

Adventure Kaving

THE SLIPPERS OF SOMNAQUETZL

BY TIGERMARK

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AND
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“Are you sure you really want this arti-fact, Kay?” Maxx asked, his striped tail flipping back and forth as he looked into the chamber. The old AzTech pyramid in the depths of the northern Column-BA jungle was, to say the least, in disrepair. Dr. Adventure Kayngi, called Adventure Kay by friends and adversaries alike, was on another extended leave from her teaching position at Furnet University.

“Yeah, Maxx, The University Museum wants it to complete their Column-BA artifact exhibit. They have a spot picked out for it right beside the ancient Form C and Tax Tables of Column-BA. Since the dragons who lived here long ago were so meticulous in their treasure accounting, Their Leader, Somnaquetzl, demanded precision in their accounting for taxes, making them the first ancient culture made up of CPA and IRS agent dragons,” Kay said as she scanned the chamber for any more traps. They had eased around or just plain barged through five so far, with Maxx’s singed tail to prove it. Kay looked back at him and reached out to flick another stray centipede off his shoulder.

“But why is-,” Maxx started to ask, but Kay cut him off with a quick gesture.

“Shh! Look at the stones in the ceiling! The way they’re fitted, it would only take a small sound to bring them down,” Kay said in a whisper. She had leaned forward to look into the chamber, and Maxx lost his train of thought as he looked at her.

“Yah, the stones are fitted in very nicely,” he mumbled. Kay noted where he was looking and shifted slightly to block his view.

“Down, Maxx! We have work to do,” She hissed at him, “Keep your mind out of the gutter!”

“I’d rather keep my mind on the down part, but okay, I guess,” Maxx mumbled.

Kay began to cautiously edge into the room and toward the large raised tomb in its center. Just on the far side of the tomb, she could see a low table, with the glint of jewels reflecting from it. Maxx crept along behind her, and suddenly stifled a sneeze.

The stones of the ceiling rumbled ominously, but held.

“Keep it down,” Kay mouthed back at him silently as he shrugged, a sheepish look on his muzzle.

They made their way over to the table, and there were the slippers. Gold edged, with jewels mounted along the seams, they gleamed in Kay’s light beam.

Kay looked closely, and noted the panel beneath the slippers looked like it would move. She looked at the slippers, and then at her feet. Too small, she decided. She looked at Maxx’s, and quickly mouthed, “Take off your boots.”

“Why me?” he mouthed back.

“Because mine are too small,” She said silently in return.

Maxx shrugged and gently sat down and took his boots off. Kay’s nose wrinkled and she thought, “Whew! Maybe I should’ve tried my boots, anyway!”

Maxx handed her the boots and, with one paw covering her nose, she turned to the table. She carefully slid the boots onto the table while sliding the slippers off. She tucked them into her pack.

Thinking, “That was too easy,” Kay led the way back out the door they had come in. She noted another door across the room, but didn’t want to take any further chances on exploring. Once back into the chamber outside the one with the tomb, they could speak again.

“Whew!” Maxx exclaimed, “That was easier than usual. Didja have to use my boots?”

“Sorry, Maxx, I’ll see if the University will get you a new pair. Mine wouldn’t have had enough weight not to set off the trap. Believe me; if I’d known about the smell, I wouldn’t have used yours.” Kay said, still wrinkling her nose.

Maxx gave her a dirty look, but only said, “Well, let’s get going.”

“Tha might be a lil’ hard ta do,” Said a voice, slightly slurred, from the opposite doorway.

Kay and Maxx whipped around, both with paws reaching for their weapons. In the doorway stood a large bull, holding a large caliber revolver on them. To his right, and slightly in front of him, a large blond-haired Great Dane holding a mini-14 was covering them, laughing slightly, almost to himself. To the bull’s left, a dark haired rhino was also covering them with a Mini-14, and doing the same, slightly insane sounding laugh.

