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## **“End Game”**

By Kellan Meig'h

### Chapter 10 – “Trials”

Nancy opened her eyes, the light in the room waking her up on what was her second day of this mission for the Gods. She stretched her arms out and quickly pulled them back under the covers to keep them warm, not being used to having no coat of hair on her body.

“Are you awake?” her father asked, rolling over to look across the room at his daughter's bed.

“Yeah, I'm up and it's freezing in this room!” she blurted out.

Her parent smiled. “It is pretty cold but you'll get used to it.” he suggested.

“Could you give me my clothes? Please?” she asked.

“I can do that,” he replied, getting out of bed and stretching. Brad still had on his tunic and leggings that he had been traveling in. “You might try sleeping in some clothes tonight to stay warm.”

“Um, yeah. I'll give that a try.” Nancy stated. “Dad, how many days do you think this mission will take?”

“I would guess about two more days. We have to get to a small city and find a mage that lives there. He has the backpack that we're after.” her father replied.

“How are we going to get it back?” she asked.

“I'm praying it will be easy but I fear we might have to use force, most likely. I have a dart gun that will incapacitate him long enough to tie him up if it's necessary. After that, we'll search his home for the item.”

Nancy thought about this situation, then asked a question that had been bugging her. “Dad, how did the backpack get here in the first place?”

Brad cringed. “Um, yeah, about that.” He shook his head, then continued. “My regular partner Nick, not

of his own choice, left it here. You don't know just how badly I still want to kick his arse for bringing that stuff with us in the first place!"

"He just left it?"

"Um, no, not like that. He was pretty torn up from an encounter with a crude cannon. The round shattered when the cannon went off and exploded, but he was in no shape to run, filled with shrapnel like that. I had to carry him with one paw and fend off our attackers with the other."

Nancy's eyes grew wide from that information. "Are we in for that kind of trouble?" she asked.

"No, we're not," he replied. "We're just going to slip in as quietly as possible, get the items in question and get the heck out of there."

The female pondered this situation, then asked a question that was burning in her mind. "Dad, why can't the angels do this work?"

"I'm not sure," he answered as he packed his gear up. "I think it must have something to do with a 'No Interference' policy instituted by *The Almighty*."

"Oh," Nancy said softly, getting her gear together.

"Well, let's go round up some breakfast and get going. We have a long day ahead of us," her father said as he motioned to the door. This mission was getting stranger by the minute in Nancy's eyes.

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Doctor Eugene Cosby from the Consortium, a rather diminutive brindle colored canid, checked Torvald over carefully while Judge Talmadge along with Counselors Carmel, Iskenderian and the others watched on. The physician made various small noises as he checked each wound both visually and with his powers of healing.

"Mala, Wilhelmine, you both have done a very good job of patching the stallion back up," he stated. "I understand you caught the fur responsible for this?"

"We retrieved him," Hrist replied. "He will not tell us the name of his employer, though." The clouded leopard was tied to a chair on the patio quite securely and he looked a little bit worse for wear. The two femme equines had worked him over in an attempt to 'break' him and force him to talk.

"Well, you just leave him secured like that for a few days. Hunger and thirst will force his tongue," the judge brought forth. "In the meantime, I think we need to postpone the trial, at least until Mr. Svensen is able to sit in court."

"How long will that postponement be?" Victoria asked.

"As I have said, at least until your husband is able to stand trial," Harold put forth. "This is probably the most trumped-up proceedings that I have had in my courtroom in the last several hundred years."

Mala made her intentions known. "I'm staying here until the trial, as a 'casual observer', Judge Talmadge. I'm under the impression that the Malefic Council is behind this and you know how The Consortium feels

about them.”

“I am well aware of The Consortium's views, Mrs. O'Kendrenal.” the judge retorted. “I have no problems with your staying here. Please feel free to do whatever you feel is necessary to keep the proceedings on track, if you get my drift.”

“I get your drift, all right,” the blue and white femme responded. “You can bet I will help out in any capacity that I can.”

“Just see to it you don't break any laws, please?” the canid asked, fiddling with a device. He erected a portal and nodded, stepping through to his destination.

