

The characters Torvald Arend 'Tor' & 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, Walter & Harriet Connell, Barbara Caine, Edward and Mary Caine, Richard & Wilhelmine Marie (nee Kurzweil) Delancey, James William & Nancy Kurzweil, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito[©], Leonard's Restaurant[©] and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission.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. (Gah, this is tedious!)
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“A Loss Of Rights”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 17

“Wilhelmine?” the male voice beckoned, trying to rouse her. “Willi Marie?” he asked again, nudging her sightly, hoping she would wake up. She yawned, rolling over to face the male kneeling beside her bed.

“Richard, you're alarm clock hasn't went off, sweetheart. Go back to sleep.” she replied sleepily. She then quickly opened her eyes wide when the hand went over her mouth gently to silence her. She looked up to see a male jaguar looking down at her, putting a finger to his mouth to indicate to her to be quiet. She nodded, acknowledging his request.

“I need you to come with me,” he asked quietly in English, giving her a nervous smile. She gave him a strange look in return, not knowing what his intentions would be.

“Why should I come with you?” she asked very quietly, reaching off the bed to get her spear in her possession. “Out in the hallway, now,” she suggested, knowing the others couldn't hear them with their earplugs in place. She got up, holding her spear like a staff, following the strange male out into the hallway. Once the door to her room was closed, he spoke up.

“I'm sorry to have barged into your room like that. My name's Douglas Muir and I have a friend that's in need of your powers,” he told her, looking down at the floor. He looked up at her again, looking very serious now. “He might die if you don't try to help him.”

“I'm not a healer!” she said quietly but firmly, getting a better grip on her spear. “You're asking the wrong fur, I'm afraid. I'm not capable of healing.”

“would you at least try?” he asked, hoping she would agree to it. Mike had looked pretty bad when he left their room to retrieve the filly. She nodded, agreeing to at least look at the injured fur since he had asked her nicely. Willi Marie followed him to the room that was closer to the stairs, looking inside before she entered. There was a black and a gray stallion sitting at a table and a huge fur, taller than Torvald and at least the same weight, lying down in one of the beds. His markings were very strange and the horns on his head had to mean he was part giraffe. The huge fur beckoned her over to the bed.

“I'm Michael Wilson, Willi. I broke some ribs and I need you to try to heal me,” he told her. “You can do this, even if you think you can't. I'm in desperate need of your help.” He grimaced, the pain in his side was getting worse, the broken ribs doing damage by continually gouging his lung on that side from

him just breathing.

"I've never done this before," she stated, kneeling down by his bed. For some odd reason, she thought she could 'see' his broken ribs beneath his skin. She touched the site only to have Mike cringe from the pain.

"You've found the place, honey. Put your hands over the ribs and will them back together." the injured fur told her.

"You have to be kidding me," she stated, shaking her head. Giving it some thought, she had to tell them just what she felt about the idea of how to heal the tall one. "That sounds *waaay* too easy to me," she pointed out, still not sure she was actually seeing his ribcage under the skin when she would concentrate hard.

"Go ahead, give it a try for me, please?" he begged, coughing up some more blood. "I'm not really sure I'm ready to die just yet, sweetheart."

"If this doesn't work, don't blame me!" she said in a firm voice as she put her hands on his side, over the ribs that were broken. Willi closed her eyes, cleared her mind and mentally willed the bones back together. A bright light grew under her hands as she concentrated, too bright to look at while she put her every effort into thinking the bones back together again. She finally collapsed slowly to the floor, the light dying between them.

"She did it," Mike stated, taking a deep breath without any pain. He rolled over to look at her, now out like a light on the floor. "I was afraid this would happen, the efforts draining her like this. Somebody will have to carry her back to her room." he pointed out.

"I'll take her back to her room if somebody will get that Valkyrie's spear for me," Doug stated, picking her up carefully. Alan grabbed her spear with a towel to avoid being shocked by it and followed his partner to her room, getting the door and helping to put her back in bed. The huge gray fur put her spear across her chest and put her arms over it before they slipped back out of the room, stopping momentarily at the door to make sure she was OK for now.

I wouldn't have believed that if I hadn't seen her do that to Mike," Alan commented as they walked back to their room.