“Ah-ah-aah! Do na’ drah ya’ weapns. I don’ wanna havta hurtcha. Jus paw ovah them slippahs, and Ahll letcha walk outas heah,” The bull said. Kay realized his slurred speech was due to the fact that both his front teeth were missing. His two companions continued the low maniacal snickering they’d been doing since the bull had announced their presence.

“Great!” Kay thought, “I knew it was too easy. Wonder what this guy’s story is.” What she said was, “Okay, but first, who are you and why do you want the slippers?” “Might as well play out the scene,” she thought.

The bull had taken a deep breath in preparation for explaining his grand plot, but the Great Dane suddenly yelled, “That’s it! I’m outta control now! Don’t tell her anything, Boss! Heh, heh, heh,”

The bull looked sharply at him and said, “Why not?”

“Cuz that’s how they **always** get you to tell them what you’re about to do! Then they can think up a way to stop you! Heh, heh, heh,” The Great Dane replied. Kay noted that he yelled everything at the top of his lungs, except for the laugh, which was menacingly quiet.

The bull was considering this, so Kay took a chance and turned on the charm a bit to see if she could get some information from him before he decided not to tell them anything.

Shifting a little and delicately arching her back to put herself into an alluring pose, Kay cooed, “Awww, Mr. Bull, you can tell me, I’d just love to hear.”

All three of their adversaries stared slack-jawed. The two even stopped their laughing. The bull finally stammered, “Ah, all righ, ahll tell ya. Ma name is Bull Hockey, these are ma assosi-, my assosh-, these are ma lackeys, Mr. Revis an Mr. But-Ted.”

Revis, the Great Dane, looked suspicious and started laughing again. But-Ted, the rhino, nodded slightly and also started to laugh in a low voice.

“Now, who ah you? We jus’been waitin’ fah some ol’ perfessah ta come an’ get those slippahs, but ya sure ain’t no perfessah.”

“I am,” Kay said with great dignity, considering the pose she still held, “Doctor Adventure Kayngi, of the Furnet University Archaeology Department. We want the slippers for the University Museum. Again I ask, why do you want them?”

“Why ah wan’ the slippahs is personal,” Bull said, “Now paw ‘em ovah.”

Kay looked over at Maxx, who had taken advantage of Kay’s diversion to ease a jar out of his pack. He slipped it into Kay’s paw.

“Oh, all right. We sure can’t outgun such a strong-looking group, can we, Maxx?” Kay said, still in her sexy, cooing voice. Maxx was unable to answer, as he was also now looking at her slack jawed, a wisp of drool in the corner of his muzzle.

Ignoring his lack of an answer, Kay continued, “Here Bull, Catch!” She flung the jar to the ground right in front of the trio, breaking it on the stone floor. Immediately a cloud of purple/reddish gas expanded between Kay and Maxx and their would-be treasure thieves. Kay grabbed Maxx by the shirt, startling him out of his daze, and dragged him back into the tomb chamber. They made their way quickly and quietly across to the opposite door. There was a great snorting and coughing coming from the outer chamber. Just as Kay and Maxx exited the tomb area, Bull and his henchfurs, tears streaming down their muzzles and snot running from their noses, came running into it.

“Stop em!” Bull thundered, causing the stones in the ceiling to come crashing down upon the hapless trio.

A few minutes later, as the dust settled, Kay cautiously poked her head back into the room. She could hear muffled snorting, and two voices still doing the insane snickering. Satisfied that they could dig their way out in time, Kay returned to Maxx, and they cautiously made their way out the back entrance to the pyramid.

“That was close, I’m glad I could distract them,” Kay said as they walked along a path through the jungle toward the river, where Maxx’s Sopwith Buffalo awaited their return.

“Yeah, you dislocated me, too. Where’d you learn to pose like that? It really showed off your assets, and your front-sets, too,” Maxx said, looking at Kay, still in awe.

“A girl uses what she has. What was that stuff in the jar?” Kay asked, switching the subject to try to bring her friend back to reality.