Victoria was standing by Wilhelmine so she made a comment about the palomino femme's rather provocative attire once the judge had left. “Um, Wilhelmine, you look real pretty like that but I hope we didn't spoil something,” she suggested, fingering the silk rope remnant still dangling from the D-ring of the cuff around her wrist.

“Well, I would be lying if I said 'No', Aunt Victoria.” she replied. “I had just purchased this teddy at that ‘Big and Tall Lingerie’ shop in the mall up in West Covina and Richard and I finally had the house to ourselves.”

“I'm sorry we messed that up for you,” the tigress stated, knowing just how hard that was to have time with her significant other when there were kits still living in their house.

“No, that's alright. We still have this evening and tomorrow.” Willi pointed out.

“Um, so why didn't you take the cuffs off?” Mala asked.

“Yeah, well, erm, I put a spell on them.” Wilhelmine replied. “Only the keys that Richard holds will unlock the padlocks.”

“You are a naughty filly . . . um, I mean mare,” Victoria said with a smile. “I think we have things under control now, so if you want to go home, please do so. Richard is probably waiting for you to return.”

“Well, only if you will call me if you need me.” the sorceress replied.

“We will,” Mala told her, smiling. “I'm here so there's not much that could happen that we would need you.”

“You will call if you need me, right?” Willi questioned to Mala and Victoria very firmly.

“We will call.” Victoria replied. “Now get home to your hubby!”

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Once Wilhelmine had popped out to return to her home, Dr. Cosby went to see about Cami's leg. She still had that coagulating pad over her wound with some gauze bandage to hold it there until it could be looked at.

“Camille, you do know this will hurt when I pull this pad off?” he queried, preparing to cut the gauze

over the pad.

“Yeah, I know. Want me to do it?” she asked as she sat on a chair so the doctor could tend to her injury.

“If you think it would hurt less, go ahead.” the doctor replied, cutting the gauze and discarding it.

Cami nodded, then stripped the pad away from her thigh, opening the wound again. Her heavily-stifled gasp that she made afterward let the doctor know that it caused her some pain to do that. “That hurt!” she blurted out through gritted teeth, blinking her eyes to clear the white spots that floated in front of them.

“You're pretty tough, Camille.” the doctor offered up. “I've seen strong male furs pass out when I've pulled off a pad that's been on as long as that one has.”

“It was close,” she commented, blinking her teary eyes. “Well, go ahead and clean it up, Doc. I know it's probably full of dirt.”

“You're right; it is full of dirt.” he mused. “Um, this is going to sting a lot,” he told her, looking into her eyes to see that she understood. He then used a military-grade disinfectant to irrigate the wound. The femme wolverine was coming very close to passing out again from the pain.

“D . . . Doc, could you hold up for a minute?” Cami begged as her vision narrowed on her. “I don't . . . don't want to pass . . .” The former soldier finally blacked out, fortunately with Victoria standing behind her, holding her up.

“Help me put her on a table, will you?” the doctor asked Mala, smiling when she used her powers to produce an exam table and put the unconscious femme on it. “I knew she would pass out,” he told them while he finished his work. “Better that she's out, anyway. That makes it easier for me to suture up her leg.”

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The two rhinos watched as the badger slipped into a hotel room at an extended stay motel in Fountain Valley. They observed his skills at jimmying an electronic lock, impressed by the swiftness of his entry.

“Any idea who he is?” Jesse asked.

“Um, my bet would be Morgan Sleight.” Randall replied. “Why do you ask? Thinking about going in there and confronting him?”

“Naw, I'm not insane,” the younger Agent retorted. “Just curious, that's all. He moves like he's part feline, if you ask me.”

“He's older than dirt, from what I hear. Nobody wants him so that made him bitter. Heard he told the Malefic Council to 'Piss Off' about a hundred hears ago.” Randall brought up, looking at the room through a pair of binoculars. “He's slippin' in his old age, though. Shoulda closed the blinds.”

“If he's older than dirt, there's a reason why.” Agent Donohue suggested.

“I'll bet he's immortal.” Agent Trask retorted. “Look, he's coming out,” Randall added.