"I know, huh? She packs some pretty amazing powers," the jaguar retorted, stopping in the hall outside their room. "She just might remember doing this for Mike. If she does, our cover might be blown."

"I had thought about that," Alan said as he opened the door, motioning for Doug to enter. "Maybe we'll get lucky on this deal." They found Mike sitting up in a chair, letting Sam re-bandage his head.

"How are you feeling now?" Alan asked, hoping the tall, spotted one would be able to travel tomorrow.

"I feel much better now," he replied, smiling just a bit. "My head feels better and my ribs are healed completely. She had no idea just how powerful she will ultimately be. You know, Doug, she's the only class six sorceress on her world presently now that her mother is dead."

"Yeah, I know. In spite of what's happened, this really has turned out to be a one time good deal for

you, Mike, having her here on this planet. I will point out the face that we need to rest a bit because we need to be out of here before Torvald's group gets up. Our first stop is about five kilometers towards the castle from here." They all nodded, knowing tomorrow would be a busy day for all concerned.

Mike was lying in his bed, still thinking about the situation. He decided to ask *that* question.

"Hey Doug, what about little Brianna? Will she have powers too?" The jaguar thought about it for a few moments before he replied.

"When she turns sixteen, she will become a class six sorceress too and I don't think Willi Marie can deny her the power." Mike nodded, hoping that would happen. That was still quite a few years in their future.

"Doug, do you think Willi Marie knows she's pregnant with Brianna yet?" the huge giraffe mix asked.

"No, she won't know until she gets back home," his partner replied, smiling at the thought of two class six sorceresses on the planet at the same time. That hadn't been that way since Willi Marie's mother died and to be honest, not very often since the Salem witch hunts.

The two femme felines were pacing the hall, finding the time spent outside their bodies to be very tedious. What really sucked was the apparent distance they were limited to away from their mortal coils. They could get in the elevator with others and go up or down a floor but it seemed to them the limit was about seventy-five feet. If they exceeded that limit, they would 'snap' back to be directly by their bodies.

"So, do we want to get another Tahoe or do we want to get a Suburban to replace our wrecked baby?" Barbara asked, watching the nurse take her vitals again. Her mom and dad were sitting by her bed, holding vigil while Elizabeth went with her husband Robert to get some dinner.

"I don't know, Barb. I thought we might look around for a classic and have it converted like Axel had their Ranch Wagon redone." She would miss their Tahoe, its idiosyncrasies and all. She had even gotten used to the buzzer going off every once in a while for the hatch being open even when it was clearly closed.

"Well, what kind of classic were you thinking about?" the ocelot asked, looking at her life-mate. Valerie went to reply but stopped as a shocked look crossed her face, followed by a grimace as she faded from sight. Barbara went to the room where her lover's body lay to see her cough, then open her eyes. Valerie was back in her body, but for how long they didn't know. It could be just a few moments or an hour or two.

"Hi Mom, Dad," she said weakly, looking up at her parents sitting by her bed. Conrad was sitting in the corner, napping against his wife who had heard the tigress wake up. Cathy was nudging him, waking him up to see his aunt.

"Valerie, we were worried about you," her mom sobbed out, finally breaking down once she heard her daughter's voice.

"I've been here all the time, Mom, I just couldn't wake up," she related, gripping her dad's paw. Looking over towards the window, she could see Barbara's spirit in the hall, smiling at her.

"Damn, Aunt Valerie, you gave all of us a scare," Conrad stated, holding her other paw in his. "You know, we came down from Carmichael as soon as we heard you were in an accident." She smiled at him, giving his paw a squeeze.

"You didn't have to do that, Conrad. Mom and Dad were going to be here along with the rest of the family," she said softly, looking up at her nephew.

"I know, it's a family thing," he replied, smiling back at her.

"Are your Mom and Dad home yet?" she asked, looking very tired from her ordeal.

"Not yet, but they should be home soon." Conrad replied, bringing a smile to the tigress' muzzle. She was ready for her sister to return home any day now.

Barbara's spirit was standing by Valerie's bed, listening to their conversation. She knew Val was looking at her, obviously able to see her outline. Barbara saw her lover wink at her, acknowledging her presence.

