

*The characters Torvald Arend 'Tor' & Victoria Angela (nee Connell) Svensen, James Conrad & Cathryn 'Cathy' (nee Hunter) Svensen, Brett, Dana Lynn (nee Svensen) and Sabrina Angela Kashnikov, Roger, Gytha Louise (nee Svensen) Roger Jr. & Heather Louise Delancey, Axel Torvald & Madelyn (nee Barrett) Svensen, Bradley Torvald 'Brad' & Janet Lee (nee Mondragon) Svensen, Trenton, Nancy Jeanne (nee Svensen), Trenton Junior 'TJ' and Chelsea Corbin, Ronald Arend 'Ron' & Brenda Mae (nee Cartwright) Svensen, Lawrence James 'LJ' & Alicia Leanna (nee Svensen) Hood, Valerie Connell, Walter Lee Sr. & Harriet (nee Bishop) Connell, Walter Lee Jr., Michelle Annette 'Misha' (nee Kazinski), Walter Lee III, Joseph Franklin 'Joe' and Sarah Noel Connell, Robert James & Elizabeth Ann (nee Caine) Sands, Barbara Caine, Edward and Mary (nee Leese) Caine, Richard & Wilhelmine Marie 'Willi Marie' (nee Kurzweil) Delancey, James William & Nancy (nee Roland) Kurzweil, Erich Martin & Ivanova Marie 'Iva Marie' (nee Schmidt) Kurzweil, Jason & Natasba 'Tasha' (nee Porter) Cummeron, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito[®], Leonard's Restaurant[®], Hunter Auto Parts[®], Right Way Groceries[™] and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meigh and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission.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. Fender, Guild, Gretsch, Jackson, Charvel and Squire are the property of Fender Musical Instruments, Inc. Gibson, Les Paul and SG are the property of Gibson Musical instruments. (Gib, this is tedious!) *Note* More rambling credits/warnings below! Please read and heed! Aslaug "The Angelbreaker" Larsdatter is the copyrighted property of Joan Jacobsen, 2005-2010 Her writings may be found at a wonderful place called "Aslaug's Axe Shed" and the URL is as follows; <http://www.aslaug.eu> Please have a look and enjoy her writings. The characters of Joe and Annie Latrans are copyright The Silver Coyote 2003 - 2010, and are used here with permission. Stories containing Joe and Annie Latrans along with The Silver Coyote's writings may be found at <http://thesilvercoyote.net/> Tell them Kellan sent ya. ;-) *Note* This is a shameless plug for Aslaug and The Silver Coyote! What are friends for, anyway?*

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“End Game”

By Kellan Meigh

Chapter 06 – “Into The Fire”

David Klepper sat at his desk, looking over the transcripts from today's arraignment hearing for the Immortal Couple. Just as he had suspected, most of the charges were thrown out before it actually began. This was not surprising, since most of the charges were for deaths of Hel's Daugr soldiers, various dark entities, underworld figures and their assistance in the exile of an entity.

He straightened the papers and slipped them back into the folder they had been delivered to him in, then sat the folder back on his desk. The gray wolf put his glasses on the desk, rolled his chair back a bit and put his head down on his arms, inwardly hating himself. He had been the catalyst of this, the fur that set the ball rolling. He didn't know how he would live with himself from now on with the knowledge of what he had done to the Celestial Warriors. His dark thoughts were interrupted by his intercom buzzing.

“Sir, a Mr. Ingvar Gamel to see you,” his secretary announced to him.

“Send him in,” the wolf replied, sitting up and straightening his shirt and tie. This was a meeting he rather wished wasn't happening, considering the reasons why. The door to his office opened and the black feline entered.

“So nice to be meeting with you again, Mr. Klepper,” the fur said in a deep, baritone voice that had a decided North Atlantic accent to it. The dark felid, possibly a panther, stopped in front of his somewhat unwilling business partner and sat a briefcase on the law-fur's desk. Dave looked up, seeing the coldness of this fur's heart in his eyes. He shuddered inwardly before he spoke.