“Oh, I brought that along just in case. It was Jalapeño sauce and a dash of Skunkfox’s spray. Had to be careful with that, I just wanted it to slow someone down, not melt their fur off.” Maxx replied, smiling broadly at the thought that his idea had been useful.

Kay smiled and reached in to plant a kiss on Maxx’s cheek, but before she could, a loud crash caused them to look back toward the pyramid. Bull and company had just crashed through the side of the structure and were dusting themselves off. The two laughing-furs had lost their weapons, but the bull retained his pistol. Kay and Maxx set out at a run, but the full voiced shout of Revis calling, “There they are! Heh, heh,” told them they’d been spotted.

“Now we know why he’s called Butt-Ted,” said Maxx. Kay gave him a sour look and kept on running. In a few minutes, they reached the river and Maxx’s old Sopwith Buffalo. A leftover from the end of WW I, the old biplane had seen better days, but it still

flew, mostly, and Maxx had equipped it with floats to handle the back rivers in his home country of Got-Amala. The fact that its cockpit area and fuel tanks were armor-plated had saved their hides a couple of times before, too.

Maxx jumped up to the pilot's position in the front cockpit, flipped on a switch and yelled, "Switch on."

Kay was used to the old plane's starting routine and went forward and pulled the prop through until she felt it catch at the magnetos.

"Contact!" she called out. "Contact!" Maxx replied. She pulled the prop and the engine sputtered to life. Kay pushed the plane off the sand bar they'd beached it on, and nearly drowned in the spray from the prop as Maxx gunned the engine to clear out any oil that might have settled in the cylinders. She climbed up into the rear cockpit as Maxx looked appreciatively at her now-soaked shirt.

"Put your eyes back around and watch where we're crashing, Maxx." She couldn't help giving a little wiggle to tease him, "Besides, I'm wearing a bra."

"Yeah, darn my luck," Maxx said as he turned back forward and started his takeoff run. The Buffalo slowly rose onto step, and then began its slow climb up and away from the river.

Kay leaned forward and tapped Maxx on the shoulder. When he looked around, she yelled in his ear, "Maxx, have you ever heard of that guy before?"

"Yeah! He and his cousin, Horse Hockey, were professional hockey players. Horse went into politics when he retired from Hockey, and was doing well as a Senator last I heard. Bull retired a few seasons ago, but I haven't heard anything from him since," Maxx replied as they flew on.

Back on the ground, Bull Hockey and his sidekicks reached the river just in time to see the old biplane disappearing from view. Bull watched it go, and then turned to his still-giggling lackeys.

"Call in da choppah. Wit' dat thing thah flyin' in, we can beat 'em to Bo-Gotta an' be waitin' for 'em at th' Aihport," He said. His sidekicks looked at him blankly. "Ya know, Bo-Gotta, named after th' ancient Aztec sports stah who allays stopped thah ta go," Bull said impatiently.

"Heh, heh, yeah, sure thing, boss," the pair said in unison.

As Revis screamed into a walkie-talkie and But-Ted laughed, Bull continued to look skyward in the direction his quarry had fled.

“Ah’ll get ya, Doctah Kay, an’ yo lil’ kitty sidekick, too,” he said quietly to himself.

###

Tigermark stretched and yawned hugely, causing a pair of nearby agoutis to faint from fright at the sight of his gleaming white fangs.

“Sorry,” the tall Siberian White tiger said as he got up and went to pay his bill. The hamburger he’d just eaten in the airport snack bar at Bo-Gotta International Airport left much to be desired, but it would keep his stomach from growling on the next leg of his trip back to the States. The airport in Bel-Lizz wasn’t one he wanted to spend a long time at, as mammals weren’t always very welcome there among the large saurian population.