The tigress then observed the femme ocelot get that surprised look on her muzzle followed by a grimace as she most likely was pulled back into her body.

"Conrad, go see about Barbara," the tigress asked, looking up at her sister's son. "I think she's awake now."

Conrad went to see about the ocelot femme only to find she was indeed awake and in a world of hurt from her shattered wrist on top of all of her other bad bumps and scrapes. Once the nurse had her breathing tube out of her throat and left the room, the roughed up femme had her request to make.

"I think I need something for this pain," he overheard her tell her sister, grimacing from the intense hurting coming from her broken appendage.

"OK, I'll go get that nurse back here," Elizabeth replied, turning to head out the door and down to the nurse's station.

"Hey Barbara, nice to see you back among the living again," Conrad told her, bending over to kiss her on the cheek. She smiled at him, nodding in reply.

"Yeah, if I can just get this wrist fixed, I'll be doing real good," she mused, holding her mother's paw in her good paw. It was nice to be awake again, even if it meant being in all of this pain.

A male leopard wearing a nice, well-fitted suit was walking up to the front of the hospital, having a cell phone conversation with what must have been his boss. He stopped, looking at his phone for a moment before continuing.

“Listen Jason, I'm having a hard time hearing you on this stupid antique device. No wonder they became obsolete so quickly.” He leaned against the pillar of the porte-cochère, listening to his superior ramble on while he covered his other ear to hear better. “Yeah, the hospital was right where you said it would be, 441 North Lakeview Avenue in Anaheim.” He listened for a moment, scratching his chin before he spoke again. “No, I told you I just got here and I haven't had time to see about the tigrress. It takes a while to drive a land vehicle across town.” He scowled a bit, then asked about something important. “Do we know if anyone has located Victoria yet?” he asked, hoping to hear good news from his superior. “Hmm, well, I was just asking, that's all. Hey, I better get upstairs and check in on her family, then.” He closed the cell phone and pocketed it, walking through the front door and across the lobby to the reception desk.

“May I help you?” the femme badger behind the desk asked, giving him a warm smile.

“I need to see Valerie Jean Connell,” he stated firmly, flashing her a badge momentarily. “It's concerning her vehicle accident, Ma'am.”

“I see, let me look her up in the directory,” she said to herself, mostly. “Ah, she's in 322 West. Take the elevator up to the third floor and turn left.” He nodded, heading upstairs.

The feline stepped out of the elevator, getting his bearings. Turning left, he went down past the nurse's station to 322, where a number of Barbara's family were sitting or standing about. He recognized Conrad right off from his pictures in the newspaper when the 49'ers won at Super Bowl XLVIII two years ago in 2014.

“Conrad Svensen? I'm Investigator Daniel Nelson,” he told the tiger, flashing his badge at him. “How's your aunt and her significant other doing? I need to talk with them about the accident when they're feeling up to it.”

“Well, they're both awake but it suffices to say they're both very tired. They both woke up just a few minutes ago.” he replied. “If you leave me a card, I can have someone call you when they're feeling better.”

“No, that's OK, Conrad. I can hang out for a while, at least until Valerie is up to talking.” he stated.

“OK, I'll tell her you're here,” Conrad said as he looked over to see Grandpa Connell trying to get Grandma to go with him to get something to eat. “She might feel like talking to you this evening, then.”

“OK, that'll do just fine, Conrad,” the leopard stated, giving him a firm pawshake. “I might be in and out but I'll stop by this evening.” Investigator Nelson patted Conrad on the shoulder, heading back for the elevators. He walked past the elevators, quickly ducking into a short hallway. He first took out his cell phone, frowning when he observed he had no bars of service. He then pulled a device from his pants pocket that looked like a small earpiece and put it into his right ear, tapping the device afterwards.

“Let me speak to Jason, please.” he said quietly after a few moments, looking up at the mirror at the intersection to make sure no fur was coming. He stood there for a minute, fidgeting as he waited.

“What is it, Daniel? What do you have for me?” the fur on the other end asked in a steady, military-influenced tone.

“They're both awake, Sir.” the leopard replied.

“Good, thank you for alerting me. Call me if anything out of the ordinary comes up.”

