

*The characters Torvald Arend 'Tor' & Victoria Angela 'Vicki D'nan' (nee Connell) Svensen, Conrad & Cathryn 'Cathy' (nee Hunter) Svensen, Brett & Dana Lynn (nee Svensen) Kashnikov, Roger, Gytha Louise (nee Svensen) Roger Jr. & Heather Delancey, Axel Torvald & Madelyn (nee Barrett) Svensen, Valerie Jean Connell, Joseph & Harriet (nee Bishop) Connell, Robert James & Elizabeth Ann (nee Caine) Sands, Barbara Lynn Caine, Edward and Mary (nee Calloway) Caine, Richard & Wilhelmine Marie (nee Kurzweil) Delancey, James William & Nancy (nee Foster) Kurzweil, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito[®], Leonard's Restaurant[®] and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission. Any resemblance to any fur or person, either living or dead is purely coincidental. (Gah, this is tedious!)*Note* More rambling credits/warnings below! Please read and heed!*

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“A Loss Of Rights”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 18

Sir Tamal had been sent ahead of the others just to warn the castle of what was coming behind him to avert any nasty surprises. He had hurriedly consumed a very light meal then quickly departed Whitehall for his destination. The knight had expected to have an uneventful trip but this ride was soon to be interrupted. His mount had swiftly brought him upon the site of of the rather one-sided battle between the two canid females and the man seeking retribution along with the two dimensional travelers and their mounts.

He slowed his horse to a slow walk, then dismounted to see what these two males were up to. The human that was tied to a tree didn't seem to be injured so he ignored him for now, his curiosity piqued by the two males hovering over a downed female of some kind. Unsheathing his sword and dirk, he walked up to them cautiously.

“Show your hands, gentlemen and I will have no reason to harm you,” he said in a level tone, keeping himself alert for trouble. There was another femme that he hadn't noticed earlier that was most likely dead by the way she was lying on the ground. He then noticed the strange instruments in their hands.

“Kind soldier, we are only trying to save her life,” Doug pointed out, giving the warrior a cautious glance. “She is dying and we wish for her to live, Sir.”

“You, the tall one, step away from her,” Sir Tamal ordered, making threatening motions with his dirk. Mike complied, going around behind the jaguar, noting Doug had placed a handy scalpel in his belt. If needed, Mike could use that to disable the soldier. “What manner of magic is this piece of metal she is lying upon?” the warrior asked, having never observed a mil-spec survival blanket. It looked like metal to him but it was soft like cloth which really confused him.

“Um, Uh, ... We obtained this metal blanket from a sorcerer, kind warrior. It will reflect her body heat back into her, helping to keep her warm. Please do not harm us, I beg of you. Once your superior gets here, we might be able to explain all of this to her.” Doug suggested. Well, no use in trying to hide it now; their cover was officially blown. Big time. Mike was moving to Doug's right to better have an open area to move in, just in case the knight got spooked by something.

“Agreed then, I will wait until Miss Vicki arrives here to allow her the task of resolving your fate.” Sir

Tamal stated as he motioned for Mike to stay sitting down where he was. Once the huge cross had complied, the warrior put his sword away, keeping the dirk in his left hand along with a throwing knife in the right. He would patiently wait to see what his tigress leader would do to them. Or possibly what the young sorceress would do to them. Either way, it did not bode well for them in Sir Tamal's eyes.

“Sir Knight, we really need to tend to the femme to keep her alive until Willi Marie gets here to save her,” Mike suggested, hoping to get him to agree to this. Hess' breathing was becoming labored and her lips were getting pale in color.

“You may care for her but I will keep you both in check until Miss D'nan arrives.” The knight motioned for them to continue caring for her, at least for the moment.

Conrad was sitting by Valerie's bed, standing watch over her while the others went for dinner. The fur with the badge was still sitting in a chair out in the hall, waiting for Valerie to wake up from her nap so he could talk with her. That male feline kind of bothered him, since he seemed so evasive about who he worked for and why he wanted to talk with his aunt. This all made no sense to him at all. While he was musing about this another male quietly walked into the room, standing opposite Conrad on the other side of the bed.