Carrying his leather flight jacket over his arm, he walked out the door of the little restaurant, heading for the flightline where his plane waited. There was a loud crash and Tigermark found himself flat on his back in a heaping tangle of arms, legs, tails, and fur. He could see two other fur patterns mixed in the heap, so he assumed that he’d collided with two furs who must have been running down the hall.

Tigermark put his paws down behind him to try to sit up. He was greeted by a loud “Yeowch!” from his left, and a sharp intake of breath, with a slight sigh at the end, on his right. He felt something round and hard under his left paw, and something large, round, and firm under his right. Almost afraid to look, he glanced to his left and was relieved to see he’d accidentally grabbed the spotted fur’s tail. He moved his paw, saying, “Sorry about that, friend.”

He glanced the other way, and froze. His right paw was on the chest of a very beautiful female, whose eyes now looked at him, half with speculation, and half with offense. Tigermark pulled his paw away so quickly he fell back down for a second. He then quickly jumped to his feet and offered a paw to each of the other furs with whom he’d collided.

“Please excuse me,” he said contritely, “I didn’t expect to run into anyone coming down the hall.” He helped them both up. The spotted one was a male with reddish brown fur, a little shorter than he, feline, with an angry look on his muzzle. The female was also feline, with a reddish tawny shade of fur and black hair, which she wore in a pair of long braids from forehead down the sides. Both were dressed for jungle work.

The male seemed about to give Tigermark a loud and long dressing down, but the lady appeared to have accepted that both the accident and the grope had been unintentional. She was still eyeing him speculatively, and he was now looking for a polite way to end the encounter. Lovely as she was, which was quite lovely, Tigermark was looking forward to home, kith and kin.

“It’s all right, we shouldn’t have been running,” the lady said, putting an alluring tone in her voice and clapping a paw across the male’s muzzle to shush his protest. “You’re an American. It’s nice to, ah, ‘run into’ someone from home.”

Tigermark arched an eyebrow, impressed by the polite answer, but ill at ease with the delivery. Another fur might have melted at her tone and look, but Tigermark’s heart was spoken for. Something about this lady was special, but Tigermark couldn’t quite put a finger on what. He’d had a whole pawful of one reason, but it was more than being physically attractive. She had an energy and strength about her. She reminded him of something, but no, they wouldn’t be here.

“Yes it is,” Tigermark stated, deciding to at least try to make amends for the collision, “My name is Tigermark, I’m on my way home to the States from Bo-Knows-‘Arry’s in Ardent-Tina. You know, the city named for the famous ancient sports star’s favorite bar, in the country down south named for Tina, ancient ruler known for her lusty ways.”

Both the other furs nodded, and the lady said, “I’m Dr. Adventure Kayngi, from Furnet University, and this is my friend Maxx. Hmm, you wouldn’t by any chance be flying that black and white striped jet setting out on the tarmac?”

Tigermark extended his paw to Maxx, who sullenly shook it. He then shook paws with Dr. Kayngi.

“My, beautiful and intelligent. Yep, that’s my bird. I just did an airshow in Bo-Knows-‘Arry’s, and-,” Tigermark said.

“Kay, we’d better get going,” Maxx interrupted impatiently.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’ve kept you from something important,” Tigermark said, preparing to move on.

“Wait just a second, Tiger,” Dr. Kayngi said, turning up the charm in her voice a bit, but casting a cautious eye back down the hall the way they’d come, “You can make up for almost running us down by doing me a favor, all right?”

Tigermark looked at her carefully, but then decided to play along to see where she was going with this.

“Anything for a beautiful lady in distress, Doctor,” he said, smiling at her.

“Hey, how did – Oof!” Maxx said as Dr. Kayngi elbowed him in the ribs.

“I have a package that has to get to my colleague, Professor Cirrel, at the university right away. I’ll call him and he can meet you at the airport there. It’s very, very important,” She said, almost cooing.

Tigermark grinned, and did an “aw-shucks-ma’am” look at the ground, then turned his unblinking feline gaze directly into her eyes, catching her off-guard.