They watched as the badger slipped out of the room quietly and headed across the parking lot to a

nondescript late model Holden Commodore, got in and drove off. Jesse and Randall waited until the badger had left the premises before they entered the room to see what had been so interesting. What they discovered was a room that had been tossed in a way that would make any drill sergeant proud.

“Pretty thorough, huh?” Jesse mused.

“Yeah, he really tossed the place.” Randall replied. “I kinda see why he didn't hang around, though. Ingvar was through with this room.”

“How do you know?” This puzzled the younger agent.

“Receipt.” the elder agent proffered up. On the end table was a cash receipt for the room, stating today at noon was the checkout time. It was now eight in the evening.

“Well, guess we'll have to keep looking.” Jesse said as he turned to leave.

“Yeah, we'll just keep looking.” Randall replied.

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Victoria woke up from her nap, her head against the side of the mattress her hubby was sleeping on. He had been fitful for some time before he had finally settled down to sleep, much to Victoria's relief. She knew from experience that he might be in and out for a few days while his body healed up from his injuries.

Looking over at the couch, Mala was asleep on the floor, curled up in front of it while Cami occupied the couch proper. They seemed like a rather rag-tag bunch at the moment, not a trio of warriors and a Grand Mistress sorceress.

She stood up and stretched out her limber feline body, trying to work out the kinks from sleeping in a chair, slumped forward against the side of that hospital bed. Looking at her watch, it was almost six in the morning, nearly time to get up. So much for getting back to sleep in her own bed.

While preparing the coffee maker, she gave thought to this situation; her hubby was injured, their entire family might be at risk and their employers from 'On High' had most likely abandoned them.

She thought back to the first time Torvald had shown her that he was immortal. They had come back to her apartment after a meal and he had told her there was something he really needed to show her before they got married. Once the kit-sitter had left and she was sure Conrad was back asleep, she told him to show her what was so important. He then cut his palm deeply with one of her chef's knives.

At first she thought he had lost his mind and reached for the phone so she could call for an ambulance. Torvald stopped her, wiping the blood away to reveal his palm, healing right before her eyes. When she had proclaimed it a parlor trick, he did the other one, just to make a point.

She remembered standing there, looking at him casually wiping away the blood with a paper towel, totally gob-smacked by the realization that a fur could be immortal. She finally asked him to leave so she could think about this. Victoria remembered being polite about it, explaining she needed some time to get her head around this idea.

The tigress didn't see Torvald for a few weeks, either ignoring his calls or making up an excuse why she couldn't see him. She eventually accepted the fact that her future husband was indeed immortal and she did love him with all of her heart. They were married two weeks later.

This had been a long, strange ride for her, from being a normal family, her hubby a police-fur and she a real estate agent, to a pair of abandoned warriors, charged with crimes against the universe. What could happen next? She finally poured herself a cup of coffee to sip while she decided on what to fix for breakfast.

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Nancy tried to eat her breakfast on this second morning of their mission, a cream of 'something', made by her father over an open fire. They had no milk in their supplies and the butter they had brought with them was very odd tasting. Probably since it wouldn't melt properly in her hot cereal.

"Dad, what is this stuff?" she asked, trying to stir in the butter in hopes it would blend in.

Brad looked up at her from his cereal. "It's supposed to cream of wheat. What kind of wheat, I'm not sure."

"Well, it's pretty nasty." she offered up.

"Yeah, I agree. We'll get something better in town for lunch." He suggested.

Nancy had a question in her mind that had been bothering her all day yesterday. "Dad, what happens if I don't like this work? How will I die when the Gods remove my immortality?"

"I'm not sure, Hon. I lost a partner to death about ten years ago. He decided he had just had enough and asked to end it all. An angel came, touched him on the forehead and he died, just like that." Brad thought about it for a moment, then added his personal thoughts. "I think you'll like this job, even though it's tough. You will get to handle a multitude of antiques."

"I wonder if Aslaug would come for me? She seemed to be a good friend to Grandpa Torvald," Nancy mused.

