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“A Loss Of Rights”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 20

Tasha stood under the shower, letting the hot water beat down on her shoulders as she shampooed her long, blond hair for the third time. It still felt filthy to her but it needed to be clean so she could get it trimmed up later today. It felt so good to shower again, to finally get this filth off of her fur. All she had been treated to was weekly antiseptic sprays and a dousing from a cold water hose afterwards since she had been imprisoned almost ten years ago. This shower was just sinfully good and she planned to use up the hot water, if she could.

She was in the middle of shampooing her hair for the fourth time when she was interrupted by the staff mage.

“Ms. Cummerow? Are you in here?” the male called out, wandering through Jason's suite in search of the lioness.

“I'm in the shower,” she called out, looking over the top of the shower door at the entry to the bathroom. Eventually the ferret made his presence known.

“Ms. Cummerow, I've been sent by Jason to unbind your powers.” the ferret stated. She slid the shower door open, exposing her naked, lithe body to him.

“Sure David, you can unbind me any day,” she said in a sultry voice, motioning for him to approach her.

“Tasha, that's not nice,” he said, looking at her with a frown. “What would my wife say?”

“I don't know, David. Summon her here and let's find out.” the lioness replied. That made the ferret scowl even further.

“Just let me remove your bands and unbind your powers, please?” he asked, stepping over next to the shower door. She held out her arms, allowing the ferret to remove the thin silver bands from her wrists.

“Now, David, would you scrub my back, please?” she asked, his clothes suddenly missing and immediately replaced with a Speedo swim trunk. “No sex David, just scrub my back, please! It itches

real bad! And I won't tell your wife, either.”

“Tasha, you are ...” He suddenly found himself in the shower stall with the lioness, holding a scrub brush and some soap.

“David? Please?” she turned her back to him, putting her head under the shower to rinse her hair again. He finally relented, scrubbing the fur on her back only to find it was indeed very dirty.

“You better not tell my wife about this,” he said sternly, lathering up the brush again.

“So what if I told my sister? I'm sure she wouldn't be too mad, considering the circumstances ...” She had turned to face him again, rinsing her back off under the shower.

“Yeah, you're right. She wouldn't be too steamed up, considering.”

“Go ahead and scrub my back again, please? I'm sure it's still dirty.”

Jason made his way through the building to his personal suite, clothes in paw for the lioness. He thought back to that day when Tasha had made that fatal error in judgment during a routine mission. He had been there with her, overseeing a run of the mill take-down of a dark operative. The underworld figure had made a run for it, through a crowd of normals. The shot had been clear for a moment, that short moment when she had hesitated. That one moment was enough for him to dart behind a normal just as she took her shot. That poor normal had been blown into such small pieces, they couldn't gather up enough of him to reconstitute him.

The board reviewed the case against her, finally stating Tasha had summoned her disruptor spell negligently in a crowded plaza. The appeals board, after a year-long deliberation had agreed with them in a 3 to 2 vote, sealing her fate. She was sentenced to 60 years in prison on a null-power planet with no hope of parole. It had been his thoughts he might never see her again, despite his continued work to get her a new review.

Above all else, he wanted to see Beoram destroyed, since it had been his sorry ass she had been after in the first place. He just hoped she could keep a level head on this mission, not letting her emotions run away with her and cause another situation that would end up with her back in prison again.

Jason opened the door to his suite, making his way through the living room, down the hallway to the bedroom, where Tasha rested on the bed, naked, eyes closed, a contented smile on her muzzle.

“Tasha?” he asked, wondering if she was asleep or not.

“Come lay down with me, Jason,” she bid, opening one eye to look at him as she smiled widely. He put her clothing on the dresser, lying down next to her, pulling her close to him.

“I missed you honey,” she said softly, kissing him on the cheek.

“I missed you too,” he replied, nuzzling against her neck.

“I also missed having a real bed to sleep in, I'll have you know. Concrete and stone are very hard on the back, sweetie.”

“You know I've tried to get you a new review for the last ten years,” he pointed out to her, not arguing when she made his clothes join hers on the dresser.

