

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 Kasbnikov, 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 Tisdale & Wilhelmine Marie 'Willi Marie' (nee Kurzweil) Delancey, James William & Nancy (nee Roland) Kurzweil, Erich Martin & Inanova Marie 'Ina Marie' (nee Schmidt) Kurzweil, Jason & Natasba 'Tasha' (nee Porter) Cummeron, Lieutenant Kenneth Aldrin LaCourt, Robert, Jennifer 'Jenna' (nee Ten Bears) & Amanda Longbon, Gerald 'Jerry' Ten Bears, Duncan & Lorna McNichol, Doctor Bruce Peyton, Tina Wood, Franklin James Hellyer, Wilhelmine Andersdatter, Maryanne Leanna (nee Jensen) Svensen, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito[®], Leonard's Restaurant[®], Hunter Auto Parts[®], Right Way Groceries[™] and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission. Any resemblance to any fur or person, either living or dead is purely coincidental

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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 08 – “The Three Wives Of Torvald Svensen”

Gytha was parking her 1966 Ford Fairlane Squire 500 station wagon near her parent's temporary living quarters, a survivor-class registered vehicle that was a true throwback to the days of thirty cents per gallon gasoline and practically no smog controls whatsoever. The femme equine mix and her hubby Roger had lovingly restored this beast to better than new condition, knowing the license fees for it would be astronomical due to the huge gas-guzzling 427 C.I.D. FE series V8 under the hood. “*So it only gets ten miles to the gallon on a good day, coasting downhill in neutral with the engine off.*” the femme mused. It was still a very fun vehicle to drive sparingly and they loved to show it at the various car shows throughout California, Nevada and Arizona.

She locked up the car after she retrieved her purse and some things that she brought over to add to their dinner tonight. Looking over at her parent's damaged home, it seemed odd for her to see Rancho Svensen under reconstruction. It hadn't been that long ago that her parents were moving in and making it their home. Shaking her head, she was glad that they were getting out of the business.

She strode up the ramp and knowing that her parents knew she was coming over, she just walked in after giving a polite knock at the door. Once inside, she was greeted by a sight that she never thought she would ever possibly see again; her birth mother, sitting with her modern-day mother, conversing in Old Danish, Gytha's first language.

“Mom?!?” the femme equine mix blurted out, totally stunned by this strange turn of events.

“*Gytha!!*” Wilhelmine replied, the look on her muzzle quickly changing from shock to joy. “*Gytha!! It is so good to see you, my daughter!!*”

“*Mother! What are you doing here?*” Gytha questioned in her native tongue, wiping at the tears that were streaming down her cheeks. She was still not sure of this whole deal; her birth mother, in the flesh, right in front of her. Something that should have been totally impossible.

“Gytha, just look at you! You do look like Torvald and Victoria's daughter with your color and build!” Wilhelmine got up and limped over to her daughter, hugging her tightly.

“Mother, how did you get here?” the tall femme questioned again, making the blond femme look up at her and answer the inquiry put forth.

“Your modern mother told me that she thinks some evil fur did it to put a wedge between her and your father. As much as some fur thought that would happen, I have already told her that I would not vie for your father's affections. Your father is Victoria's husband now and I will not do anything to change that.” Wilhelmine explained.

“I remember you were married to Frode Gunnarsson after my father left to be with my . . . my modern mom and do the work of the Gods.” the tall, ruddy femme equine brought up.

“Yes, I was married to him and I watched the Saxons kill my husband Frode, your brother Axel and Dana's husband Godin.” Wilhelmine shared with her first daughter. “You were out harvesting grapes with your family so we never knew what happened to you. I am sure Dana and I were murdered that afternoon.”

“I don't know why but I remember that day very clearly now.” Gytha said as a look of sadness mixed with anger crossed her muzzle. “You and Dana were murdered not far from our village, near the stream to the North. We hid in the vineyard until that evening, waiting until the Saxons had gotten good and drunk on our pillaged wine and mead. After we made our kits Adalbert and Gunhildr hide in the woods, my husband Lundvarr and myself crept back into the village and slit the throats of almost all of the murderous Saxon swine. We had help from Karl Jensson, who was badly injured in the initial battle and his younger brother Sigurðr.”