“Yes, Sir. Nelson out.” he replied, tapping the earpiece then removing it from his ear and pocketing it again. He then got into the elevator, headed down to the first floor and the cafeteria for some food.

Nevaeh shook Hess, trying her best to wake the sleeping canid up. She had been to see if she could get into the tigress' room but found one of her soldiers standing guard outside her room. This was not turning out to be easy to do, to perform a simple task like this, to eliminate Victoria.

“Nevaeh, you better have a good reason to wake me up,” she stated, turning over to see the shorter canid's form staring back at her. “What is it that it's important enough to wake me?”

“We need to leave now and set a trap for the tigress. I cannot get into her room because it's guarded.” the smaller canid replied. “Get up and get ready, please! We must leave before the sun comes up if we are to ambush them.”

“Oh, all right, then. Let me get up and we'll get some food before get out of here.” Hess said as she sat up on the edge of her bed and stretched out her arms. They hurriedly packed up what little they had along with a bow and quiver of arrows that Nevaeh had pilfered, headed out the door and ultimately towards the castle.

Willi Marie had been awake for a few minutes, rubbing her muzzle to wake up further. She got up, wandered over to the washbasin and poured a little water in it, using a rag provided to wipe her face and neck down to refresh herself. Looking in the crude mirror, she noticed her mane was a mess so she tried to straighten it as best as possible with her fingers and claws. Looking at her fingers, she noticed her claws were badly in need of sharpening.

Scanning the room, she spotted a scratching post mounted to the wall for felines. Kneeling down to accommodate the low mounting because of this world's short stature of beings, she stretched up and clawed the wood, making herself smile and purr just a little. Her husband Richard still thought it was strange for his equine mix bride to have claws and feline dentition. He had even freaked out the first time they were cuddling after they were married and she began to purr like a large khat.

“Willi Marie, you don't know how weird that looks for you to be doing that,” Axel commented, looking at his adopted cousin using the scratching post. She turned and smiled at him, showing off her wicked-looking feline teeth.

“That's what Richard said about it the first time I used the one I put up in our bedroom.” she retorted. “You should have seen the look on his face the first time we met and I smiled at him. He almost didn't go on that first date with me.”

“Well, I can see why he would have done that,” the tall equine stated, slipping his tunic on. Joe and Morri were stirring, trying to wake up themselves. “At least your earplugs did the trick last night. I slept like a rock.”

“About last night,” Willi Marie said, looking to see if Axel was listening to her. “I had this weird dream that I healed a fur that was injured. Strange, huh?” Axle looked at her, giving her a crooked smile.

“Yeah, that is strange. Do you think you could heal a fur's injuries?” he asked, curious about the possible powers she might possess. She was turning out to be a powerful sorceress, indeed.

“I really don't know, Axel. That dream, it seemed so real to me. This jaguar came to our room and asked me to help his sick friend. I went with him to the room down by the stairs and healed a fur that looked like a giraffe/equine mix of some sort.” She related to him. “He had some broken ribs on one side. I don't remember anything after that, though.”

“Yeah, that is weird, for sure. I'll see if Mom and Dad are awake so we can go down and get something to eat.” Axel got up and left quietly, headed for his parent's room.

The tigress was enjoying watching her stallion hubby sleep, having woken a few minutes ago when he rolled over and put his arm over her, hugging her closely to him. She was amazed at how quietly he was sleeping at the moment, considering just how loudly he was snoring the night before. He stirred a bit more, wiping his nose with the back of his paw.

“Tor, sweetheart, are you awake?” she whispered, just to see if he was awake or not.

“My alarm clock went off, didn't it?” he questioned sleepily, yawning widely afterwards. “What time is it, anyway? Am I late for work?” he asked, rubbing his eyes. That's when his mate started snickering, trying to keep from laughing. He slowly opened an eye, looking at his mate who was smiling widely at him.

“You don't have to go to work this morning, sweetheart.” she said softly, giving him a kiss. He nodded, looking around himself just to confirm where they were.

“I guess I've worked for a living too long,” he stated, pulling his tigress close to him. “All I know is when we get back home, that's the end of our off-planet work for the gods.”

“You sound pretty sure about that,” she commented, snuggling up against his chest.