“Now, Mr. Cummerow, you owe me a ton of loving,” she stated, pulling him on top of her. “You are not to stop until I tell you to do so.”

“Well, I guess that's the least I can do for my wife,?” he mused, kissing her on the lips afterwards.

It was just after dark when Sir Tamal arrived at the castle, making his way to the stables to put his horse into the care of the Stablemaster.

“You look tired, Sir Tamal,” the orange tabby stated, taking his reins from him.

“Yes, JerMac, I'm very tired. Miss D'nan sent me ahead to warn the King and Sir Varn of her return.” He took his rifle, bow and quiver from his saddle, allowing another stable hand to lead his horse to a stall.

“You look as if trouble follows you,” the Stablemaster stated, offering him some beer from a tankard.

“Yes, trouble follows me but I fear it will bring more trouble once she arrives.” Sir Tamal sat down on a barrel, sipping the beer to clear his throat. “Thank you for the drink,” he said handing the empty tankard back. “I must see the King as soon as possible.”

Sir Tamal strode off towards the side entrance to the Royal halls, in search of an audience with his employer. He had no script to go by so he was just going to have to wing it, which didn't set well with him. As he approached the Royal chambers, the knight was stopped by the Chamberlain.

“What business do you have with the King, Sir Tamal?” the hedgehog asked, giving him a stern look over his spectacles.

“Miss D'nan has sent me ahead of her to warn the crown of what follows behind me.” He looked to see that this information didn't seem to bother him. “Did you not hear my answer?”

“Yes, I have heard your answer,” the Chamberlain said as his face fell. “I have 'felt' this coming for several days now. Your arrival just confirmed what I have felt in my heart.” He motioned for the knight to enter, opening the door for him. The Chamberlain entered the room, took an official stance and stated; “Sir Tamal to see His Royal Highness.”

The knight went to stand in front of the king, kneeling on his left knee in front of him out of courtesy. Sir Varn was standing off to the side, having just had a long conversation with the king.

“Stand, Sir Knight, and address me.”

Tamal stood, putting his helmet under his left arm, just so.

“Sir, I have been sent by Miss D'nan to bring news of her return to the castle, My Lord.”

“Do tell, Sir Tamal. What is so important that you come before her?”

“My Lord, she returns to the castle ...” He choked up momentarily then finished. “She brings her family with her, My Lord.”

“Ah ... I see ...” The king seemed quite speechless by this turn of events.

“Her husband, her son, a niece that was brought into her family and a family friend comes with her, My Lord. Her niece is a very powerful sorceress. I have seen her abilities with my own eyes, My Leige.”

“I do not like the sounds of that, if I might say so, King Andath,” Mirelda stated, coming out of the shadows to make her presence known. The king's sorceress, a human/skunk cross, gave him a forced smile as she approached the knight. “Are you sure you haven't been hexed by her, that you cannot tell the truth?”

“I have not been hexed by her, Mirelda. She is a kind, gentle soul that means nobody harm.” he retorted, giving her a scowl.

“I overheard you say her husband is with her,” Sir Varn said, looking at his knight with a sad look on his face.

“I'm sorry, Sir Varn. Her husband is with her and it seems she is still deeply in love with him.”

“I have felt all along her life-mate would return.” Sir Varn stated, heartbroken by this news.

“Perhaps he is a demon in control of Vicki D'nan's mind,” Mirelda suggested, putting her black and white arm around the chief warrior.

“He does not act like a demon,” the younger warrior said in Torvald's defense.

The king thought about this for a while, giving it much thought.

“Well, it is my decree that we shall welcome Miss D'nan's family with open arms.” This seemed to upset the sorceress.

“My King, please reconsider your ...” He cut her off cold with a gesture of his hand.

“This is my decree! Do not cross me on this matter!” Mirelda backed down, bowing her head.

“As you wish, My King.” The king made a dismissing motion, so they all vacated the Royal halls. Once out in the outer hall, Sir Varn pulled his knight aside.

“Tamal, tell me of her husband,” he asked, looking him straight in the eyes.