“It has begun, Ingvar. They were charged and held over for trial,” Dave proffered up, not taking his eyes off of the fur standing in front of him for even a brief moment. “I don't see why we have to be involved in this in the first place.” he added.

“You cannot understand the reasoning, Mr. Klepper,” the dark feline replied as he sat down in the chair opposite the wolf. “There are things even you, a fur that has skipped about time and space, cannot possibly fathom. In order for the Council to attain the goals we desire, many furs will be hurt along the way. That is just the way it is. You need not understand it, only accept that you acted as we instructed you, and now we

pay you your price for compensation.” The feline straightened his tie, then smiled a cold, malicious smile.

“It's all there?” Dave asked, tapping the briefcase for emphasis.

“Except for this,” Mr. Gamel replied, pulling an unusually large amulet from his pocket. “You really would want what this medallion would give you?” he asked as he gave the medal to the canid behind the desk.

“I want it more than you could possibly understand,” Dave replied.

“Place it around your neck so we may conclude our business.” Ingvar instructed. Dave did as he was told, placing the amulet's chain over his head and settling the medallion on his chest. Once there, it glowed brightly for a moment or two, then went back to the normal gold color it began with.

“That's it?” the law-fur inquired. That didn't seem like much to him, considering the actual purpose of the weighty piece of metal.

“Yes, that is it. You might enjoy it for the moment, but let's wait about, hmm . . . I don't know . . . three hundred years or so and see if you still enjoy immortality.” Mr. Gamel stated. “I think by then, you will decide the other offer, the second one I made you would be more than welcome.” Dave looked up to tell him what he thought of the other offer of a quick, painless death in exchange for his soul but Ingvar was gone.

The wolf pulled the briefcase over towards himself, laid it down and opened it, just to be sure that the rare gold and silver coins along with the gold-pressed latinum strips were indeed inside. Touching the amulet, he felt torn by the implications; he would no longer die from pancreatic cancer but would being immortal turn out to be a curse? Mr. Gamel had told him that he would be begging for death after a few hundred years or so. The wealth, however, represented by the coins and latinum strips now in his possession might just outweigh the negatives. Hell, if he played his investments right, he might be able to buy back his mortality someday.

Wilhelmine was finishing up with washing the dishes left over from dinner, thinking about the day in retrospect. Her adopted aunt and uncle were in trouble with the Celestial Courts, she was under surveillance by the FBI and she still didn't know if she was a Valkyrie or not. If anything, her pregnancy at this point was the least of her worries. Putting the dishrag on the counter, she summoned Hrist in her mind.

“What is it, Wilhelmine? I came as fast as I could,” the spotted equine femme stated as she materialized in Willi's kitchen.

The palomino femme looked at the taller femme for a moment before she replied. “I need to see Odin, Hrist. I have to know if I'm a Valkyrie or not.” she stated.

“I'll have to see if you can do that,” Hrist replied. “You know, maybe you should . . .” Willi cut her off politely.

“Hrist, have you ever known me to back down from anything?”

“No, I have not.”

“Then you know I will not back down. I need to know.”

Hrist thought about this situation for a moment, then spoke up. “I will ask Freya if she will see you.”

Before Willi could object, the spotted mare was gone. Then before Wilhelmine could summon Hrist again, she reappeared, along with a red fox vixen wearing a blue robe. The vixen stepped forward and hugged Wilhelmine before she spoke.

“I am Freya, Goddess of Love and War. Hrist tells me you are in need of some fur to talk to.” she said to Willi in a soft, kind voice.

“I need to know some things, Freya,” Willi replied, motioning for them to sit at the table. She went into her kitchen, rounded up some nice red wine, a loaf of french bread, some cheddar cheese and returned with it.

“You honor me with food and drink, Wilhelmine. You are so kind.” Freya put forth. “Now, while we enjoy this offering, please tell me your troubles.”

“Freya, I was given the power to summon Hrist by Eyr and Hrist gave me a spear to protect myself with. Now I've come to realize the spear is much more than protection.” Willi waited a moment before she continued. “My spear acts as if I were a Valkyrie. No other being can touch it. Furthermore, I can summon Hrist without speaking. All I have to do is think of her and she responds.”