Brad contemplated for a moment before he replied. "I'm not sure about that, Nan. She's a Valkyrie, a collector of souls for *Allfather*. You're Christian, Hon. I'm not sure if *The Almighty* would allow Aslaug to collect your soul."

"Sometimes I wish I weren't Christian. Like right now, in fact," the daughter piped up, much to her father's surprise. "I was cold last night, even under two blankets! I just don't see how you handle doing business in such rough, primitive conditions."

"I'm sorry you feel that way." Brad stated. "You know what; there have been times I felt the same way about *Allfather*. Mostly when the chips were down and it looked like he wasn't listening." Brad looked down at his meal, shaking his head. "I hope you don't want to end it, Hon. At least not until TJ and Chelsea are grown up. They need both of you around to guide them."

"I don't want to give up my life, Dad." Nancy said softly. "It's just . . . it's these damned demons I've had to live with all of my adult life. Every time I think I'm doing fine, I think about committing suicide again."

It's like . . . even though I know I won't die, I want to see just how immortal I really am.”

That didn't seem to phase her father. “How about standing up to a dragon's breath, one that would melt steel? Immortal enough for you?” he posed. “That car wreck you had wasn't shit. I saw your car afterward and I could tell you didn't even come close.” He stopped, sat his spoon back in his cereal and continued. “I know what you're going through because I think those same thoughts, too.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, I do.”

Nancy pursed her lips, thinking this over. “How do you deal with it?” she asked, wanting to know some wisdom in this matter.

“I just . . . I just deal with it, Hon. I stop and think, 'Do I really want to kill myself or am I just pissed off that I can't die?' I realize at that point I don't really want to die and try my best to carry on afterward.”

Nancy shrugged her shoulders. “Gah, I was hoping you would have said something very profound.”

“Sorry, Nan. That's how I deal with it. I remind myself that I don't want to die, then I move on.”

“Um, Dad, about that; What will you do about your appearance? I noticed you quit using that theatrical gray in your fur.”

“I already have a plan.” he replied. “I'll have the Gods move me to another place with a new identity. Your Step-Mom understands that I won't do that, though until after she passes away.”

“Well, maybe I can learn to deal with it,” Nancy stated, finishing the last of her meal.

“I hope so, Hon. I would hate to see you give up your life so early.”

“Me too,” she interjected, frowning at the thought. “Me too.”

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Victoria had all the ingredients rounded up to make French toast and she was preparing to start cooking when she heard her hubby stir. Going to see about him, she noted he was awake, his eyes partially open.

“Tor? How do you feel?” she asked, checking his pulse which seemed pretty fast for a resting fur.

“I feel like some fur parked a steamroller on me,” he replied at barely above a whisper, wincing as his wife peeked under the bandages covering the worst injury over his liver. That bandage had some fresh blood on it, much to her consternation.

Looking at his face that seemed pale this morning, his reply made the tigress feel uneasy. “So, you can't get a deep breath or you're just hurting?” she queried.

“Can't get a deep breath.” he answered. “I feel like my chest is too tight, sorta like some fur is standing on it.” he wheezed out.

“Okay, this has gone on long enough!” Victoria stated very angrily. She took a few deep breaths to clear her head and then looked skyward. “Christopher! Odin! Tor is dying! I need one of you to help out right now!! Do you hear me?!” she screamed, not caring who she woke up. “One of you needs to do something right now before he dies!!”

Without warning, the world around the tigress and her stallion went white . . .

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Ingvar smiled when the Immortal Couple faded from view, giving him the opportunity to do what he needed to do. He slipped across the patio to the form of Kenji who was tied very securely to a chair. It would only take a moment to take care of this situation. Using his pocket knife, the black panther cut through the bonds that held his assistant. Helping him to his feet, they slipped away, unnoticed.

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Nancy tried to keep her balance in her saddle, which was difficult, since she had her hands tied up rather securely. The two brigands that had jumped them by dropping out of a tree over the roadway, had tied a long leather thong to one of her wrists, forced her at pistol-point to cross her arms, then pulled the thong behind her back before tying the other wrist off. Her arms were crossed in front of her with no way to reach the knots to undo them. At least it wasn't too unbearable at the moment.