“Excuse me, is this Valerie Connell?” he asked, looking questioningly at the young tiger. Conrad looked up to see a rather large white tiger with ice-blue eyes standing there, looking quite pitiful. At first he thought this might be Tigermark but it wasn't him upon closer inspection. This feline's markings were pure Bengal tiger, albeit a white Bengal tiger.

“Uh, yes, this is my aunt Valerie. May I ask who you are?” the young male questioned, seeming somewhat confused by this.

“Yeah, you can most certainly ask. I'm your uncle Walter Lee Connell Junior. I'm your aunt Val and her sister's older brother.” was the tall tiger's reply. Conrad's jaw dropped and he was speechless for a moment before he could get his brain back in gear.

“The family has never talked about you at all,” he pointed out, getting up to walk around the bed to face his uncle. The family resemblance was clear now that he had gotten a very good look at him.

“You might say I'm the black fur of the family,” the pale tiger replied, giving Conrad a hug and then shaking his paw. “I've stayed away because ...” he stopped, deciding if he wanted to say what he was going to say. “You're Vicki's son James Conrad Junior, aren't you?” he asked.

“Yeah, I am,” Conrad replied.

“Well, I got into some serious trouble with the law when I was sixteen, James, so Dad never wanted to have anything to do with me after that.”

“Call me Conrad, please? Everyone else does,” the young tiger asked, giving him a pensive smile.

“OK, I will, Conrad. I spent time in juvenile hall in Stockton then I was transferred to prison in Chowchilla when I was twenty-five. I was paroled out of there a year later and came home to see your

grandparents only to have your grandpa beat the snot out of me and throw me out of their house. I've been living in Hughson since then and I've luckily stayed in contact with Val but your mother or my parents don't have a kind word to say about me. They all still hate me for what happened.”

“Why is my Mom so upset with you?” Conrad wanted to know.

“Gah, I'm so embarrassed and ashamed of this,” Walter said as he hung his head, trying not to cry. “I ... I got her first boyfriend killed in a car wreck. He was my best friend so we were out drinking real heavy one night after a football game. I was too drunk to drive so I accidentally ran off the road and into the canal that runs alongside Hatch Road. You would know the one I'm talking about if you lived in that area. Dangerous as all hell. I got out of the car but he didn't. Frank Hellyer was his name. We looked almost like twins.” Walter stopped momentarily to wipe his eyes and get his composure back before he continued.

“I tried to save him but the current in the canal was too much for me that evening. I almost drown myself trying to save him. I never forgave myself for being so stupid in all my life. Unfortunately, your Mother and your grandparents couldn't forgive me either. I served ten years of a twenty-five year sentence in jail for that but it just wasn't good enough for them. I'm just glad Valerie kept in touch with me. The police found my cell phone number in her purse and called me, leaving a message when she had her wreck. I just got here a little while ago from a temporary job in Prescott, Arizona.”

“Well, I guess I see why they were mad but it's been a long time since that happened. Why are they still mad?” Conrad was really confused by this point in the conversation. This made no sense in the least to him.

“Conrad, we were Mormon at the time this happened. The church takes a very dim view on drinking and taking another fur's life, even accidentally. Dad disowned me to keep from getting kicked out of the church.”

“I see ...” He mused about this a moment, then decided to ask him a question. “You still haven't forgiven yourself for this?”

“I'm sorry to say, I haven't. I can still see Frank's face, struggling to get out of the car. It's ... It's haunted me for thirty-five years. I just can't forget ...” He finally broke down, crying in earnest from the memories of his friend dying from his stupidity and lack of common sense as a young fur.

Conrad held the sobbing form of his uncle, trying his best to calm him down. He could understand the situation now, why his uncle had never been mentioned to him. The younger tiger finally got his uncle to sit down and pull himself back together again, finding him some tissues to wipe his eyes and blow his nose with.

“I guess I should tell you Grandpa and Grandma are here. They're downstairs in the cafeteria, getting something to eat.” Conrad related to him just so he could be prepared for the storm that might occur.

“Well, if Dad decides he wants me gone, I'll leave. No use in causing a scene.” Walter confided in him.