Freya thought for a moment before she replied to Willi's concerns. “If you are worried that you're a Valkyrie, I can assure you that you are not. As much as I would like to have you as one of my warrior femmes, your God would not allow it. Just think for a moment; a Christian, working for Allfather? No, it would not happen.”

The vixen sipped her wine, then continued. “Your spear is doing exactly what it was intended to do, regardless of being a Valkyrie or not. It is a conduit through which you channel your abilities. It is an extension of you, a part of you, Wilhelmine and it *will* protect you.” Freya stopped, nodded at some thought that went through her mind, then sipped her wine again before she finished her thoughts. “Your powers of magic are strong but I sense you might be able to control *sejd*, too. That may be an influencing factor in your abilities.”

“*Sejd*? I've heard Aslaug talk of it but I don't know what it means.” Willi put forth.

Freya smiled, looked down, then back at Willi. “*Sejd* is not quite like magic, Wilhelmine. Magic forces the world to accept what has been forced to happen, such as making a vase with flowers in it to appear on the table. *Sejd* is more subtle, such as a rose bush that is wilted and sickly. You would think you would like the bush to become better and in a few days time, it would be healthy again. That is *sejd*. It allows things to happen but it doesn't force them to happen.”

“I think I see,” the palomino femme stated. “My front lawn was looking so bad from a blight that was causing it to get rusty-looking patches on the grass blades. I didn't want to 'put the whammy' on the lawn, as Richard, my husband fondly calls it, so I kept thinking of a way to help the lawn to be healthy. About four days later, it looked a lot better.”

“You might very well be able to control *sejd*, then.” Freya stated. “You are a very powerful femme that no doubt will be a very powerful force in your God's realm.” Freya smiled and added, “You might get to keep your spear, too.” She smiled a mischievous smile as she pointed out, “It's not like Odin or WhiteChrist can take it away from you.”

A lone fur walked across the street, careful of the inattentive furs that were texting or surfing the internet on their cellular phones while driving. These mechanical beasts were still something he would rather not be involved with, especially after that last go-around with the vehicle that belonged to that law-fur. It wasn't like he was going to keep it, at any rate. He just needed to get to the next city, that's all.

He wandered into a particular bar, stopping just momentarily to allow his eyes to adjust to the dimness in the establishment. It was clean, as far as dives go, and the clientele seemed a step or two above seedy, just the place to meet another fur.

Scanning the room, he located the two furs that had summoned him to this meeting. Carefully making his way across the room, he sat down at the table opposite the male and femme tigers.

“You asked for me to meet you?” he queried, scanning the room for trouble afterward.

“I asked for you to meet with us, Morgan. I have a job for you, if you're interested,” Mitchell Gallegos replied. He pushed an envelope on the table over to the dark-clothed badger, then he tapped it to indicate it was the assignment.

“Sounded serious on the phone, Mitch. This is the job?” he asked, picking up the envelope and putting it into a pocket inside his overcoat.

Mitch nodded, then looked at him square in the eyes. “I'm calling in that marker you owe me for bailing your butt out of jail last year. Find the fur behind this travesty of justice. Two good furs, Agents, need this information so they can clear themselves with the courts.”

“Ah, the Svensens, eh? I'll be glad to help them clear their good names,” the badger replied, letting a warm smile cross his muzzle. “*Yeab, just my kind of job,*” he thought, sitting back in his chair. “*Go bust a few heads, piss off the Malefic Council and maybe moon WhiteChrist while I'm at it. Just my kind of job.*” Mitch talking to him snapped his attention back to the present.

“So, Morgan, you've heard about this situation? I thought the investigative department kept this on the hush.” the male tiger pointed out. It didn't surprise him when Morgan nodded 'yes' to him. Needing to know how much he knew, Mitch asked another question; “Any ideas off-paw about who's behind this?”

Morgan thought for a moment, then answered. “Yeah, most likely the Malefic Council. They've been itching to get their paws on them for years. They see the Svensens for what they could be; powerful dark agents that have the knowledge of what lies beyond. Just think of the power they could hold over mortal furs; tell them and then show them religion and faith aren't what they think they should be and show them that their Gods aren't what they profess to be. Show them just how hypocritical their Gods are, to the point that they turned their backs on Torvald and Victoria.”