Despite all that had happened, she was more concerned with her father's condition, since he hadn't stirred once he had been tied across Star's saddle. The brigands had hit him in the back of the head with a sap of some sort, knocking him out. Because of the movement in the saddle, she couldn't tell if he was breathing or not.

Nancy was just waiting to see what would happen next, since the hoods that had jumped them had taken their sweet time in raping her earlier. She just hoped they didn't try to kill her and discover she was immortal. That could be a bad thing. She did take the time to formulate some sort of a plan for escape and a bit of retribution in the process.

The two men took a side path off the road, one not used very frequently. The path was partially overgrown, showing the fact that no one had been up this way in a while. Not a good thing. After a few minutes, they came out into a clearing that had a small shack of sorts in its midst.

The taller of the two bandits, a dark-skinned man, took her from her mount roughly and tied her binding thong to Jeff's reins, telling her to stay still or die. They then paid her no never-mind while they literally rolled Brad off of Star's back. She cringed when he hit the ground, crumpling into a heap.

“Hold still,” Jeff requested, whispering into her ear. “I'll bite through the thong and hold it in my mouth. You jump one of them when you see the chance and I'll try to trample the other.” he suggested.

Nancy nodded, crossing her arms as far as she could to give some slack to the thong. She smiled when she felt the thong go tight, then the tension going away substantially. It didn't take long for the shorter man to return, stopping momentarily to take his leggings off, indicating his intentions.

“Now, Missy, you and me are gonna dance . . .” He stopped talking when she took her knee and drove it as hard as she could into his unprotected groin, using her hands on his shoulders to add leverage. He dropped to the ground instantly.

Jeff and Star were making headway in cornering the taller of the two while Nancy used part of that thong to tie the shorter man's hands behind his back just as tight as she could. She knew it was cutting off the circulation to his hands but that was the effect she wanted. She finished by tying his ankles with the other part of the thong.

Quickly checking her father, she took a pistol from the taller highwayman's saddle and pointed it at him after pulling the hammer to full cock.

“Stand still or I'll kill you!” she shouted, getting the brigand's attention. Her outburst also garnered Jeff and Star's attention, too.

“Now what do you think yer gonna do with . . .” The bandit lost his bravado when she moved the aim of the pistol away from his face and down to his crown jewels.

“I suggest you lay down on the ground, face down, arms and legs spread.” she directed in a murderous tone, getting a good aim on her intended target. “DO IT NOW!!” she snapped at him.

“Yes, Mum,” he said in a frightened tone of voice as he quickly got down on the ground in the requested fashion. Star nipped a thong off of one of the bandit's saddles, bringing it to her so she could tie him up while Jeff went to nudge Brad and see if he was all right or not.

“Star, stand on the small of his back. I don't want him moving on me,” she requested, smiling to herself when the horse put enough of his weight on the brigand to hold him securely. She then tied his wrists and ankles in a secure fashion at her leisure.

Brad was finally coming around from Jeff's nudgings, noting he was on the ground and in a lot of pain. The bandits had obviously roughed him up before they secured him to the saddle. He looked around to see Nancy putting on the shorter man's leggings, since they had cut hers to ribbons before they had sexually abused her.

“Nancy? Are you alright?” her father inquired, sitting up and taking stock in his injuries. A few knife wounds that were healing up and a bad headache seemed to be the only issues at this point. He stood, looked around, then froze when he heard a female voice coming from the shack. A voice asking for rescue.

“I'm fine but did you hear that?” Nancy asked, not sure she had heard that sound but there it was again, coming from the shack. She went to investigate, pistol in hand.

Pushing the door open slowly, she scanned the room to see a female, brunette hair pulled back in a matted ponytail, stark naked, chained to the fireplace by a length of chain and a shackle around her ankle.

“Help me!” the female begged, seeming quite frantic about it. “Do not leave me to these varlets, please?”

“What are you doing here?” Brad asked, once he had joined them.

“I was taken from my home,” she replied, trying her best to keep from sobbing. “They killed my husband and burned our cottage! Please don't leave me here! They will surely kill me just like they killed the other female that was here with me!!”