“Oh My!” Wilhelmine commented. Victoria however, sat there, mouth open, totally shocked. She had no idea that her daughter would do such a thing.

“We found the ones that had killed you and Dana, so we gave them special attention.” the ruddy orange equine femme explained. “We tied them to their horses' saddles by their feet, making the ropes just long enough so that the horses would not kick them while they were being dragged along. With a slap on the rump, they were sent back to the South the hard way. The last to receive our attention was the one that had raped Dana before he killed her. We staked him to the ground and used clubs to turn his arms and legs into mush.”

“What happened to you and your family?” Wilhelmine wanted to know.

“We packed some provisions and set out Northward, eventually returning to Denmark. We settled down near what is now Gerding, close to Uncle Ulf Svensen and his family.” Gytha explained.

“I remember Ulf.” the blond equine *bedni* femme offered up. “He looked just like your father, only shorter. Actually much shorter. He was not as tall as I am.”

Victoria seemed very confused by all of this so she spoke up. “Gytha, how do you remember all of that?” she asked in English.

“I don't know, Mom. I remember all of it just as clearly as the time I've spent with you.” the ruddy equine femme replied. “I have to be honest, this return of my memories scares me just a bit. On the other paw, I just realized that my husband Roger looks just like my first husband Lundvarr Leifsson, especially in the face.”

“Well, this is going to be confusing,” the tigress brought up, “How will we know which one you're calling

to when you say 'mom'?"

"I will say *Móðir* in Old Danish to indicate my first mother and I will say Mom in English to indicate you." she replied to Victoria.

"Maybe that will work." the tigress agreed. "Um, by the way, Gytha, this is Frank Hellyer, my first boyfriend," she offered up, pointing to the male tiger sitting at the table, "And the femme on the couch is your father's second wife Maryanne." she added, motioning to the recliner-divan where Torvald was tending to the unconscious femme occupying it. "Frank, this is Gytha, one of our twins."

"Nice to meet you, I think," Mr. Hellyer offered up hesitantly, shaking Gytha's paw gently.

"Nice to meet you too." the femme equine mix replied. "Maybe I'm remembering this wrong but didn't Mom tell me that you were . . . killed . . . in a . . . car accident?" Gytha looked at him again, then her birth mother, then her modern mother, finally over at the still-unconscious Maryanne, giving a high degree of thought to all of this. "Mom? Is this a Dark Agent's actions that has caused this?"

"Your father and I think so." Victoria replied.

"I see." Gytha then sat down by Frank and shook her head. "Gah! How do you get completely out of the business?" she mused to no fur in particular.

Victoria grimaced as she replied to that muse. "I'm beginning to think that you never truly retire from this insanity."

####

Rumjal adjusted his caramel brown Carhaart work shorts again, still not satisfied with the overall fit. The femme at the mall where he had picked up his work uniform told him the fit was just fine, however he still didn't agree with her on that assumption. These darn things were too baggy and any good pair of trousers shouldn't need a belt to keep them up on his waist. At least the bright day-glo safety orange pullover shirt fit decent enough. Too bad is kind of hurt the eyes, it was that bright.

The pachyderm pulled his hard hat down low over his eyes, trying to disguise himself enough that he could work around the Svensen's house undetected, while at the same time keeping his senses attuned to any approaching Dark Agents that might be looking to stir things up. Looking about for something to do, a dark-furred Labrador hollered at him, startling the huge gray one.

"Hey you! Mister Coffee Break! Grab that broom over there and sweep the debris out of the living room!" the fur that was probably in charge directed Rumjal. "You know I'm not paying you to stand around and hold down the floor from taking flight!" the fur added in a sharp tone before he went into another room, stirring up the furs in there.

"Wow! Maybe I should recruit him as one of my lieutenants!" Rumjal commented as he put on his work gloves and picked up said push-broom, shaking his head at the notion of a deity doing manual labor. He was still pissed that all of his associates had ducked out on him, most likely hearing about the blackmail job by Jenna. They could at least have helped him out with this covert protection operation.

He wondered if that femme equine that arrived earlier was Torvald and Victoria's daughter, considering her size and coloration. He could see where the Berserker would impart his muscular equine frame whereas

the tigress would pass along her coloration. He wondered if she had a predator's dentition and claws. That thought made him shudder.