“What of the Gods? Do you think they will step in and stop this . . . this farce?” Lisa asked.

“Naw, I don't think so this time. Seems the God of Abraham is offended by Torvald taking a Christian wife, not once but twice and putting immortal children on His planet, a planet where Torvald is just a visitor, practically a barely-tolerated or unwanted guest.” Morgan replied. “It flies in the face of His tenets. I hear the Big Fur thinks Torvald and Victoria took turns pissing in his Cheerios. The Almighty has abandoned them, the way I see it. Maybe not Allfather but certainly the Big Fur.”

Mitchell grimaced at the thought of abandonment. “You know, the immortal children are by Torvald's second wife Maryanne. Why did Victoria get caught up in all of this? Isn't she innocent?”

Morgan mused about this for a moment before he answered. “I dunno, Mitch. Guilty by association? Because Eyr made her son James Conrad an immortal? I'm not sure, I'm just guessing at this point . . .”

Mitch passed him a card with a cell phone number on it. “Call me when you have what you think I need,” he asked, hoping he wasn't putting his best private investigator's neck out on a chopping block.

“I'll do what I can,” Morgan replied. “I'll have to be careful, though. Rumor has it Aslaug Larsdatter and Jose Latrans are up to something themselves so I'll have to stay out of their way.” The badger stood up, laid a card on the table and quietly left the room.

Lisa picked up the business card and looked at it. In the upper left corner was the name Morgan Sleight. In the bottom right corner was a local cell number and in the center of the card, in red, was the letters 'S' and 'L' followed by the number '8'. The 'S' had a small dagger intersecting it, making the 'S' look like a dollar sign. That little dagger was depicted dripping blood from its tip.

Axel was turning off the 'OPEN' sign in the front window, preparing to close the shop for the evening. It had been a long day for some reason, with some of the customers seeming to be . . . unusually irritating to him. At least he had gotten a few compliments on his appearance. One regular customer even commented it was good to see him in his actual coloration. That femme did a very good dye job for him.

He was heading for the door to lock it when a stoat in a business suit, carrying a briefcase walked in.

“Can I help you?” the equine asked, wondering why someone would come in so late, especially after he had turned off the sign.

The fur looked around for a moment, then turned to face Axel. “Are you one of the owners?” he asked, giving him his full attention.

“I am one half of the owners. How can I help you?” he asked again, hoping this wasn't a set-up or something. Axel reached behind himself, making like he was scratching his back. He actually lifted the tail of his shirt and repositioned it, getting his Springfield Armory 1911 pattern .45ACP pistol clear. He had a habit of arming himself after this thing with his parents had started.

“My name is Joshua Horner. I represent a group of investors from the Mid-West.” he offered up.

“I'm Axel Svensen. What brings you here so late?”

“The group I represent wishes to buy a few of the smaller music shops in the Los Angeles area and create a chain with them. I'm prepared to offer top dollar for your business.” the stoat put forth.

“How much are you offering?”

“Well, we would have to have an accountant look at your books to determine the actual worth of the business. Just to give you an idea, we offered Darryl Towne just a bit over four hundred-thousand for his business. Your shop is bigger and I understand you do a very brisk business.”

“We cater to the beginner and the professional here. I have all the major brands and we try our best to keep the garbage out of here.” Axel offered up.

“Give it some thought, Mr. Svensen. Here's where I can be reached,” the representative said as he gave Axel a business card.

“Okay, we'll think about it,” Axel stated, just to get the fur out of the shop. He escorted Mr. Horner to the door and locked it after the stoat stepped through.

“Hon, what was that all about?” Madelyn asked as she came out of the back room. “I had a shotgun on him the whole time but he seemed to be on the up and up.” she stated.

“I don't know what to make of it.” Axel conceded. “I have his business card so maybe I can find out who he really works for.”