“No, I'll tell Grandpa you have every right to be here.” Conrad informed him. The white tiger gave him a crooked smile.

"If Dad decides I have to leave, I wouldn't put it past him to throw me out that window by Val's bed." Conrad was going to say something until Dana and her husband came back into the room.

"Um, Walter, this is my little sister Dana Lynn and her hubby Brett Kashnikov, my best friend from high school. Brett, Dana, this is our uncle Walter Lee Connell, Junior." Conrad introduced them around.

"Uncle Walter ... ?" Dana queried, then looked closely to see the family resemblance. He was a younger, taller, paler version of her Grandpa Connell.

"Dana, Brett, nice to finally meet both of you in furson. Val has told me all about the family over the years. She even sent me pictures of all of you." Walter confessed. He then felt he had to comment on Dana's condition. "It looks like you have a bun in the oven." he stated.

"Yeah, I'm due in about a month," she told her uncle, finding a chair to sit down in. "I just hope Mom and Dad are home in time for the delivery."

"Oh, Um, so where are they right now?" he asked, wondering why they would be away when their daughter was great with child. Conrad gave him a crooked smile as he asked a very important question.

"Aunt Valerie didn't tell you what Mom and Dad do for a second job, did she?" he queried, pursing his lips in anticipation.

"No, she didn't," he replied. Looking at all of them for direction. Conrad finally broke the silence.

"Well, you might want to get comfy. This is a long story you may not believe." The young tiger closed the door to Valerie's room, settling in to give his uncle the Svensen story, short version.

Doug and Mike were still sweating it, keeping a watchful eye on Hess. The canid femme had looked like she would die several times, only to surprise them by raggedly hanging in there. Things seemed to be not quite so touch-and-go when the Immortal couple arrived on the scene.

"Miss D'nan, we have a situation here you need to mediate," Sir Tamal suggested, running a hand through his sandy brown hair. He motioned for her to take a look at Hess, who was still unconscious from her injuries. Victoria dismounted and looked at the canid lying on a emergency blanket so this clued her in that something was not right at all. She looked at Doug and Mike, setting her right hand gently on her longsword.

"Which one of you is in charge?" she asked in English, assuming they both would speak her native tongue.

"Um, I am, Mrs. Svensen," the tall cross proffered up. "My name's Michael Wilson and this is Douglas Muir." He looked at her sheepishly as he said, "I guess you have some questions we need to answer for you," he suggested, giving her a pensive smile.

"Yes, I do have some questions for the two of you, like who are these two femmes and what's wrong with them?" she asked, kneeling by Hess. She was joined by Willi Marie, who touched the sutures on the canid's abdomen.

“Willi, you need to try to heal her,” Doug suggested, looking somewhat worried by the situation. The tall equine femme thought about it but the Jaguar spoke before she could. “You need to heal her because she's the only one that can return your Aunt Victoria's memories to her.” That snippet of information garnered the tigress' attention.

“I seem to remember her, but from where, I don't know,” the tigress admitted, stroking the canid's cheek. She looked at her niece, asking her an important question;

“Willi Marie, if this is true, can you heal her?”

“I'm not really sure I can,” she replied, looking up at Mike. “I healed you, didn't I?” she asked the huge spotted one, who gave her a smile in return.

“Yeah, you did, Willi,” he replied, nodding towards Hess. “I'll be honest with you, Wilhelmine. You're a class six sorceress so this should be child's play for you. Go ahead and give it a try.”

“What do you mean, she's a class six sorceress?” Torvald asked, curious as all hell to know what was going on. Doug looked at him, thinking about how to answer this for the huge equine fur.

“Well, when she was on world IS-12297 with you and your wife, that world inhibited her powers greatly. Now that she's here, her powers are now back to full potential. She makes Merlin look like a carnival magician. Merlin was only a class two.”

“What?!?” Willi Marie blurted out, her jaw hanging open. It took a moment or two for her to get her head around this news. “You mean to tell me I'm a very powerful sorceress?” She shook her head in disbelief, the thought of this fact scaring her to some degree.