He stared intently at her for a moment, until she almost squirmed under his gaze, before he said, “You can turn down the sex appeal, Adventure Kayngi, you don’t need it with me. I’d be glad to help. I recognize you now, from the papers back home. ‘Adventure Kay’ they call you, ‘Paws-on archeologist.’ I assume what you want delivered is some valuable antiquity, and that some evil villains are after you. That’s fine, I don’t mind the delivery, and as far as bad guys, they have to catch me first.”

Still taken aback by his matter-of-fact analysis and straightforward manner, Dr. Kayngi said, “Uh, yes, that’s right. Only, call me Kay. All my friends do.”

“Then I am glad to be called a friend, Kay. If Tigermark is too long, you can call me Tiger. Let me have the package and I’ll get to my jet and be off.”

She opened her backpack and handed the tiger a wrapped package roughly the size of a large shoebox. Tigermark took it and turned to go, but before he could, Kay grabbed him in a large hug and said, “Thanks, Tiger. Kiss for luck,” and she kissed him lightly on the cheek.

Tigermark smiled at her and said, “No such thing, it’s providence and planning. I’ll get this there ASAP. I assume the University will pay for the extra fuel.” He turned and walked down the hall and out onto the ramp.

Once outside, Tigermark noticed a large bull, a Great Dane, and a Rhinoceros, eyeing an old biplane with wheels and floats down the row of parked aircraft. He almost turned and went back inside to tell his newfound friends, to see if they needed any help. After a moment’s pause, though, he went on. Kay would want the package to get through. He draped his flight jacket over the package and walked on by the trio, slightly disconcerted by the insane-sounding low laughs the Dane and Rhino were doing. He went to Stripes One, his tiger-striped T-38, and placed the package into the centerline pod under the fuselage. After a quick check to make sure his tanks were full and nothing untoward had happened to the jet in his absence, Tigermark climbed aboard, strapped in, and started the engines.

As he taxied to the runway, queuing up behind two jetliners and a turboprop commuter plane, Tigermark looked back at the parking ramp. Kay and Maxx were at the biplane, and Kay was vamping it up, leaving the bull and his cohorts in a state of sensory overload. Tigermark smiled to himself as his turn for takeoff came.

“I shouldn’t have worried. Looks like the lady can take care of herself,” he mused as he pushed the throttles forward and the afterburners lit. Soon, gear up and climbing away, Tigermark turned north and headed for home.

###

The young wolf with purple fur and a red WR armband on had come by for the fifth time, trying to give them literature about the Wolf Revolution. For the fifth time, the pair of furs standing on the tarmac had refused. He had walked away muttering the last time, saying, “Hah, they’ll all see. I’ll lead the Wolf Revolution to greatness one day, mark my words. I don’t care if it costs me an’ arm anna leg.” He turned and headed back toward the terminal area. A piece of luggage from a passing cart fell off on his right toes, and he howled to the sky. “Hey,” he said to himself after a moment, “That’d make a great battle cry!” He headed on into the terminal out of sight.

“Tell me again why I’m here,” Mike said sourly, his striped tail waving in agitation.

“Because the University insists on having two staff members present to receive and authenticate antiquities. I’ve told you that already,” Professor Cirrel said, looking toward the approach end of the runway. They were at the airport in the small community that Furnet University was located in; awaiting a courier that Dr. Kayngi had phoned them was on the way.

“I was in the middle of redoing the Middle Ages resource section. What was it Dr. Kay said again?” the raccoon said, himself now looking toward the runway.

“There’s a courier on the way with the item I came for. Be prepared to reimburse him for fuel,” Cirrel said, doing a fair imitation of Kay’s voice, if not her mannerisms. “Plus, I need a second signature on the voucher to pay for the fuel for whoever the courier is. It’s probably some guy in a Lear or Citation; you know how Kay is at persuading guys to help.”

“Yep, she does have a talent for garnering male assistance, and assistants,” Mike agreed.