“He is a huge stallion, maybe one and a half arm widths in height or more. He is a giant as is their son.” The two warriors strode off towards the knight's quarters, Sir Tamal telling of the last few days in great

detail.

The gray squirrel hairdresser brushed the lioness' hair back again, looking at the net results in front of him. Tasha's hair at least reached her shoulders, that much of it didn't suffer from split ends. He had feathered her hair, trying to make it look as nice as possible, considering what he had to work with.

“Thanks Tim, you did your best,” she said, looking at her hair in the mirror. She normally wore her hair longer than this but it looked too ratty, all frizzed out from split ends to be left much longer.

“I have done my best, Natasha. I only wish you had not been incarcerated for so long.” he replied. She got up from his stylist's chair, putting her glasses back on. “Since when do you wear glasses, my dear friend?”

“Well, there's not a lot of light in those jail cells. My eyesight went bad from almost ten years of reading magic law books in the dark.”

“That's a shame, love,” he said, giving her a hug. “I will bill the department for your styling, then.”

“Sure, Tim. They owe me that much, considering they left me hung out to dry over that incident.” She straightened her clothes in the mirror, smiling slightly. “I intend to bring those three bastards that voted for my incarceration to justice. Never let an enraged lioness search out the solid loopholes needed to indict them. They will finish my jail sentence, the three of them.”

She left the salon, headed across the campus to her office which hadn't been used since her incarceration. The cleaning crew was finishing up cleaning it for her as she arrived, getting it to at least a usable state. A few more cleanings would be needed to make it look proper, in her eyes.

Sitting down in her chair, she looked at the folder delivered to her by Jason. She opened it, reading about the situation so far. The operatives names were all unfamiliar to her, all of them too young to have served while she was an active agent. A further study made her smile, reading about Willi Marie and her powers. This was one fur that desperately needed her guidance, since Tasha knew what it was like to grow up without guidance for one's powers. She had been a reckless teen causing destruction in spades when Jason had met her, helping her to control her powers and put them to good use. Tasha shook her head, thinking about the situation. The lioness was only a class 3 sorceress while Willi Marie was at the very least a class 6, if not a master. There were two masters in Willi Marie's long lineage.

Tasha went to the mini-bar in her office, opening the refrigerator to retrieve a cold drink. Finding a Diet Dr. Pepper, she smiled slightly as she opened it, taking a long pull on it. How she had missed that simple little enjoyment in her life, a cold soft drink. That crap they called drinking water that they gave her daily in prison was no better than ditch water, having a very bad taste to it.

Returning to her desk, she typed up a requisition form on her computer, sending it to the appropriate individuals to acquire the items she would need for this mission. She then picked up the phone, calling Transportation to schedule a trip to planet IS-23440 to meet with a tigress, her family and a doomed winged whippet.

Teric and Phillip spent the remainder of the afternoon herding the Archem under their control towards Whitehall and Vicki D'nan's location. The dragon could feel her presence growing stronger and he could now feel several others, something that bothered him. He could see a campfire ahead so that must be her encampment. He soon made out the form of a badger standing guard, Sir Jac.

"It is I, Sir Teric," he called out, stopping his horse until he was sure the knight had made his presence. The badger gestured, waving him into the camp.

"Sir Teric, it is good to see you again," he said, giving the dragon a warrior's handshake once he had dismounted. "Who have you in your possession, kind dragon? Who have you captured this time?"

"It is not I that has captured these Archem, Sir Jac. This warrior Phillip Cooper subdued them in some manner. He says he is in search of Miss Vicki D'nan." Teric related to the knight.

"I am Phillip Cooper," the malamute said to the badger once he dismounted. "I must find Victoria, I mean Miss Vicki, as soon as possible."

"I am sorry but she rests right now, kind sir," the badger retorted. That made Phillip stop for a moment before he spoke again.

"Is it possible that Douglas or Michael is with her?" he asked, furrowing his brow in thought.

"Yes, the huge one and the feline are with her, if you would like to meet with them," he related, giving the canid a smile.