Axel pulled the security gate closed and locked it, then they made their way into the the office to do a search on his company name, 'Borden Associates, LLC'. A quick Yahoo! search turned up the name of the primary partner in Borden Associates, LLC; it was Odell Martin, CEO of Guitar Shack, Inc.

Madelyn nodded, taking a deep breath to get her anger under control. “I knew I smelled a rat, disguised as a stoat, working for a huge bovine ass-hat.” she stated.

“Well, so much for that,” Axel said sarcastically as he shut down the computer. “I'll bring this up Wednesday morning at the Independent Owner's coffee klatch. Hopefully, no fur bites on this deal. Especially Darryl. All guitar Shack needs is a toe-hold in this area and they will force out all of us little furs., just like they did in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.”

Making sure the shop was shut down properly, they went out through the side door to the parking lot, set the alarm and went home.

It was just beginning to get light outside and the tigress found herself unable to sleep any longer. She snuggled up closer to her stallion, feeling the warmth radiating from his body. She pulled the covers up under her chin and pondered their predicament.

They had been charged with one death apiece, the demise of two criminals that had tried to kill her in cold blood. It bothered her to have to end a life like that, since she was immortal and she would have survived the outcome of either encounter. What really bugged her was the unwillingness of their employers from *On High* to send any assistance. Had they finally been abandoned?

“Torvald? Are you awake?” she whispered.

"I've been awake for an hour, Sweetheart." he replied softly.

"Tor, have we been abandoned? Have they forsaken us?" she asked.

Torvald rubbed his nose before he answered. "In my heart, I want to believe they haven't forsaken us but the fact is, I think they have." he replied.

"What does that mean for us?" she asked, snuggling up tighter to him. The thought that they had been abandoned scared her to no end.

"It means we are on our own in this matter. For the rest of our unnatural lives, in fact." he offered up. "It also means the Dark Ones, the Malefic Council will be trying to recruit us. You know, when that little oil-slick demon that took that feral bear's body was stalking you, he wouldn't have killed you, I believe. I think he would have torn you up real good, just to get me to lose it. If they can manage to turn one of us, they will have us both."

"You really think so?" Victoria asked.

"I do." Torvald looked at his mate, the love of his life, the biggest reason he didn't want to leave this planet. "If they do succeed in turning us, I just wonder if we would still love one another." he mused.

"Honey, I don't want to work for the Darkness," she put forth, trying to keep from crying. "I can't work for those who tried to kill us."

"I agree but it might become our only choice." he countered. "Maybe we should just get up and fix ourselves something to eat. It seems like our sleep has come to an end." Torvald suggested.

"I'll second that, as long as your cooking," his mate told him as she got out of bed. "Waffles would be fine with me; quick and easy to make."

Tor sat up on the edge of the bed, stretching his arms. "Okay, Waffles it is but you have to do the dishes."

Trenton wandered through the house, searching for his better half. Her purse was on the hall table and her Plymouth Prowler was in the garage, the hood still warm. Looking out the patio door, he found her sitting in a patio chair, smoking a cigarette while she waited to see the sun rise.

He opened the door, which made her look his way momentarily from the sound. Crossing the patio, he pulled up a chair next to hers and sat down. "Um, Nan, you want to talk about it?" he asked, having a good suspicion about what was bothering her.

Nancy took another drag off of her cigarette, letting the smoke roll languorously out of her nostrils before she answered. "Yeah, I had an episode at work yesterday." He knew what she meant, it was her way of saying "I thought of suicide again" without saying the actual words.

"I'm sorry, Nan. I wish there was something I could do for you." he offered up.

She looked at her husband in a very sad, almost pained way. "I know you care, Trent. It's just that . . . I've lived with these demons for too long. I'm afraid that some day, I will find a way to kill myself and carry it

out.” She looked down and pursed her lips before she continued. “I just know it. Someday I will . . .” She stifled a sob, putting a paw up to cover her eyes.

“Honey, look, maybe your Grandfather could give you some insight.” he suggested.

She stubbed out what was left of her smoke, took another one from the pack and lit it up. “I guess I could do that but there's more to it.” She took a drag off of her cigarette, then sat it in the ashtray beside her. “You remember what I told you about working for the Gods?” she asked.