Rumjal finally managed to sweep the debris from deconstruction into a pile so he went in search of a waste can to dispose of the mess. Finding the items he needed, the pachyderm swept the debris into a dustpan, then ultimately put the mess into the plastic garbage can. This really was hard work for him. It had been a very long time, some twenty-two centuries since he had actually touched paw to tool, he had forgotten what it felt like to toil for one's meals.

“Hey you! Mister Coffee Break!” that black canid shouted at him again. “Hey, I need you to assist Matt. He's bringing in some plywood subflooring on a sheetrock cart. Can't miss him. Solid white felid right out front.”

“I guess I have a new name now,” the pachyderm mused as he went out front to assist this feline that was moving something called a subfloor.

The fur he was looking for was right out front, just as the boss said he would be. This subflooring turned out to be sheets of plywood that had been tongue and grooved on the edges to lock them together, creating a stronger floor structure. Rumjal went to one end of the stack and began to help put the material on an orange cart of some kind, obviously made to transport material like this. While they were loading the cart, the pachyderm noticed that another fur had drove up in an odd car/truck vehicle of some sort. The big sticker down the side proclaimed 'Maloo by Holden' in white letters against the metallic blue body.

The male got out of the driver's side, another equine that bore a distinct facial resemblance to Torvald. This had to be another of their children, since this stallion had phantom tiger striping on his arms. It was the color that didn't make sense, though. This male was a handsome flaxen chestnut with a darker blond mane and tail, several shades darker than the Berserker's. At least this stallion had a very beautiful mate, the elephant mused. She was the prettiest zebra femme that he had laid eyes on in a long time.

“Hey, I don't want to call you Mister Coffee Break like the boss does,” the feline stated, bringing Rumjal back to the present. “I'm Matt McGillivray. What's your name?”

“Ron Patel.” the gray one replied, pulling that name out of his arse. “Nice to meet you, Matt.”

“Nice working with you, Ron. Listen, we need to step it up a bit. The carpenters need this stuff ready for them tomorrow morning but we have to be neat when we stack it inside. The femme homeowner wants to take a look around but she's in a wheelchair. We need to leave enough room for her to get through the kitchen and the living room.”

While he helped to move the plywood, Rumjal wondered about what was going on at the temporary residence across the way. Were they fighting like Zagam had predicted? Had the femmes went tooth and nail yet? He hoped not if this hair-brained scheme was to work. “*Oh well, I had better get used to this,*” he mused, turning back to the task of moving the construction materials inside.

###

Just like Victoria had thought, Wilhelmine Andersdatter had recognized Axel practically the moment he stepped hoof inside the Svensen's temporary home. And just like Gytha, Axel remembered his first life as a *bedni* just as clearly as his twin sister had. Madelyn's appearance had shocked the blond femme equine, however. She really wanted to know who was responsible for painting the femme zebra in such a manner.

While the equines visited, Torvald and Victoria were trying to get Maryanne to come back to the land of the living. They had tried cold compresses to the muzzle and forehead but that didn't work. Finally in a fit of desperation, Tor uncorked a bottle of strong smelling salts under her nose. That garnered the response they wanted.

"Aack!" Maryanne spat out, rubbing her nose to ease the burning. "Wha? Where am I?" she asked when she opened her eyes, right before she observed the huge blond fur hovering over her and she remembered what had happened.

"Maryanne? Are you okay?" Torvald asked.

"Well, besides this shocking discovery concerning where I am and what year it is, I seem to be fine." She replied. "So, you were telling me that I've been dead for some time?"

"You died in Nineteen thirty-three." he replied as he helped his second wife to sit up.

"Our children?" She had to know their plights. "Thomas was sick with Influenza at that time, too."

"He died right after you, two days later to be exact. Elizabeth died the next month, not quite thirty days later." Torvald had to give Maryanne a tissue, since that information made her upset.

"How about Rebecca, Bradley and Ronald? Are they still alive?"

"Funny you should bring them up." the stallion began. "Victoria and I were out of town, doing our side job, so to speak, when Bradley came looking for me. I guess he really surprised Valerie with his appearance."

"Tor, he's how old now?" the bay colored femme asked, then her mouth slid open as she observed the truth in Torvald's eyes. "Are they . . . are they like you?"