"Please show me to them, if you would," he said, then observing Mike walking across the encampment. "Never mind, I see Michael over there," he then stated, heading towards the tall one.

"He is a strange one," Teric commented after Phillip was out of earshot. "I have no clue how he subdued these warriors without bloodshed."

"I have come to accept some very strange things on this foray, I'm afraid. Miss D'nan has a niece that is a powerful sorceress, to the point she summoned her life mate from another place in time, I have been told."

"I see," Teric mused, thinking about the situation. He had felt there was something very special about the tigress from the day he had first met her. There was an aura around her that he could 'see', a glow that existed around no others. Well, maybe one exception, the tall equine that was walking their way.

"I am Torvald, mate to Victoria. I am to understand you are her friend," he said, giving the half-dragon a warm handshake.

"I am Sir Teric, a knighted subject of the crown," he replied, returning Torvald's handshake. "I have known her for at least 20 or more years, ever since I was knighted by King Andath." He then added this snippet of information; "I am very sure she does not belong on this planet, kind Sir, as neither do you, I suspect."

"You are very correct, kind dragon. We are from another planet, where your kind unfortunately does no

longer dwell. Your kind are a very noble sentient that our world would be a better place with.”

“I had feared there were places where my father's kind were no longer alive,” Teric stated, giving the huge stallion a sad look.

“Your father's kind?” Torvald queried, thinking this sounded odd to him.

“I am only half drac, kind Sir. My mother was a subject of the crown, a full human.”

“I see, Sir Teric. My world has no humans on it so it still seems odd to hear of half-human sentients.”

“Your mate,” he asked, changing the subject, “she is resting, I have been told. Is she in good vigor?” Teric was concerned with her health, considering she had saved his life once.

“My wife is resting from having her memories restored to her,” Torvald replied. “She was brought here with her memories blocked, so she had no remembrance of her family at all. A former minion is restoring her memories and it is very strenuous for her.”

Teric could sense the huge equine's concern for his mate. This was a very serious thing to deal with, one's mind.

“I was in need of her warriors to catch these ruffians, but that canid, Sir Phillip, detained them for me. I suspect he is not of this world, either.” Torvald nodded his head, knowing that canid was not from here.

“I suspect, Sir Teric, he is not of my world either. He may possibly work for my employers, the gods of our worlds.”

“Ah, you are a warrior for the gods, as I have heard legends of.” Teric now knew the huge equine's true calling was making things right for the good of all sentient-kind. They were interrupted by Willi Marie, holding a plate of food for Teric.

“Uncle Torvald, I have some food for our guest, if he is hungry,” she said, smiling at the half-dragon. He bowed to her, smiling at her afterwards.

“You must be the sorceress I have heard about,” Teric stated, taking the plate offered him. “I am Sir Teric, a friend of Miss Vicki.”

“I'm Wilhelmine Delancey, her niece. I am a sorceress that is in dire need of training, I must admit. I accidentally summoned my husband from our planet earlier, just by thinking about seeing him muzzle to muzzle.”

“As long as he was not hurt by that, I see nothing wrong. You must have been missing his company.” Teric pointed out.

“Not to change the subject, but I have noticed you are blind, yet you seem to be able to see.” This had bothered her, to think he had no way of seeing the land around him.

“I have been given the power of sight through this magic sash,” he replied, giving her a nervous smile afterwards. “I may not see in color like you do but I can see well enough, even in the dark.”

Willi Marie put her arms around Teric to give him a welcoming hug, feeling the warmth emanating from his half-drac body. What the others saw was that now-familiar blinding light enveloping their bodies, making it impossible to see them. As the light faded, Teric blinked his eyes, wondering why he was seeing things differently now. He put his hands in front of his muzzle, turning them to see that they were now in vivid color.

“What has happened? I can see ...” His voice tapered off as he unfurled his wings, now stretching out to over twenty feet or more in span. He felt the new powerful muscles on his back ripple, strong and large to support his new wings.

“I am so sorry, Sir Teric, I seemed to have given you your sight back and healed your wings,” Willi Marie said, turning red under her coat from embarrassment.