Trenton nodded. “Yeah, something about running screaming the other way?”

“Yeah, that. Well, the angel Uriel came to me yesterday. He told me I have to make a choice soon.” Nancy took another puff, then continued. “He said if I didn't work for the Gods, they might take away my immortality. If they did, it might kill me.”

Trenton looked down in thought, then looked back over at his wife. “So, what is it they want you to do?” he asked.

Nancy was looking at the pending sunrise, the colors so beautiful and vibrant. It was quiet at this early hour, the very reason she had gotten out of bed to think. “They want me to do retrieval duty. Uriel said I would go get items left behind on missions and find things before mortal furs could find them.”

Trent was giving thought to this. “That doesn't sound too bad to me. You do love the antiquities.”

“I kind of think some of the things I would going after would be of modern origin or maybe tough to recover.” she put forth. “I wish I knew more but just like Grandpa told us, seraphs are very evasive creatures. They won't tell you the whole story, only the parts that they think you need to hear.”

Her hubby was watching the sunrise, enraptured by the sheer beauty of it. It still boggled his mind that something could be so . . . breathtaking and it happened every clear morning they were awake early enough to see it and experience the panorama spread before them. He begrudgingly broke the silence that had surrounded them as the sun finally peeked over the rim of the mountains to the east.

“So, what will you do?”

Nancy almost broke down but found that little smidgen of composure that she had been holding onto. “Trenton, I don't know what I will do. I keep thinking I can't leave TJ, Chelsea and you to go gallivanting around the stars but if I turn down the offer, it might be the end of my life right there. I . . . I'm torn, Honey. I have no idea what to do.”

“Nan, are you going to work today?” he asked, concerned that she probably needed a few days off to get her head back on straight.

“No, I already called in.” she replied, taking another drag off of her smoke. “I'm taking a few days off, too.” she added. She looked down at her hooves, then back to Trenton. “Maybe a day or two off will help my outlook on this situation.”

Dave stood facing the wall by the front door to his house, the side of his face plastered to the wallpaper

and his right paw pulled up into the middle of his back in a place it normally couldn't reach. Morgan was the one holding that paw firmly in place while carefully explaining to the wolf just what the situation was.

“Mr. Klepper, you can either tell me who instructed you to file those charges or I'll be inclined to see if your paw can reach the back of your head.” he said quietly into his ear.

The canid was sweating and it wasn't warm in his house at the moment. “I'm tellin' ya, his name was Ingvar! Now let me go!” he demanded. He screamed out in pain next when the badger put a little more pressure on this brutal submission hold.

“Now Dave, you expect me to believe you don't know the gentle-fur's last name? Hmm?” Morgan brought up, putting just a bit more angle on his quarry's wrist, placing even more tension on the tendons in his paw. “Keep fooling around with me and there will be permanent damage to your wrist that your cherished amulet will be quite unable to repair. It won't grow you a new paw.”

“Come on! I told you, his name was Ingvar!” Dave put forth through gritted teeth. The pain from his wrist was so bad, he was having trouble keeping his thoughts together. Morgan had him a hold that was like a vise and he just as well have been part of the wall, he was being restrained that firmly.

“Ingvar *what?*” the badger demanded loudly, punching the canid in the ribs for emphasis.

“Okay, it was Ingvar Gamel!” Dave finally confessed.

Morgan punched his victim in the kidney right before he released him. “It figures you would do business with Gamel. By the way, that last punch was for making me have to torture you for that information, you dumb-ass! Those punches don't really matter anyway, since you were ignorant enough to fall for that 'immortality' shit. You'll want your mortality back soon enough. I should know.”

Morgan stepped over the collapsed form of Mr. Klepper and went out the front door, making sure it was locked behind himself as he left. He walked out to the street and down a few houses to the vehicle he had 'borrowed' from a used car lot. Getting inside, he started the engine, checked his mirror and pulled away from the curb.

“Hmm, I'm getting better at this driving stuff,” he commented to himself, slowing down to turn at the corner. “Now to make a few stops to find out where Gamel is hiding.”