“Wilhelmine, your mother wouldn't use her magic because she hated it,” Mike told her, kneeling next to her. “She could have saved your father and herself from being murdered but she didn't. She wanted to die so your lineage would die. She was quite positive that you possessed absolutely no elemental magic.” This information shook the young equine femme to the core.

“Why did she think that?” Willi mused, wondering why she wasn't told she was possibly a powerful sorceress as a child and why her mother allowed herself and her father to be killed.

“She didn't want to see you hurt by magic so she never instructed you in its use,” Doug replied, still checking Hess' condition. “I'll ask you again, please try to restore the femme's health to her for Victoria's sake. Mike and I are only normals so we have no powers. We desperately need your help.”

“I'll try it but I won't make any promises,” Willi said, getting up to face Victoria who had already stood back up. “I'm doing this for you and not because I want to personally. I'm very afraid of this power, now that I've been told how powerful I actually am.” The tigress hugged her, letting her know what she thought.

“Wilhelmine Marie, Just give it your best shot, knowing you're doing something to help another family member. You know we all love you and care for you so just go ahead, do what you need to do for me, please? I really need my memories back.” Willi nodded, kneeling next to Hess again while Mike knelt down next to her to give her direction.

“Just look into her, see in your mind where the sword went into her. Use your mind to pull that sword back, closing the wound back up.” Willi Marie nodded, putting her hands over the wound site.

She cleared her mind and closed her eyes, 'looking' into the canid with her powers to see the ghostly outline of the blade embedded into her abdomen. Using two ghostly 'hands', she pulled the blade backwards, slowly, the flesh closing as the blade retreated from the canid's body. What everyone else observed was a blinding light between her hands and Hess' body. Eventually the light ceased and she sighed, opening her eyes to see the sutures lying on top of Hess' body, still tied. There was now no sign that a sword ever penetrated her body at all.

“Hess? Hess, can you hear me?” Doug asked the canid, her eyes fluttering as she tried to sit up. Doug lifted her into his lap, helping her to become cognizant by rubbing her body to stimulate her circulation.

“Wha ... Huh??” Hess said quietly, blinking her eyes to clear them. She looked up to see the tigress standing over her, hand resting on the pommel of her longsword. “... Aw shit ...” she said, resigning herself to a death at the tigress' hands.

“Hess, can you restore my memories?” the tigress asked, waiting very patiently for an answer from the canid femme. Hess nodded sullenly, knowing she had to help her out or die. Death seemed a foregone conclusion to her at the moment. Either Victoria would kill her if she didn't help or *He* would kill her when *He* found out what has transpired.

“I will try to restore your mind when I have regained my strength.” she replied, closing her eyes momentarily until she remembered what had happened to Nevaeh. She got up to her knees, looking around to see her friend laying near her, motionless. Screaming out her friend's name, she made her way to her, holding her lifeless body to her closely and crying.

The leopard was sitting in the hallway, lip-reading Conrad's story to his uncle. He had a gut feeling something was not right nearby so he was keeping an eye out for his marks. He observed the femme ferret casually step out of the elevator, right paw in her coat pocket. That was obviously where the hypo full of a neurotoxin was hidden. He stood up slowly, putting his paw on his service weapon nestled in a cross draw holster. She was preparing to grasp the doorknob to Valerie's room when Mr. Nelson put his left paw on her right shoulder, stopping her. He penetrated her clothes with his claws, breaking the skin in five places.

“Nice to see you again, Kira,” he said cheerily, turning her towards that short hallway by Valerie's room. “Don't make me tear your shoulder off your body,” he quietly threatened in an evil tone, pushing her in the direction he wanted her to go.

“Who the hell are you?” the ferret hissed, turning her head to give him a stare that could melt steel.

“None of your business, bitch. Shut up before I kill you right here and now.” She heard him pull back the hammer on his service revolver, most likely a .44 SuperMag caliber revolver with depleted uranium-tipped armor-piercing ammunition. The body armor she wore was no match for his firepower, considering he had put his claws through the top of her vest.

“All right,” she retorted, keeping her voice low. “What do you want with me?” she asked, still madder than hell at him. Her shoulder was in extreme pain from all of his claws that were sunk more than an inch deep into her hide.