“No, please do not apologize for this,” he said quickly, giving her a hug to comfort her. “It's just ... I never thought I would be able to see through my eyes. I have been blind since birth.”

“Teric! Your wings!” sir Jac said excitedly, looking at something he had never observed before.

“Yes, the sorceress has seemed to have given my wings the size and strength they need for flight,” he commented, carefully folding them and then quickly stretching them back out. “I seem to no longer have the room in my armor for the flight muscles.”

“Well, maybe I can fix that, if you're not afraid of me trying,” Willi stated, giving him a very pensive smile.

“Please do, kind sorceress. This is very uncomfortable without sufficient room for my new physiology.” Willi Marie put her hands on his armor, a gentle glow building up momentarily as his armor began to change shape. The dragon flexed his wings then folded them carefully, finding he now had plenty of room for his newly-restored wings. “That is better,” he commented, spreading his wings again.

“Kind dragon Teric, have you ever flown in your life?” Willi asked, wondering about this since his wings were quite small to begin with.

“No, I have never flown so I am not sure just how to do this,” he mused, flapping his wings experimentally. He managed to lift his boots from the ground for a few beats, shocking himself momentarily before settling back to earth. “This is something I will need much practice with before trying an extended flight.”

“Sir Teric, if you would like, you may stay here with us for the night. We plan to travel to the castle in the morning to bring several ruffians that Torvald captured to justice.” Sir Jac informed the half-dragon.

“That would be excellent,” he replied, a warm smile crossing his muzzle. “I think I should make acquaintances with Miss Vicki's family, at any rate.”

“Good then, let us go introduce you around.” Sir Jac and Sir Teric strode off towards the assembled group, catching up on each other's exploits while Teric nibbled on his food.

Tasha walked into the staging area after changing into period clothing, looking at the equipment sitting on the tables in front of her. A female bay equine with four white socks, dressed similarly to the tigress was checking off their equipment, making sure it was all there and accounted for.

“Kristy, how have you been?” the lioness called out, smiling when the equine smiled back at her.

“I’ve been fine, Tasha. I’ve really missed you not being around, you know. I’m glad you’re back, honey.”

“Yeah, we’ve had a few exciting missions, haven’t we?” Tasha nodded, remembering the early years of her missions with the equine. “You know, Kristy, Rob Holland in requisitions tried to get me to sign for you. Imagine that,” she said, looking at the equipment closer.

“He tries that all the time, honey. He knows we’re considered sentient now, since the laws have changed over the years. I hope you told him off.”

“I threatened to turn him into a human normal,” the lioness stated, checking over her first aid kit closely. It needed to have bandages that work on fur for her to be able to use it fully.

“I’ll bet that got his attention,” the equine commented, giving Tasha a smile.

“Yeah, he ran for cover behind the clothing racks until I left the room,” she replied as she began to pack up their gear.

Once their gear was packed up properly, Kristy squatted down, tapping the bracelet on her left wrist. She quickly morphed to a four legged horse, taking a few steps to see that everything in the morphing process went off properly.

“You ready to go?” Tasha asked, picking up her saddle blanket.

“Yeah, let’s get going. My husband Sam will surprised to see me.”

Tasha put her blanket on her, then her saddle. Cinching it up properly, the lioness put a hackamore rig on Kristy, adjusting the strapping just so. She then put the saddlebags and saddle roll on her, getting them secured properly.

“You always were so gentle when it came to setting up my rigging,” Kristy commented, walking over to the transport chamber. “You first, so I can get in after you.”

Tasha stepped into the semi-spherical chamber, getting to the side so there was room for her partner. Once Kristy was inside, a technician closed the mesh gate behind them. Within seconds, they were gone, on their way to finish up a mission on planet IS-23440.

Conrad was still awake, staring at the ceiling in their hotel room. He was still thinking about the conversation he had earlier with the General Manager of the 49ers and the \$1,000 fine he had slapped on Conrad for missing the practice today. At least he had waived any further fines, provided Conrad

stayed in touch with them.