“I almost lost you for good because of being off-planet on a parallel world,” he stated, wrapping his arms around her, stroking her back slowly, gently. “I have you back now and I don't want to lose you, ever again.” She now understood why he was so serious about quitting his work for the gods.

“What would you do if you quit working for the gods? Do you have another job besides that?” she asked, causing him to cringe slightly. She needed to know about her day job, too, not just his.

“Well, I work for the Los Angeles Metropolitan Police Department as a troubled youth counselor.” he

replied. "Um, I guess I should tell you that you sell real estate for a day job." That made her look at him strangely.

"Do I wear a red tunic or coat when I do that?" she asked, now that he had brought this up. "I have dreamed of walking through houses with other people, showing them the rooms inside of them. I sell homes? That's my job back home?"

"Yeah, you're a senior salesfur for the office you work out of." he related to her. He thought for a moment then let her know another snippet of information. "Your boss is really wanting you back because he was ready to make you an assistant manager."

"His name is Clifford and he's an arctic fox, isn't he?" she queried, having had this strange dream for years of being in an office full of red coated furs, talking to this arctic fox tom. Names and dates were slowly coming back to her, now that they had talked about it.

"Uh huh, his name is Clifford Edwards." he replied. "You've known him a lot longer than we've been married. As a matter of fact, he was upset for a while that you married me because he had a crush on you. He wanted your affections but he was too afraid to ask you out."

"I seem to remember that," she said cautiously. "He was very upset that we married, to the point he gave me all the crappy ... uh ... listings for a while, if I'm remembering this right." It was weird; that memory came flooding back to her as clear as day, now that her hubby brought this up.

"Yeah, you were upset he did that but you managed to sell a run-down strip mall in San Fernando that .." She cut him off, deep in thought for a moment.

"I sold that dingy little strip mall and we used the commission money to buy our home outright for something like \$54,000." she said as she finished his sentence. "We do still own our house outright, don't we, sweetie?"

"Yeah, we do." he replied, rubbing his nose again. "I never even gave thought to mortgaging the house at all, even when we added on for Axel, Gytha and Dana. I'm not sure how he did it but Christopher paid that bill somehow." She nodded, glad that at least some of her memories were coming back to her. They were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Mom? Dad? Are you guys awake?" their son asked from the hallway.

"We're awake, Axel. Come in," Torvald replied, pulling the covers over his naked wife's body. Their son made his entry, still being eyeballed by Sir Marc, who was standing outside his leader's door.

"What's with Marc guarding the door?" he asked as he sat in a chair by their bed. It made Axel feel good inside for him to see just how happy his parents seemed to be at the moment. "It seems funny to have a guard in front of your door, I guess."

"He's just being protective of me," his mother replied. "What are you up to this early in the morning? I thought you might still be sleeping."

"I was seeing if you're ready for breakfast," he related to them, smiling when his father gave his mother a kiss on the cheek. "Your speech patterns are beginning to sound normal again, Mom," the young

equine noted, giving her a smile.

“I had noticed that myself,” she retorted, looking up at her hubby. “Are you ready for breakfast?” she asked, the huge fur nodding in reply. She turned back to her son and let him know, “Yeah, give us a few minutes to get dressed and we'll meet you at your room.”

“OK, I'll let Joe, Willi Marie and Morri know what's up, then,” he stated, leaving the room. Once the door was shut, Victoria looked back at her husband.

“Sweetheart, I won't lie to you,” she began, stopping momentarily to draw her thoughts together. “I'll openly admit that I'm nervous about talking to Sir Varn about us.” She reached up and stroked his cheek, giving him a kiss on the chin. “I'm also scared about returning home. I know I need to for our family's sake but I know in my heart it'll be an uphill battle for me to get used to being in a modern world again.”

“Your family and I will help you to become comfortable with the intricacies of our world,” Torvald said to reassure his mate. He gave her a hug, holding her closely to his chest.

“From what you told me last night after we made love, our world seems very confusing to me at the moment.” Victoria looked at the ceiling for a moment, trying to figure out how to say what she wanted to say. She looked at her hubby very seriously as she said, “Don't take this wrong, but I feel we need to continue our work for the good of all furkind. Maybe there's something we can do that doesn't involve leaving our homeworld.”