Nancy rounded up a tunic and some leggings for her while Brad found the key that would unlock the

manacle around her ankle. After a brief struggle to work the lock, the bracelet slipped free of her leg.

“Thank you, kind Sir,” she offered. “I am Kimma, in your debt for saving me.”

“Just doing our job,” he replied, scanning the place to see if there was anything that might indicate the possibility of the duo outside being Dark Agents. “So, the brigands outside are rapists and murderers, eh? Seems like we should take them to be prosecuted.” he suggested.

“They . . . they sodomized the other woman that was here. Took turns at her.” Kimma said softly, looking down at the floor. “I do believe that is what killed her. She was bleeding badly for more than a day and she was almost dead when they slit her throat.”

“That's what they planned to do with me,” Nancy brought up. “They told me that they were going to make me watch them take Kimma, then eventually give me the same treatment.” It was clear that the thought of being raped again didn't set well with the younger Agent.

“Well, that settles it.” Brad said in an irritated tone. “We'll take these two into town and make sure they're prosecuted for their actions.”

“Kind Sir, the sheriff in the next town cares not for what they do.” Kimma pointed out. “He is very aware that I am here, being abused by these ruffians.”

“In that case, we'll just have to dispense a bit of justice ourselves.” Brad stated.

They went outside to where the two evil-doers were laying, attempting to get themselves free. Brad unceremoniously dragged the two of them over to a tree. He tied a rope around the taller man's neck, then threw it over a limb.

“Dad! You're not going to hang them, are you?” Nancy blurted out. “Not that they don't deserve it for raping me,” she added, wiping a tear away from her cheek with the sleeve of her tunic.

“Just watch,” he replied, making the taller one stand up with his ankles still tied rather tightly. He then made the shorter man stand up and tied the other end of the rope around his neck. “They can get themselves free by one of them chewing the rope through. In the meantime, we need to get out of here. Kimma, can you ride?”

“Yes, I can.” she replied. Gathering up their gear from the outlaw's packs, they mounted Star and Jeff after helping Kimma up onto the back of a blanket appaloosa belonging to the shorter bandit. Giving the highwaymen a wave, they were off.

The shorter bandit turned to look at the taller one, scowling as he spoke his mind. “I told you to leave them alone! Now see what kind of a mess you've gotten us into?!”

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Victoria looked around herself, unsure of where they were at the moment. This was not Asgaard nor was it Christopher's realm. Wherever this was, it was a forested area, very green and verdant. Regardless, she just wished she knew exactly where they were and how they were brought here.

Torvald seemed to be worse off than he was at their home, apparently struggling a bit for his breath. To

top it off, he seemed paler than he was earlier. His lips and the flesh under his fingernails seemed bluish in tone and his ears had almost no color inside. Bad signs indeed.

The tigress pulled her hubby over to a log to prop him up a bit in hopes that he would be able to breathe easier. It really bothered her that he was starting to become unresponsive to her, his eyes getting that unfocused look to them. Checking his pulse, his heart was beating very fast, too fast for her likes.

Taking his Buck knife from him, she found a suitable stick to sharpen into a point. Using another piece of wood with an appropriate indentation, she began to spin the stick against the notch, attempting to start a fire the old-fashioned way.

It took her a while but she eventually got a small fire going, much to her relief. Making short trips into the forest, she found enough dead fall to keep the fire going for a while. She was still concerned about her hubby's condition, though. Concerned enough that she didn't want to leave him for very long.

What really bothered her was the fact that she had tried to summon Hrist, Denise, even Willi Marie and Mala to no avail. Sitting down to sharpen a stick into a spear, she wiped at her tears as she thought about the ass-reaming she was going to give Odin and Christopher if she ever got the chance.

This was it, as far as she was concerned. This was the straw that broke the four-legged camel's back. They had been abandoned, they lost the assistance of Denise and now to top it off, they were who-knows-where, marooned, left to fend for themselves. Well, not Torvald at the moment. He was in bad shape and the possibility existed that he might not survive this encounter with a Dark Agent.

Victoria just hoped he survived because she was not ready to be all alone. She wasn't going to pray, though. She felt like she had lost all of her belief in the Gods.