They both looked harder as the sound of jet engines came to them from the distance.

“That doesn’t sound like a Lear,” Mike said.

“Or a Citation,” Cirrel agreed. Presently, a small, sleek, white aircraft with black tiger stripes came into view on approach. Cirrel arched an eyebrow. Mike arched both. This was no bizjet. They watched as the small aircraft touched down and taxied to the parking ramp where they were standing. Both plugged their ears with their fingers until the jet shut down.

The canopy opened and the pilot waved. The pair of professors couldn’t see any details of him yet because of the helmet and gloves he wore. A worker from the airport had brought a set of boarding steps out, and he wheeled these up to the aircraft. The pilot stood and Cirrel noted his tail was encased in a sleeve that was part of the G-suit he wore. He climbed down and walked up to them.

Mike and Cirrel looked at each other, and then back at the pilot. Not just anyone flew around in a tiger-striped T-38. The pilot removed his helmet, revealing the face of a white tiger with piercing blue eyes. He smiled at them.

“Which one of you is Professor Cirrel?” he said.

“I am,” Cirrel replied, “And this is Dr. Regan, our university librarian.” Mike nodded his hello, looking the tiger up and down.

The tiger’s smile never faded as he said, “Prove it.”

Cirrel was somewhat taken aback. The smile was still there, but the set of the shoulders, the slow wave of the tail, and the unblinking gaze told him that the tiger wasn’t joking. He slowly reached into his pocket and retrieved his credentials from the University and showed them to the tiger, who took them and examined them closely, even going so far as to sniff them.

Returning them to the feline, the tiger said, “My name is Tigermark, pleased to meet you both. Sorry about the ID check, but I wanted to make sure Kay’s package got to the right furs. I would’ve been here sooner, but I stopped back home and had the drop tanks put on, just in case.” Cirrel had noted the extra fuel tank under each wing.

“Quite all right. I’m glad to see Kay’s found a worthy ally this time. That’s not a standard T-38, is it?” Cirrel said. Mike had wandered over and was looking at the aircraft from nose on.

“No, I had it rebuilt and modified. It has F-20 wings, which accounts for the extra hardpoints for the tanks. Stripes One also has modified flaps and speed brakes, and the engines are uprated and have a self-start capability so I don’t need a starting cart. Helps getting into and out of some of the places I go. I fly at Airshows around the world,” Tigermark said. He walked over to the centerline pod and opened a door in its side. Returning, he handed the package to Cirrel.

Mike ambled back over and watched as the feline opened the package, to reveal the golden, bejeweled slippers. Both he and Cirrel examined the artifacts carefully, referring repeatedly to a book Mike carried. Finally, Cirrel looked up, smiling.

“Kay has done it again, these are indeed the Slippers of Somnaquetzl,” he said.

“Which means exactly what?” Tigermark said with a puzzled look on his muzzle.

“They complete the University’s collection of Column-BA artifacts. The legends say the wearer is able to walk through totally dark houses and find the bathroom and refrigerator without stubbing their toes, stepping on the kaht, tripping over the kali, running into doors, or any of the other noisy, painful things we usually do if we get up in the middle of the night. Somnaquetzl created them so he could get up and check on his

CPA dragons on the night shift without them knowing about it. In modern terms, they would tend to make the wearer more sure-footed,” Cirrel explained.

Tigermark was about to comment on that when Cirrel’s cell phone rang. He answered it on the second ring.

“Hello, Prof. Cirrel here . . . Yes, he just got here . . . Yes, they’re perfect . . . You need what? . . . Where? . . . When! . . . All right, all right, don’t get your p-, Ah,” he looked up at Tigermark and Mike, who both stood listening with arched eyebrows, “Don’t fret, my dear, I’ll send him on his way with the item you requested. I’ll see you when you get back.”