"Yes, they are both immortal." he confirmed. "Brad's daughter Nancy lives nearby and the males live up in Washington state. Rebecca passed away a number of years ago, according to our males."

"Brad's daughter, is she . . . ?" Maryanne couldn't finish that sentence. "I know how much you hated being immortal." she admitted, giving them a crooked smile.

"No, she actually caught a lucky break and had her immortality lifted for her." the stallion related to his second wife. "We can thank Victoria's short temper for that."

"How is that?" Now Maryanne was very confused.

"Let me get you something to drink, then we have a very long story to tell you." Tor stated. "I think I have something you might like to sip," he added, getting up to fix Maryanne a refreshment.

"A long story? Does it have to do with how I arrived here?" the bay colored femme asked Victoria while the stallion fixed her some iced tea.

"It has a lot to do with how you came to be here." the tigress confirmed. "All we ask is that you keep an open mind."

Maryanne was concerned about one thing, however. “Victoria, what has happened to the two of you? You seemed to have injured your arms and legs and Tor looks like he's been through a meat grinder. He has what looks like miles of stitches in his hide and he looks like he was hit in the eye and the lip with a bat.”

“We will get to that, although you're not the first to make that 'meat grinder' analogy.” the tigress told her. “If you remember that huge crater up above the house here, that was our barn. We were in an explosion up there and that's where our injuries came from.”

“Oh . . . My . . . God!!” Maryanne blurted out. “That must have been horrific!”

“Even though we're both immortal, it almost killed Tor.” Victoria explained. That seemed to make the femme equine think about something.

“Victoria, unless it's none of my business, how long have you been married to Tor? You are married to him, right?” Maryanne asked.

“We've been married over twenty-five years.” Victoria replied.

“I trust he has treated you well?”

“That he has.” the tigress agreed. “You know, he still has a big framed picture of the two of you, where you're sitting in a chair and he's kneeling next to it. We had one made of the two of us in that same pose, dressed in similar clothing, on a lark once upon a time.” Victoria noticed Maryanne was thinking about something intently, not really paying attention to her. “Is there something wrong?” she asked, touching the mare on the arm to get her attention.

“There may well be something wrong that will be trouble for all of us.” Maryanne replied. “Now that I'm back from the dead, I think that means Tor and I might still be legally married.”

“Oh Shit!” Victoria blurted out. “That is a big, effing problem!” she added, shaking her head. The malice in forcing Wilhelmine, Maryanne and Frank into this situation had just surfaced. “*Thank you, Malefic Council.*” she thought to herself.

“There may well be another major problem,” the femme bay-colored equine offered up, giving Victoria a very apologetic look as she took the tigress' casted paws in hers. “Unless I am horribly mistaken, I am a few months pregnant with Tor's third kit.”

You could have heard the dust stirred up by a pin dropping at that moment.

####

Nancy looked over a page in the prints that contained the structural elements for a four-story medical building. Since her company had been familiar with the architects responsible for the design, she checked the load calculations very closely. The last building was seriously delayed when a flaw in the calcs had forced the job to be brought to a standstill while an independent firm had checked them, finding numerous serious flaws in the equations.

“Why would anyone use Heifitz and Deering as a design firm, anyway? They never turn out an inspired

design,” she mused, marking another flaw not in the math but in the design proper. The section had been drawn using undersized steel, incapable of bearing the load put upon it by the upper three floors.

She made a note on a pad, being somewhat 'old school' in that Nancy used paper when most furs used a digital jotting pad. This was now an RFI, a 'Request For Information' from the architect, where the architect had to respond to her with an answer to her inquiry within a reasonable amount of time. At least the foundation had panned out and they could at least get the foundation and basement done in the meantime if they won the bid and her company was awarded the contract.

Some motion in her peripheral vision made her look that way, noting a male had come into her office space. She knew the owners were hiring a new estimator so maybe this was him. He would have to wait, anyway while she checked this last set of numbers on her calculator.

“Excuse me, are you Mrs. Corbin?” the male asked, something sounding familiar to her about that voice. “Max Lowrey, the boss said I should find you so you could start me on a project.” he added.

“I'll be with you in a sec,” she said as she gave him a quick glance. Looking back at her notes, she began to add up a series of calculations. That's when she stopped her work, dropped her pencil and looked back at the male lion, who was backing away from her with a frightened look on his muzzle.