“You're sure about this?” he asked, giving her a serious look in return. “That's how we've been separated twice, so far. I really don't want to lose you or have you lose me again.” She got up out of bed, stretching out her arms and back. She started to put on her leggings, then looked up at her hubby again.

“Let me think about this but I don't think I'll change my mind.” she pointed out. She finished putting on her leggings and slipped her tunic back on. “You and I will have to discuss this with our boss.”

“OK, I'll leave it at that,” Torvald stated as he slipped his leggings back on. “Honey, do you think we'll make it to the castle this evening?” he asked out of curiosity.

“We should make it by then,” she replied, letting him help her put on her vest and sleeves. “I'm going to send Sir Tamal ahead of us to let them know what's coming their way. That way there will be no nasty surprises when we get there.” Torvald helped her on with her armor then she slipped on her boots.

“If you're ready, I'm ready.” the berserker stated, putting his baldric over his shoulder and buckling it.

“Yeah, I'm ready,” she replied, putting her weaponry on and waiting for her hubby to hold the door for her.

Doug was snoring lightly, enjoying his sleep. That was until the soft beeping of his monitoring device woke him up. Jarred awake, he could see it was after sunup.

“Oh Hell! Guys! We gotta go!” he said loudly, getting out of bed and looking at his tracking device. Hess and Nevaeh had gotten a big head start on them.

“Aw Nuts!” Mike spat out as he got his tunic and weaponry on. “How much of a lead do they have?”

“I dunno, maybe an hour and a half,” the jaguar replied, Alan in the meantime was doing some mental calculations concerning the former minion's lead on them.

“I think we can catch them fairly quick,” the huge gray equine stated. “Let's get out of here now.” They all hastily got dressed, literally running down the hallway and stairs past other guests then walking quickly through the dining hall. They left the inn, turned right and headed at a fast pace towards the stables. Alan and Sam were ahead of the others, carrying their saddles. They went past the stables, then into a quiet area between two buildings. Squatting down, they tapped their bracelets, morphing back into four-legged equines. The feline and the giraffe cross that were right behind them quickly saddled their mounts, getting headed towards Hess and Nevaeh.

“I hope we catch them,” Mike said as they rode on at a fast pace. “I would hate to think we failed.” The jaguar looked at his partner with a look of dread on his muzzle.

“Don't even say that,” Doug retorted. “We can't fail, Mike. Just don't say that again.”

“Did you see that tall giraffe cross run by us in the hallway?” Willi Marie asked Axel, wondering if she had really healed him or not. Her adopted cousin nodded, looking back at her.

“You're gonna tell me you might have healed him?” Axel asked, looking back at her strangely. “I dunno, Willi, that sounds very far-fetched to me.” He stopped in the hallway, looking at the femme equine mix with one eyebrow raised. “I know you're a sorceress, and a powerful one at that, according to what I heard about that mission you got pulled into by Dad making a wish. I'm just not sure you could heal somebody, that's all.”

“OK, I'll admit, it does sound strange,” she proffered up. “It's just ... well, how did I know he was part giraffe? Answer me that.” She crossed her arms and gave the tall equine male a crooked smile. “I'm waiting.”

“I'm not sure how you knew that,” he replied, giving the matter much thought. He kept thinking about it as he sat down at the table with the rest of his family. He looked up at Willi Marie and told her, “I don't know how you knew but you did.”

“What did you know?” Torvald asked her, curious about this conversation between them.

“I had a weird dream last night, Uncle Torvald,” she related to him. “I dreamed I healed another fur that was a giraffe cross of some kind, like the one that went past us in the hall upstairs.”

“He looked OK to me except his head was bandaged up,” the huge fur stated, giving this much thought.

While he was thinking, Axel decided to take matters into his own paws. He took out his Buck knife, cutting his thumb on the side enough to bleed profusely.

“Willi Marie, try to heal my thumb,” he asked, letting her hold it in her paws. She put her paws around his momentarily, closing her eyes for just a second or two. When she let go, his paw was healed and there was no sign that he had cut his thumb at all. Joe was the first one to make a comment about this feat of magic.