Cirrel faced Tigermark and said, “Kay said to get you moving ASAP. She needs you to deliver a package to her in Te-Goosy-Galpa, the city in Honduras named for Galpa, the leader who liked, oh, anyway! She said she and Maxx are hole up at the airport there, and she needs this package delivered at 2100Z tomorrow. If you get some rest right now and we get you refueled, you can just get there in time.”

Tigermark looked at the professor carefully, weighing whether or not to go along with this. Then he grinned and said, “Anybody got a cot? I’ll call home and tell them I’ll be late.”

Cirrel smiled and said to himself, “Yep, Kay’s got her another one, all right.”

Before he could do anything else, Tigermark said to Cirrel, “Professor, may I have a word with you in private? No offense Mike.”

Mike merely nodded and headed for the car, carrying the slippers in their box.

“Professor Cirrel, I wanted to ask you privately about something,” Tigermark said after Mike had gone.

“All right, what can I do for you?” the feline replied.

“How long have you and Kay been on Furry? I recognized you both as Sholans,” Tigermark said evenly.

Cirrel looked like he had just dropped a load in his drawers, and opened his mouth to speak, but couldn’t bring out the words.

“It’s quite all right, Professor, I won’t blow your cover, I was more curious than anything else. I finally recognized Kay as Sholan, and you when I saw you, as well. You fit in well with the furs here, and it would take a practiced eye to see the subtle differences, like the fur shading and ear shape,” Tigermark said, a smile on his muzzle.

Cirrel sighed and said, “We crashed here when Kay was just a kitten. Her parents were killed in the crash, and I raised her as I would a daughter. I’ve worked at FU since shortly after that, and I’ll retire soon. I’m very proud of Kay, but please don’t say anything to her. She knows her folks died in a crash, but she doesn’t know she’s not native to this world.”

“My lips are sealed, Doctor, have no fear of that. You have every reason to be proud of Kay,” Tigermark said, still smiling.

“Now, tell me how you know about Sholans?” Cirrel said.

Tigermark leaned in close, widening his grin, and said, “Some things must remain a secret, Professor.”

Cirrel started to protest the non-answer, but the look in the tiger’s eyes said that he would speak no more about it right then.

###

Maxx was working up on the engine of the Buffalo as sweat ran down his fur. He was fussing under his breath as Kay waited in the shade of the wing. He’d lost compression in the number two cylinder just before they arrived, and he was having a hard time tracking down why. They’d made it in just before dark the previous night, and Maxx was hoping to get them going again before Bull Hockey and his lackeys figured out where they’d gone and caught up with them. Kay had called Professor Cirrel in the States and had him send the white tiger jet jockey back down their way with something she said would get Bull off their backs if he found them. She seemed to think that was going to happen fairly soon, because she now walked up to where Maxx was working.

“Maxx, how’s it coming? I figure Bull’ll be here in 15 minutes or so,” She said, shading her eyes from the afternoon sun. The heat of the day had her drenched with sweat, also, but Maxx thought it looked a lot better on her.

Shaking off the fantasy, Maxx replied, ‘I don’t know, I think I have the problem figured out, but it’ll take a little while to solve it. Like I said, you should’ve called Mapper and the Badger Brigade when we got here.’”

“Yeah well, it’s too late now. It was probably too late then! It’d take them a day and a half to get here in that old chopper they use. Sheesh, I’ll have to talk to them about finding a way to respond quicker.” Kay grouched.

“Maybe your new boyfriend can fly them around in that fancy-shmancy striped jet of his,” Maxx said, the hair on his neck rising involuntarily.

“Why Maxx, you’re jealous, that’s so cute. He’s not my boyfriend, but he is a polite, friendly fella. Maybe if I ever slow down . . .,” Kay trailed off.

Maxx looked up sharply and banged his head on the wing. Looking down at her as he rubbed his head, Maxx could see she was teasing him.

“Why don’t you set off the Badger alarm? That’d both get them started for here and run off everything within ten miles, including Bull, his henchfurs, and that tiger,” Maxx said, teasing back.