“Oh Shit No!” he blurted out, dropping the box of supplies and estimating tools he held in his paws when he found himself cornered against the bureau in her office.

“Aiden Cole, Junior?!?” she spat out, picking up that infamous Ka-Bar 'letter opener' from her desktop as she stood and went around her desk to confront her old nemesis. “You've got some nerve to come here after what you and your father did to me, you dirty, lying bastard!!!” she screamed, brandishing the blade in his face.

“Nancy!! Please?!? I . . . I'm sorry!! I didn't know you worked here!!” he practically begged. “Please, Nancy!! I didn't know!!!” he added, dropping to his knees and beginning to cry in earnest. This broke whatever hold Nancy's emotions had on her, making her take a step back as she tried to compose herself.

Aiden had been shocked to see the source of his undoing, standing right in front of him. His failure as a fur in general and his father's failings had allowed Nancy to bring down his family's business, destroying their good name. Things had been going bad for the lion but this seemed like the last straw. He was surprised when a paw was offering him tissues for his eyes and nose.

“Come on, Aiden. Get up. I can't stand to see a grown fur crying,” Nancy stated, gritting her teeth just to keep her emotions under control. Once he had stood up, she continued. “Okay, tell me why you're here,” she asked, grimacing when she realized she was still brandishing her letter opener at him. The femme equine sat that Ka-Bar on her desktop, then crossed her arms in annoyance while she awaited an answer.

“I uh . . .” he tried to begin his explanation, only to start sobbing again. Once he had his composure back he continued. “I came here looking for work. Things haven't been so good for construction up in Seattle so I came down here, staying with some of my mother's family while I looked around. I had to find some way of paying my lawyers that defended me from that failed business venture with Richard Crane.”

Nancy remembered that whole Crane Investments, LLC. issue, the Ponzi-esque scheme of duping furs for build capital to construct office buildings with. She knew there were other furs involved besides Richard Crane but he was the only one mentioned by name in the news, since it was an ongoing

investigation. Aiden Cole, Junior must have been a small player in this scheme.

“You couldn't pass up a quick buck, eh?” she mused.

“I was kind of into it for the long haul,” he countered. “I was taking care of the construction end of it, while Richard secured the investments. His accountant was the bad fur in all of this. He managed to divert a butt-load of the secured money into various accounts and carefully set us up in the meantime to be the fall-furs. I knew something was wrong when my construction account went from millions to nothing overnight and the accountant was nowhere to be found.”

“You're serious, aren't you?” she asked, moving aside a few things to make a spot for herself to sit on the corner of her desk. “You, the famous Aiden Cole, Junior, duped?”

“I was duped.” he agreed sheepishly. “I was so busy building two major projects at the same time that I wasn't keeping track of the money flow, well, not close enough, anyway. I didn't realize we had a problem until the check for the latest concrete pour bounced hard.”

“You know, I don't feel sorry for you.” she stated bluntly as she made herself comfortable.

“I wouldn't expect you to, either.” Aiden countered. “I got in with the wrong crowd and I paid for it. Dearly, in fact. I might never be able to pay off my lawyers in my working lifetime, since they gouged the piss out of me for their fees. I do need the work, though. I have my mom to support, now that my father has passed away.”

“Your dad's gone?” she asked, having never heard of his passing mentioned in the contracting circles she hung out in.

“He died last year from complications related to his colostomy.”

Nancy almost said “Serves him right” but she bit it back. “Sorry to hear that.” she offered up. Nancy also wondered where he was right now. Who knew, she might have walked right by him when she had her short stay in the hereafter.

“I do need the work.” Aiden offered up again. “Look, I've had a long time to think about what had happened. That first time when I took you home, I started to undress you for bed after you fell down on the floor, concerned you couldn't do that on your own. You were so drunk and I wasn't none too sober, either, so between the two of us we really made a mess of your clothes. I was ashamed of that, too. That suit seemed expensive and it looked good on you. I should point out that I honestly only meant to remove your outer clothing, Nancy. I never meant to remove your slip, bra and panties. That happened later.