Willi Marie was wandering the house after her husband Richard had left for work, feeling kind of bored because most of the housework had been done and her parents and house guests weren't up yet. She heard the newspaper hit the front porch so she opened the door to get the morning tabloid. The small army of FBI agents on her front porch surprised her.

“Agent Wood, FBI. Mrs. Delancey, please come with us,” he directed, gripping her elbow to guide her down the walk to their waiting parade of black Suburbans.

Willi pulled back, clenching her fists to keep from slinging her magic at them. “Hold on just a minute! These are my pajamas I'm wearing!” she pointed out.

“We will bring you some of your clothes, Mrs. Delancey. Come with us.” he said insistently.

She pulled back again when some fur attempted to put paw-cuffs on her. "I will go with you willingly but you can forget the paw-cuffs, buster!" she stated rather tersely.

"Glenn, get those cuffs on her," the lead agent stated, giving his partner a strange look when the agent behind Willi began patting his clothing, searching for something. "Glenn?"

"Dang, Terry. I must have left my cuffs in the car," the otter offered up, checking his pockets again.

"Use mine," agent Wood said as he went for his set. They weren't in his cuff-case or a pocket. The other agents soon noticed they were without restraint devices, too.

"Shit! Frank and Mandy said weird things happened around her!" the collie offered up. "Okay, Mrs. Delancey, will you come with us quietly?" he finally asked in a neutral voice.

"If you will let me change first, I will do so."

Willi Marie knew exactly where she was; the downtown Los Angeles branch of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, fourth floor, room four thirty-one. She had been here long enough to will the video camera to quit working and she had used her mind to 'see' through the one-way glass, noting agents Wood and Reed were talking to one another. She could lip-read parts of their conversations about the Lakers game tonight.

An agent came into the room with a folder in his paws. The onager sat down opposite her, opened the file and looked at the cover page for a moment, then at the femme facing him.

"Wilhelmine Marie Kurzweil, born five September nineteen ninety-two, Münster, Germany. Early graduated from Mira Monte High School in two thousand-nine. Attended CSU Fullerton, undergrad in Criminal Justice, graduate of UC Santa Barbara majoring in Criminal Justice. Served two years compulsory service with the German Army in the German/Dutch Corps, rank of Hauptgefreiter, duty of Demolitions Expert. Married to Richard Tisdale Delancey while still in college, legally a citizen of Germany. Currently pregnant with twins."

Willi pursed her lips, then smiled a slight smile at the agent. "You seem to know me very well, Agent. Mind telling me why I'm here? No other fur seems to want to say why." she pointed out.

The agent took a photo out of the folder and sat it in front of Willi. "Know this fur?"

She examined the photo of a rather ordinary young teen stag. "No I can't say as I do. He has one of those faces that blends in."

He gave her another photo of that same fur, but older, more mature. "Still don't recognize him?"

"No, sorry, I don't."

"Does the name Roland Braunschmidt ring a bell? Grade nine, sat behind you in homeroom, you went to a dance with him?"

“No, not really . . . Oh, Rollie. Yeah, I knew him. Lived down the street from my parents. I went with him to the dance as a favor to his sister who was my close friend. He couldn't dance at all.” She smiled at finally remembering that episode of her life. It seemed so long ago.

“Recognize this fur?” he asked, showing her a picture of a stag with a long beard, wearing Middle-Eastern clothing. He was holding an AK-47 carbine and a book of some kind.

“Should I recognize . . .” The sudden realization that it was another picture of Rollie sent shivers up her spine.

“Yeah, that's your friend's brother. He's a high-ranking fur in the Taliban.”

Willi gasped. “What does this have to do with me?” She was getting scared now, which was a bad thing. Whenever she got nervous or scared, things happened around her not entirely by her direct control.

“Rollie is a specialist in IED's, Mrs. Delancey. They appear to be done in a style used by the German Army. In a style you are quite familiar with.” The agent closed the folder, sat back and folded his arms across his chest.

“I ask again, what does that have to do with me?” Willi was getting very upset by this line of questioning.

“You and Mr. Roland Braunschmidt were both stationed in Münster, Germany at the same time.”