“I actually want to kill you myself but I'll let my boss Jason deal with you personally,” he replied, pushing her against the wall, muzzle first. Daniel removed the syringe from her pocket, then rummaged around in his jacket for something. Pulling a circular metal device about three inches across out of his coat pocket, he slapped it into the middle of her back, hooking it to her coat. He pressed the button in the middle of it, letting go of her and stepping back.

The femme quickly turned to look at him with a look of death on her face. She began to unbutton her coat quickly but the sequencer fired off, a shimmering effect growing around her.

“I'll kill you with my bare paws, you dirty Mother ...” she didn't get to finish her sentence before she shimmered out of existence on this planet. Daniel slumped back into a chair in the hall, shaking his head in disgust. Maybe his boss would do something a little more permanent with her now. One mark left to go, just one more mark and he was done.

Valerie felt some furson holding her left paw gently, rubbing the back of it with their thumb. By the feel of it, it must be a male that was doing this to her because her paw felt so small in the embrace of this other fur. She looked down to see a black and white paw holding hers.

“Wally, is that you?” she asked, turning to see her older brother sitting by her bed, Conrad standing behind him smiling. “How did you find out? When did you get here?” she asked excitedly, holding her arms out for him to let her hug him.

“The police called me because they found my phone number in your purse,” he confided in her, smiling widely. “It's so good to see you again, Sis. I've really missed you, Vicki, Mom and Dad.” They hugged each other tightly, tears flowing freely from both of them.

“Wally, I hope Conrad told you Mom and Dad are here,” she told her brother, still holding him tightly. He nodded, letting her know he already knew this much.

“Conrad says he'll make a stand to make them let me stay here,” the white tiger stated, finally letting go of his sister. That was about the time their parents walked in and looked at the pale colored male.

“Walter?” Grandpa Connell asked, looking at him strangely. It was clear that the older tiger was not happy with this situation, thinking about something that happened so many years ago. He actually began to cry just a little bit before he pulled himself back together.

“It's me, Dad. I'll leave and wait until you go before I come back,” Walter replied, turning to leave. He almost made it past his father when the elder Connell stopped him with a paw to his chest.

“Son, you don't have to leave for my sake,” he told his offspring, turning him to look at him square in the eyes. “This is something I have regretted for more than a few years now. I should have accepted your penance when you got out of jail. I was being stupid, letting the church dictate my feelings towards you.”

“No, you did what you thought you needed to do,” Wally told him, trying to keep his emotions in check.

“Son, I've accepted the fact that your sister is hopelessly in love with another femme,” he told his child, turning him to look across the hall. “That's her, lying in that bed over there. We've been over there, praying over her for her swift recovery. I've changed, Walter. I think you can see that.”

“Uh, I don't know what to say, then,” the pale tiger retorted. He looked at his mom, standing near her husband. He went to her, hugging her tightly while he began to cry all over again. “Mom, I'm so sorry about what happened to Frank. It still haunts me to this day.” he confided to his mother between sobs.

“Walter Lee, we're so sorry about what happened too. The Hellyers have asked about you for years, sweetheart. They were worried you would have emotional problems over the accident.” his mother told him. “Please forgive your parents for being stupid, Walter. Please stay here, with all of us. You're family just as much as any of the rest of us. Stay, please?” she begged, tears flowing down her face, matting her fur down.

“I forgive both of you,” he replied, tearfully hugging both of his parents. “I'll stay here just as you've asked me, with my family. I'll stay right here.”

Hess was still sobbing when Willi Marie wrapped her arms around the femme that was still holding the inanimate form of Nevaeh to her bosom. It really seemed to hurt the femme equine to see the canid crying like that. She could feel Hess' hurt in her heart, having lost what must have been a close friend to her. She had hoped to console the taller canid but what she didn't notice was the blinding light slowly enveloping all three femmes, so bright that everyone else had to close their eyes or turn away from them. Momentarily Nevaeh coughed and twitched in the taller canid's arms.

“Hess, what happened to ...” Her voice trailing off when she realized what had transpired. She had been dead, she knew because her spirit had left her body to see her dead mortal coil lying in the roadway. She was sure that she was now alive again, through what means she did not know.

