announcing her intentions like her uncle Torvald would have done;

“My mane is Wilhelmine Marie. I mean no fur harm.”

This caused the fur that was sitting with their back to her to stand quickly and throw back the hood on their cape.

“Wilhelmine Marie...” the tigress said uneasily, walking up to her to get a better look. Vicki thought she knew this fur ... there was something there in her mind ... cloudy, jumbled up but there nonetheless ...

“Aunt Victoria? Is that you?” she asked in return, her jaw going slack from shock. This was her, standing right in front of her, just an arm's reach away. “Aunt Victoria Svensen?” she asked again, in

hopes she would recognize her. The tigress' men made a move to assist their leader but she turned, giving them a gesture to back off before she looked back at the equine femme.

"I know you, filly. My memories are scrambled, however, preventing me from knowing just how I know you ...." the tigress admitted. "Your clothes, they come from your home land?" she asked, motioning to her armor, sweatpants, sweatshirt and her 49ers cap that Conrad had given her on her head. Willi Marie nodded, trying to get her mind together, to keep from crying from relief, finally finding her aunt at last.

"Aunt Victoria, we have been looking for you for a long time, ever since you became lost during a mission." the palomino colored femme stated. "Your husband is on this planet, looking for you right now as we speak."

"You know of him?" the striped femme asked hesitantly. She was having to struggle to keep her emotions under control as she stood there, facing the tall equine.

"Yes, I know Uncle Torvald. My brother and I lived with you and him for a while."

"His name is Torvald?" Victoria asked, a very shocked look crossing her muzzle.

"Yes, his full name is Torvald Arend Svensen." Willi replied. This caused the tigress to stifle a laugh as she looked over at her horse. "Aunt Victoria, what is so funny?" the tall filly asked, seeing how this was in a way was very confusing to her.

"I hope he has a sense of humor when he finds me," the tigress replied. "You see that horse, the large, blond one?" she asked, pointing him out to the tall femme.

"Yes, he is a very pretty horse." Willi Marie stated.

"That is my warhorse and I named him ... Torvald of Arend." She looked to see Willi's reaction, which was one of amusement.

"I'm sure he will find some humor in that, Aunt Victoria." the tall one pointed out, smiling at her aunt widely. The tigress touched the filly's hand, noting it was cold to the touch.

"Wilhelmine Marie, please come to our fire and warm yourself. I'm sure we have some food for you if you're hungry." Victoria made her sit where she had been sitting near the fire, getting her something to eat afterwards.

Victoria knew in her heart that she was very familiar with this tall filly, but how and where, she did not know ... Maybe time would return her memories to her ... *Maybe* ...

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Hilda dismounted from Glenda, stretching her legs a bit in the process. They had tried to cover as much ground as they could in hopes of catching up to their mark before nightfall. The red-haired female unrolled what looked to be a parchment map, pinching the corners and giving it a tug to make it flatten out. Putting a particular coin from her pocket to the edge of the paper, the center turned into a screen, eventually giving her an overhead real time view of their surroundings.

Using her fingers to make gestures on the screen, she zoomed in on Torvald's group, still on the move. Nodding her head, she used a program to estimate the mileage between them.

"I hope they stop at some point tonight," she mused, panning over to Victoria's camp not far away from the stallion. "But knowing what I know about him from his dossier, I'll bet he just continues on to find her." she suggested, looking over at Hilda for her opinion.

"I'll pass on that sucker bet," the horse said with a smile. "He'll just go on, since he can see to travel by the moonlight." Looking around, she made a comment; "You know what, Hil? Let's stay here for the night and catch up to them tomorrow. It's nice and quiet right here." She looked over to see her partner smile and nod in agreement.

"Let me set up a fire ring and I'll get us a fire going," Hilda suggested, pulling a few stones from here and there to make a small ring. Getting the dimensional shift bag out of her pack, she pulled a few logs out of it, one having a cord attached to it. Setting that log on the bottom and putting the others over it, she pulled the string firmly, which made the log burst into flame immediately.

"Nice job, Hil," the mare said, getting nearer to the fire for warmth. "Now if you could get me a plate of that feed out, I really need to fill my belly so it'll quit growling so loudly. I'll also need a blanket to stay warm underneath tonight, too. It's going to be a cold one."

Hilda set out at Glenda's urgings to get them some food prepared and a shelter of sorts set up so they could stave off the night's chill.

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"She did What?!?" Conrad said excitedly, not wanting to believe his ears. His sister had just called him to let him know what had just happened.

"I'm telling you, Willi Marie was praying and then she just shimmered out! I'm not kidding, either!" Gytha replied. "Conrad, this whole thing is getting scarier by the minute." She was still shaking, her nerves shot from this happening. Richard was definitely in shock, his wife going missing so suddenly. He looked over at his sister-in-law right as he took another shot of whiskey to settle his nerves. Gytha could see the fear in his eyes, his wife and lover missing from this planet.

"OK, let me see if I can get Loke to help out," the tiger suggested, hoping he could still call him. It had been over eight years since he had summoned the weasel for any reason.

"Yeah, maybe Loke could get Hrist to look for her too," Gytha suggested, taking another sip of her coffee that was laced with a heavy dose of Jack Daniels. "Whatever you do, don't mention this to Annie Latrans. I don't want her to get upset unnecessarily."

"All right, I'll see what I can do on my end. I'll call you and Richard when I know more." They said their goodbyes and the tiger slowly ended the call on his cellphone, lost in thought. Shaking his head, he had hoped no others of their family would get pulled into this but it looked like it was too late for that now. Looking skyward and clearing his mind, he called out for the trickster to make an appearance.