“I went to put you in bed and things seemed to be going okay but you were so loaded that you grabbed my shirt for support and you ended up pulling me in after you. Well, to be exact, right on top of you. I really tried to be a gentle-fur and get out of the bed but you wouldn't stand for that. We eventually had sex after my drunken mind and my out-of-control libido urged me to continue what probably started out as an honest, friendly but drunken snuggle between us. You kept on wanting to do it with me but part of my mind kept screaming that you were drunk and you probably didn't know what you were asking me to do. I ignored that warning from my own rational mind.

“I have to tell you that I was repulsed with my actions at the moment. Something happened to me before morning, though to make me think different. I felt I owned you, since we had sex with one another. It was

wrong. I was wrong. I know that now.”

“You're right; even if we were drunk that first time, you were very wrong to abuse me afterward like that and my hoof to your jewels was not nearly enough payback, Mister.” Nancy tried to say calmly. “Having that one drunken roll in the hay was one thing, Aiden but forcing me all those times afterward to 'service' you was wrong. Very wrong. You took away my dignity, Aiden. You almost destroyed my will to live, you bastard.” She could see that statement hit him like a ton of bricks. There was a look of sorrow in his eyes. And a look of defeat, too.

“I am a real bastard, Nancy.” he agreed. “It took me years of groveling at other fur's feet for a job to make me realize that I had brought that all on myself. I had destroyed myself by allowing my lust to control my emotions. What I did was totally inexcusable. I had tried to use you for my pleasures but I had in fact ended up destroying myself and my family's good name.”

Nancy gave this some thought. Had he really changed? “Listen, do you want the job? I'm not happy with this but I don't have control over the hiring. I'm kind of stuck with you at the moment unless you really eff-up and I have to recommend firing you.”

“I don't just want the job, Nancy, I need the income.” he replied. “I'll understand if you send me away, though. It's not like I don't have it coming to me.”

“Well, giving it some thought, the plate is on the other hoof now.” she mused. “I will be your boss so you would have to stay in line to keep your job.” Nancy pointed out. “The males under my management all say I'm a real witch to work for. I just like to think that I like to see results in a timely manner. You can guess that will go doubly-so for you.”

“Nancy, I can't say I'm sorry enough to make up for what's happened between us. I will accept your challenge, though. I need the work and the owner I met with said you needed a top estimator.”

“You think you're pretty good, eh?” she asked.

“I like to think that I haven't lost my edge.” Aiden retorted, giving her a half-hearted smile.

“Okay, you tell me what you think is wrong with this set of plans.” she instructed, motioning to the blueprints on the desk. Nancy removed her notepads, though, just to make it harder for Aiden.

The lion sat down and looked at the page that covered the first floor structural. He scanned it, then looked at the following pages to determine just how many floors there were. He looked at the load calcs, then shook his head as he ran a few figures through Nancy's calculator.

“This front wall on the first floor is seriously under-engineered for a full glass front. The steel needs to be at least four inches thicker on the header I-beam webs alone. It might need full re-engineering from what I see. Whatever engineer signed this one off just put his neck on the chopping block.”

“Okay, maybe you're still as good as I remember.” Nancy stated. “Now, let's set some ground rules. You are not to touch any femme that works here improperly and that includes me. Just so you know, that's my husband in the photo, the one on the left, the one in the center is my father and the other male holding the tigress is my grandfather. None of them would appreciate it if I would happen to mention in passing that you had touched me inappropriately.”

Aiden looked at the picture on the desk of Nancy, Trenton, TJ, Chelsea, Bradley, Janet, Torvald and Victoria. He gulped when he observed the three muscular equine males in the photo, any one of them obviously strong enough to snap him in two like a pretzel. All of them together could no doubt make a mud-puddle out of his hide. Nancy's voice speaking again snapped him back to reality.

“Furthermore, we start up at six sharp and we knock off for a hour lunch at eleven. Quitting time is at three and we don't allow overtime unless the boss deems it necessary. Please park your personal vehicle in the North lot, towards the back in space eleven. You will be assigned a company truck to do jobsite visits with but you can't take it home at night. Being that you're the junior estimator, don't expect a real nice truck. Actually, you might be thankful if it starts, drives, steers and stops in an orderly manner without scaring you to death. Lastly, this is a no-smoking building. If you need to light up, it's either in the patio off the break room down the hall or out front, to the right side near the street. Any questions?”

Aiden nodded. “Yeah, um, when can I start and where's my desk?” he asked, kneeling to pick up his scattered supplies.