“Nevaeh?” Hess questioned, looking down at the femme that was now alive. She then heard the femme equine behind her make a sharp sound when she realized what she had just done.

“Oh My Gawd ...” Wilhelmine said softly, standing up and backing away from them a few feet. “No, I didn't just do that ...” she said hesitantly, putting her hands to her face, then looking at her hands in shock. She was lucky that Torvald could move fast enough to catch her when she fainted, preventing her from falling to the ground and possibly injuring herself.

“Did I just see her ...” Joe was in shock too, his head swimming from the thought of just how powerful she really was.

“Yeah, I believe she just gave that femme back her life,” Axle replied, standing next to the coyote. “I saw that with my own two eyes and I still don't believe it.”

“Um, Doug, I guess I should point this out,” the huge cross began to say to his partner, clearing his

throat. "That is beyond what a class six is capable of, reanimating and restoring the soul of an almost cold body. She must be a Master." That suggestion lit up the jaguar's eyes.

"Mike, if she's a Master, this changes everything." Doug stated, giving thought to their next moves.

"Yeah, this will change everything. Even *He* would not stand a chance against her." Mike mused, looking over at the unconscious femme lying in Torvald's arms. Victoria and Axel made a place to lay her down while she recovered from her shocking discovery so they all prepared for a short stay in this location, at least until Willi Marie was ready to travel again.

Victoria finally got around to attending to the male that was tied to the tree and he seemed relieved to be released from his bondage. What seemed odd to her was his predicament; tied up like this for no real reason. She turned to walk back towards the others when a sharp pain shot through her abdomen. She looked down to see her long sword's blade poking through her clothing, just below her vest and armor.

"You will die now for killing my brothers!" the male shouted, spinning her around to face him. "You killed my brothers twenty-four years ago and now I will avenge them!" he pulled out a dirk from his boot top and lifted her chin to slit her throat. Just as the male's blade touched her fur by the left side of her jaw, several loud reports were heard followed by the man falling to the ground, dead from a series of head shots from Joe's Dragoon. The tigress grimaced as she fell to her knees, putting out a hand to keep from falling down. Everyone rushed to her aid but the coyote beat them all to her side.

"Victoria, are you hurt badly?" Joe asked, helping her to sit down on a log. The warrior had left her sword embedded in her, since he probably intended to behead her after killing her.

"Joe, this hurts like hell," she replied through gritted teeth, touching the blade experimentally. She somehow had a thought of Torvald being down on his knees with a broadsword through him, of all things. "Um, you better pull this out of me, please? Joe, this really hurts bad." Her hubby and son had made their way to her, holding her paws and supporting her while Joe removed her blade from her body. By the look on her muzzle, this was not very pleasant at all.

"Victoria, do you need to lay down?" Torvald asked, holding her to his body. She looked up at him and shook her head 'no', laying against his chest afterwards. Joe was busy checking her for any continued bleeding, which she didn't seem to be doing at the moment. That seemed to be a good sign to them all.

The tigress heard something in the bushes cross the road as did a few others so she looked that way and motioned with her muzzle for her warriors to go investigate. After a few moments of searching through the brush, Sir Jac came back with Hilda in his possession. Sir Marc was right behind him leading Glenda, who was not happy at all.

"You had better let go of my reins, you stupid jerk! Don't make me kick your behind, buddy!" she shouted angrily, pulling back against her hackamore. That made Sir Marc stop and look at her strangely.

"What manner of demon horse are you?" he asked, dropping her reins and slowly backing away from her, drawing his longsword for protection.

"I'm no damned demon, you simpleton! I'm supposed to be a bipedal feline but I had to play the horse on this mission!" Glenda replied in a snippy tone.

“Thanks for giving us away, Glenda Jean McDermott,” Hilda said sourly, pulling herself free of Sir Jac's grip and straightening her clothes. “I'm sorry, we were supposed to keep that male from harming Victoria, Hess and Nevaeh,” she related to the assembled furs, checking the dead man to see that he was truly dead as a door nail. “It looks like we really missed our cue on this one. We were supposed to keep him alive if at all possible, too.”

“So, who are you and who do you two work for?” Mike asked, seeming to be non-plussed by this turn of events. Hilda thought this over for a moment, then conferred with Glenda quietly before she answered the tall cross.