“Conrad, are you still awake?” his wife asked, rolling over to face him.

“Yeah, I can't sleep, hon. I keep thinking about that fine and my parents.” He turned to look at her, his brow furrowed in thought. “I keep thinking about my family, what are they doing right now, are they all OK?”

“Well, there's nothing you can do about it sweetheart. Try to clear your mind and get some sleep, please?” He hugged her close to him, giving her a kiss.

“Yeah, you're right. I need to get some sleep.”

Torvald was sitting by Joe, discussing the situation at paw. They were looking at the yurts that Willi Marie had conjured up for them, a reasonable way to spend the evening. It was amusing to Joe, considering she had created a small village of sorts, giving them enough sleeping accommodations for all. Richard had decided to stay the evening and spend some time with his wife before she would send him home in the morning. They had retired early, the lights in their yurt now out.

“Torvald, Joe,” the tigress greeted them, sitting down on the couch between them, leaning over against her hubby. He put his arm around her, hugging her warmly.

“How are you feeling, Victoria?” Joe asked, concerned for her health.

“Well, I'll be honest about it, Joe, I've felt better. I have a banging headache from having my mind worked over,” she stated, giving him a weak smile.

“I believe your squire was looking for you earlier, wondering if you were well,” her hubby pointed out, waving Morri over to them. “Morri, is it possible you could fix something for Victoria's headache?”

“Yes, I can do that for her,” he replied, hurrying off to take care of that task.

“You were very lucky to have such good folk to take care of you,” Joe commented, watching the squire begin to brew something over the fire.

“Yeah, you're right.” she replied. “I've been lucky, that's for sure. Robert was a good husband to me when Torvald and I were in that alternate reality. Torvald has always been good to me and Morri has been a very good squire.” She sniffed and wiped her eyes as she said, “I'll miss this place and all of the good people that inhabit it. Twenty four years is a long time to be someplace and not miss it afterwards. It will be oh so nice to be home with my family, though.”

“I'll enjoy being back in Annie's arms,” the coyote said wistfully, thinking about the last mission he was on. Even though it was not a very complicated mission, he almost bit the dust on that one. Maybe it was time for him to quit, before any permanent harm came to him.

Morri returned with a cup of medicinal tea for the tigress, waiting until she had consumed it before leaving again. Victoria shook her head, noting that tea had made her very woozy.

“I'm not sure what he puts in that tea but it's very powerful,” she commented, leaning over against her hubby.

“As long as it works, I don't see that as a problem,” Joe commented, sniffing the cup she had drank from. It had a very unusual smell, a mixture that he was sure Tigermark had concocted at one time or another for the squad.

“So Torvald, Joe, I think it might take us all day tomorrow to get to the castle with our prisoners on foot,” the tigress said sleepily, rubbing her eyes to stay awake.

“Why don't you get some rest, Victoria?” Joe suggested, getting up to go to bed himself. She didn't answer him because she was asleep, out like a light in her hubby's embrace.

“I'll put her to bed, Joe,” Torvald stated, picking her up and cradling her in his arms. “I'll see you in the morning.”

The coyote nodded, headed over to share a yurt with Axel, Teric and Morri.

Torvald put Victoria down on their bed, undressing her carefully while she protested lightly from being half asleep.

“I'm cold, Sweetheart, come warm me up?” she begged softly, trying to get under the covers.

“Well, let me get your other boot and your leggings off and I'll warm you up,” he replied, finally getting her other boot off. He slipped her leggings off, hanging them over a chair in their yurt. Looking around at their accommodations, Torvald thought it was a good thing Willi Marie wasn't a warrior for the gods because they would have had a fit over her slinging magic around like she had done for the past few days.

Once Torvald had slipped into bed with his wife, she snuggled up to him, purring quietly.

“I missed you,” she said sleepily, giving him a kiss on the lips.

“I missed you too. Don't ever leave me like that again, you hear?”

“I won't ever leave you again,” The tigress said softly right before slipping off to sleep again, snoring lightly. Torvald snuggled down in the bed further, slipping off to sleep himself.