“That is on par with Eyr's abilities,” he said cautiously. “Do you know how useful you could be to a mission?” he asked, still slack-jawed at the moment. She looked at the canid very sheepishly as she answered him.

“I guess I could be very useful to a difficult mission,” she replied, biting her bottom lip as she thought about it some more. “I must have healed that injured fur last night, then.” she pointed out.

Torvald was about to say something just as their morning meal arrived. He decided to just wait and see what would come of Willi Marie's new powers.

Woodstock and Storm galloped on like the wind, getting their riders closer to the two females that had left the inn before them. Mike was gritting his teeth, his head still hurting him badly this morning. All that kept going through his mind was the fact that they needed to prevent Hess from being killed, no matter what. If that happened, the mission was done for them, as far as returning to the place in time they belonged. Failure meant that place in time didn't exist any longer and there was no need to return to a barren, dead planet. He gritted his teeth harder as he urged Woodstock to catch up to Storm, who was about fifty yards ahead of them.

The two riders rounded a bend in the road to find something they hoped not to find; Nevaeh lying dead in the roadway with a sword through her and Hess kneeling down on one knee, bleeding badly. There was a swordsman standing over her, preparing to administer the finishing blow with his dirk.

“Hey! Don't do that,” Mike shouted loudly, getting the warrior's attention as their steeds skidded to a stop. The warrior looked up, sheathed his dirk and drew two pistols.

“Alright you two varlets, off your mounts right now,” he demanded loudly, brandishing his weapons at them. The two males complied with his request, climbing off of their horses. Storm and Woodstock slowly wandered off towards the side of the road, out of the warrior's view. “If you two have anything to do with this pair, I will kill you both. They tried to dispatch me quite unsuccessfully.”

“No, kind Sir, we are not in league with this pair, I can assure you,” Doug stated, watching the horses out of the corner of his eye.

Storm in the meantime squatted down on his haunches, letting Woodstock touch his bracelet with his hoof. He transformed back into Samuel Storm, taking his bit out of his mouth and letting the saddle slide off his back quietly. Sam began to flank the gunman, slipping up behind him slowly.

“Sir, it seems you're taking justice into your own hands here,” Mike pointed out, just to kill time. “Maybe you should take this female to be judged by the King,” he suggested, keeping the gunman's attention focused on him.

"I shall do no such thing! She had tried to kill me so I have the right to do her in as I please!" he shouted back, obviously feeling no remorse for his actions. That was until he felt cold steel against his throat.

"Drop the guns right now, kind Sir and I will not slit your throat, do you understand?" Sam asked, putting the tip of the lethally sharp blade against the man's neck just under his chin, by his ear. "I can kill you in a heartbeat, kind Sir, but I wish not to. Please comply with my request." The man nodded, raising his hands as he took his fingers off of the triggers. Mike moved in fast, taking the guns and his dirk away from him.

While all of this was happening, Woodstock had triggered his bracelet against a stump, morphing back into Alan Woodstock. He walked over with a handy piece of rope, tying the warrior's hands behind him.

"Sorry about this but we can't let you do any more harm than you've already done," he told the man, making him sit down against a small tree and tying him to it. "You just stay right there and don't move." The man nodded nervously, knowing he was most likely among sorcerers. Those other two equine males must have been the horses, he thought to himself. Their saddles were off to the side, behind him with no horses under them.

Sam checked out Nevaeh while Mike and Alan looked after Hess. The smaller canid was dead, an obvious fatal blade injury that might have been through her heart. The taller femme canid had taken a blade to the abdomen and she was bleeding badly. Doug came over with his medical kit, kneeling down by her.

"Gah! This looks bad, guys. Let's get her off the road so I can try to save her sorry furry butt." he suggested. They carried her off to the side, laying her on a foil composite emergency blanket Doug had removed from his pack. Using a pair of EMT's shears, he cut her clothes open enough to see the extent of the damage Hess had suffered. She was stabbed only one time just to the left of her navel, deeply. The blood coming out was dark and that wasn't a good sign.

Shaving her fur down with a cordless clipper and wabbing her quickly with a disinfectant, he put on gloves and began to operate. Cutting her open, he found a grievous wound to her liver and her stomach was cut slightly. He quickly checked out the surrounding organs, finding no other injuries.