“I'm Hilda Anne Sinkovich and that's Glenda McDermott. We're Time Continuum technicians.” she replied. Mike had asked this question for the other's edification, not his group. They already knew who they were.

“Well, who do you and the jaguar work for?” Glenda asked Mike, since she didn't really remember him being mentioned in their briefing. Mike looked at Doug, who nodded back.

“Um, we're not exactly at liberty to answer that but it suffices to say we're here to make sure Willi Marie, Victoria, her family and Joe make it off this planet in one piece.” was Mike's reply.

“I see ...” she commented, thinking about it momentarily. “You're not Celestial Police, are you?” she queried, giving Mike her undivided attention.

“No, we usually have to bail them out,” he replied. It wasn't exactly the whole truth but this seemed to settle the mare's mind. That was when Torvald spoke up.

“Now that we have that all straightened out, let's make camp here until Willi and Victoria are ready to travel again.” he suggested. All of them discussed the situation before they finally decided this was the right thing to do so Victoria sent Sir Tamal on to the castle while the rest of them set up a makeshift camp.

An elderly man was standing in a clearing, waiting for the arrival of the town's protector. He was quite nervous this morning, considering what he had to tell their mysterious champion. The usual payment was not in his possession, the result of being robbed by Archem Raiders just an hour earlier in the day. He was in hopes the individual on his way would take pity on him and seek no retribution. Most likely their reluctant champion would see it as an opportunity to dispatch a few Raiders, since he often said he did not need payment for his services. The townsfolk, however knew he did like gold. It was only fair, since he did act as a sheriff of sorts for them.

He spotted the creature on his mount, a huge black stallion. The figure rode up to him, dismounting to stride up to the man waiting for him.

“Harlan Willim, you seem upset this morning,” the half-human, half-dragon stated, stopping in front of the shorter male. He was not looking straight at the man, but looking off into the distance through clouded blind eyes. His magic sash around his waist gave him the gift of sight, the only way he had to move about this land at all.

“I'm sorry Sir Teric, I was robbed of your payment for your services by a band of Archem Raiders on the way here. There were more than ten of them, I'm afraid.”

The half dragon took off his helmet, tucking it under one arm while he thought about this dilemma. The green scales on his head and neck were like mirrors, reflecting the morning sun while he stroked his chin. He ran a hand through his medium brown hair, straightening it out after having been under his helmet. He then scratched around the base of one of his horns, tending to that itch that had been bothering him all morning while he pondered this situation.

The only reason he protected the town was his parents had once lived here and it was here he was born. It was well known throughout the region that the town was always kind to them. This protection he provided was repayment for their kindness but they knew he had a weak spot when it came to gold. What dragon or even half-dragon could resist gold? He certainly could not.

“Gah, Raiders ... they did not harm you, did they?” Teric asked, concerned for his townspeople's well-being. His gold as payment could always be replaced but a life could not.

“They pushed me around a bit but they didn't actually harm me,” the elderly man confided in him. “They acted as if they were merely after the small amount of gold, Sir Teric.”

“I fear I must retrieve my payment and bring them before the crown, then,” the half-human, half-dragon stated, nodding as he thought up a plan to go by. “by which way did they retreat?” he asked, waiting patiently for an answer.

“They all headed eastwards, towards Whitehall of all places, Sir Teric. Please be careful when you approach them, they are heavily armed but they carried no firearms that I saw.” Harlan bid.

“I will be careful, Harlan Willim. I intend to enlist the aid of Vicki D'nan and her warriors.” he retorted. “I am sure she will assist me in this endeavor, since the Archem pose a threat to all in the lands controlled by King Andath.”

Teric strode back to his horse, deftly leaping into the saddle. He flexed his stunted, flightless wings then tucked them against his back, out of the way before wheeling his mount around, headed towards Miss D'nan's location. Teric checked to make sure his father's sword was secure as he urged his mount on. He did not know how or why but he could sense the tigress' proximity to himself. Whether that be because she was immortal or a creature not from this realm, he did not know. All that mattered now was reaching her quickly to ask for her help in this matter.