“Your desk is right next door in what we joking refer to as 'The dungeon', last desk on the right. If you need a better desk light, let Marci at the front desk know. She is the fur responsible for ordering our supplies.”

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Aiden had hurriedly picked up his supplies from the floor at Nancy's hooves and made a hasty retreat to his work space in 'The Dungeon'. Sitting down at his desk, he looked at his paws, noting they were still shaking like a leaf in a fall breeze. Trying his best to get his composure back together, he wondered if this was going to work out for him. Had he known that Nancy worked here, the lion would have never applied for the position. All he could do now was to make the best of it and continue to look for other work, just in case this didn't pan out for him.

“Aiden?” Nancy said softly, getting his attention. The lion was startled momentarily by her appearance in his workspace. “Listen, I forgot to give you these prints to work on.” she explained.

“Thank you,” he said, taking them from her and placing them on his plans table.

“You're welcome.” she replied, then she sat on the corner of the next desk over and continued in a concerned tone. “Listen, I hope this works out for you, Aiden. I know just how tough things are up in Washington state right now. Just do your job, do it well and I think you will do just fine.” Nancy thought for a moment, then continued. “I do want you to understand that I really can't forgive you for what happened between us. Like I said before, I'm stuck with you. I'll try my best to keep it professional between us and I expect you to do the same. Please don't disappoint me.”

“I will try not to disappoint you.”

“Now that we have that out of the way, you need to know we're just bidding the shell on this two-story mini-strip mall. Paul over at Martin's Interiors is working up the Tenant Improvement bid for the units that are spoken for and Styx over at Jay-Cee Plastering in West Covina will be doing the exterior insulation and finishing system bid. Their numbers are in the Rolodex[®] on your desk.”

“I worked for Paul Martin last year on some Jamba Juice[®] locations up in Culver City.”

“Well, we have a few of those coming up.” Nancy brought up “If you're done with this project in time, I can give them to you, since you have some experience with that type of project.”

“I did the interior estimates only.” Aiden sheepishly admitted.

“that's okay. We were thinking of trying to do the whole project instead of subbing out the interior and EIFS work.” she explained. “Well, I have to get back to work myself.”

Aiden watched her walk out of the doorway of 'The Dungeon', his heart still beating a bit too fast at the moment. This was just about the weirdest thing that had ever happened to him, to run into the source of his professional undoing. One thing really bothered him, however. Whereas his beard and hair were turning grayish-white, Nancy seemed to be just as young as ever. It was as if she were immortal, unable to age at all. He quickly dismissed that thought, knowing immortality was just something from a kid's fairy tale. Maybe she dyed her coat. Yeah, maybe that was it; a professional dye job.

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Nancy sat back down at her desk with a fresh cup of coffee and half of a plain old-fashioned donut, trying to unwind from her renewed acquaintance to Aiden. This had to be about the weirdest thing to have happen to her; to have Aiden Cole, Junior, end up working under her direction, opposite of the way it was in Seattle. She sipped her hot beverage and mused about the passing of the lion's father. Did the old fur repent and ask forgiveness on his death bed? Did he even get a chance to? Death seemed to upset her, now that she was mortal again.

The femme equine looked at her project, trying to get her mind back in gear to finish this RFI and get it off to the architects this evening.

Turning to her laptop computer, she opened her copy of OpenOffice[®] and found her RFI template. Getting the necessary information ready, she began to compose her request. She noted the dimensions of the steel, the load calculations and her findings. Setting up her email to send a carbon copy to her boss and another copy to herself as proof of mailing, she attached her RFI document and pressed the 'send' button.

Looking over the top of her laptop's screen at the wall that separated her office from 'The Dungeon', she stopped what she was doing and thought about the look on Aiden's face when she had called him a bastard. She knew that she had observed his agreement in that assessment and even possibly the look of defeat, too. Was he a beaten fur now?

Nancy remembered her first meeting with the then-young lion. He was so full of life, quick with a joke or quip. He was possibly the best estimator in the area at the time, too. Now he seemed like a shell of his former self. She knew she was not to blame in this. Aiden had brought this all on himself with his misplaced libido. Nancy felt that she didn't owe him a thing but because she was his boss, she did owe it to the company to see that he did give them the output that they expected. This was going to be a tough situation to deal with.