"I'll see if I can suture up her liver," the jaguar stated, beginning to work at a fevered pace. He knew her life was hanging in the balance right now.

"Her blood pressure's low," Sam commented as he kept track of her vitals. The dark stallion knew she most likely wouldn't make it but he was hoping he was wrong, too. While this was going on, Mike was administering some steroids and a bag of universal synthetic plasma to boost her blood volume. It wasn't the best thing but it would have to do. He then administered a clotting booster to help staunch the bleeding.

"Doug, how's it going?" Mike asked, looking at his partner's handiwork. There was blood everywhere by this point in time. It was looking seriously ugly from his vantage point.

"I dunno, Mike. I have her liver sutured up and I've fixed her stomach but the bleeding is still more than I would like to see." he replied. "I'll use the cordless cauterizing tool to stop the last of this," he said, doing what he could to save the unfortunate canid femme.

"I hate to say this but Torvald's group will be here in about twenty minutes or less," Sam pointed out, still checking the femme's blood pressure. It was low but stable now.

"Crap, I didn't need to hear that," Doug stated, looking up at Sam. "We can't move her for at least an hour or two, not until her blood pressure's come back up." Mike cringed at the thought of them seeing this impromptu surgery.

"dammit, we're sunk now," the tall giraffe cross stated. "How are we going to explain the lack of horses for the four of us?"

"Well, that's pretty easy," Sam said as he helped Doug pack up his equipment. "We'll just morph back before they get here," he stated, giving them a hand at cleaning up Hess. She was a bloody mess at the moment but at least she was still alive.

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense, Sam," Mike retorted. "We'll have to do that before they get here. You know, maybe we should do that right now, just to be on the safe side." The two equines got themselves clear of the others and squatted down, touching their bracelets to morph back into horses again.

"We'll be over there, grazing, Mike. I spotted some sweet grass over by that boulder." Woodstock told his rider as the two horses began to move that way.

"Mike, we need to get Nevaeh out of the roadway," the jaguar suggested, getting to his feet. Mike nodded, getting up to deal with the task of carrying the dead canid body out of the road and burying her.

The red-headed female rolled over in bed, groping for an alarm clock that wasn't there on a non-existent night stand. Opening one eye, she suddenly realized she was still sleeping when she should have been on the road hours ago.

Getting dressed in a hurry, she shook her head at the thought she had just screwed up big time. It was possible one mark had already done damage that couldn't be repaired, no matter what. She gathered up her saddlebags, stopping by the Immortal Couples' room just to see that they were indeed gone. She grimaced, knowing at least two furs were in harm's way right now, if not three. Rushing to the stables, she began to wake up Glenda, who was still sleeping soundly, leaning against the wall with one back hoof off the floor slightly.

"Glenda Jean, we need to get going right now!" she said blurted out, pulling the blanket off of her partner and hastily saddling her.

"Wha? Huh?" the horse mumbled sleepily, blinking her eyes to try to wake up. She had needed the rest, since they had traveled so very hard the day before.

"Glenda, everyone's left the inn! We need to get down the road right now!" she pointed out, putting the hackamore rig on her mount. She then took a bit of water and splashed her friend's face with it that made Glenda scowl back at her.

“Hilda, that was not necessary!” she spat out, shaking her head to get the water off her muzzle. “I was waking up, dammit!”

“Well, I’m sorry Glenda but we need to go like right now, if not sooner!” Hilda said as she got up into the saddle and urged her friend to start moving.

“Alright! Keep your shorts on, Hil. Let me get a little ways under my belt then I’ll try to cover some ground.” she retorted, leaving the stable in a fast trot towards the castle.

In an alleyway near the hospital, a slight breeze kicked up followed by several lightning strikes from a cloudless sky. Momentarily there was a blinding flash followed by the sound of a fur falling a short distance to the ground. A naked femme ferret stood up, brushed off her fur and picked up a bag near her. Removing the contents, she dressed in pale blue hospital scrubs and a short white coat, making sure a hypodermic syringe was nestled in the left coat pocket. Clipping an employee badge to her lapel, she headed leisurely for the hospital.