“I’d really rather not. Last place we set it off said if we ever came back they’d stick us in a cell and play that to us 24 hours a day for a week. That’d drive anyone insane!” Kay said, watching Maxx work.

Maxx smirked at her, and got squirted on the muzzle with oil. “Ah crap! Now I gotta start over!” he exclaimed.

Kay sighed and stretched languidly, working the kinks out of her back from the lumpy mattress in her room at Hotel LaCucarachá from the night before. “K, try your best,” she said as she turned to stroll back out under the wings. “Tiger better not be late, or he’ll owe me big time,” she muttered to herself. She looked at her watch. It was 2050Z, or 1450 local time. She looked out towards the runway and saw landing lights approaching in the distance. As the aircraft got closer, she could see it was a Learjet.

Looking farther out, she said, “C’mon, Tiger, I won’t be able to stall him for long.”

As the Lear landed, Kay saw another landing light come on far out along the approach. She turned her attention to the Lear as it taxied toward her. It taxied to a halt a short distance away, and the engines idled down and were shut off. Kay stepped out from under the wing and struck her most alluring pose as Maxx hopped down and grabbed his pistol from the cockpit. Kay waved for him to put it back out of sight.

The door on the Lear opened, and Kay got leered at by the three furs who made their way down the ramp. Bull Hockey led the way this time, but kept his gun out of sight, much to everyone’s relief. He tripped twice coming down the steps. His henchfurs were still doing their inane, insane laugh, except for Revis, who shouted at the top of his lungs.

“Who wants to get those slippers! Heh, heh, heh,”

Bull looked at him sharply, and then said, “Docta Kay, Ya know whut ahm here for. Paw ‘em ovah an’ ah’ll be on mah way.”

Kay took her time, sidling up beside But-Ted, and then Revis, before stopping in front of Bull. She noted the landing light coming closer to the airport fast.

“Why Bull, I didn’t know you cared for me like that,” she said teasingly, stalling for time.

“That’s not whut ah meant, an’ ya know it! Now give me those slippahs,” Bull demanded.

“I’d love to, Bull, really I would, but I don’t have them anymore. I sent them to the University yesterday when we stopped in Bo-Gotta,” Kay said sweetly.

Bull saw red. He yelled at But-Ted, “Charge! Run her daown!” The Rhino started to move, but Kay held up a paw with a plastic card in it. The Rhino grabbed at his pocket, and began to blubber uncontrollably.

“Whut’s wrong wit ya! I sahd charge!” Bull thundered.

“She took it, she took it, bleh, heenh, heeh,” But-Ted cried.

“TOOK WHUT!” Bull continued to shout.

Kay, still smiling sweetly said, “I lifted his credit card. Everyone knows that’s the best way to stop a Rhino from charging.”

Bull looked at her, abashed, and said, “Ah can’t bulieve ya said that!” Revis, on the other paw, had fallen over in a hysterical fit of giggles. “heh, heh, heh ,heh, I’m outta control! I can’t stop laughing! Heh, heh,” he said as he rolled on the ground.

Just then, the jet that had been on approach taxied up to the group and stopped. As the engines shut down, Kay ran over to it. The canopy opened, and the pilot removed his helmet revealing a familiar white and black-striped face that matched the jet’s paint scheme.

“You’re five minute’s late!” Kay yelled up at Tigermark.

“Couldn’t be helped, had to dodge a developing tropical storm over the gulf, It was bigger than they thought, and I had to go farther around,” Tigermark called back.

“You can buy me a steak dinner next time to make up for it,” she said, flashing a brilliant smile his way, “Did you bring what I asked for?”

“In the front section of the cargo pod in the center position, Kay,” Tigermark said, pointing over the side of the aircraft. Kay went under the plane and retrieved her items, and then hurried away without further word. Tigermark waited to see what would happen, as he had noted one of Bull’s henchfurs on the ground crying, and the other one on the ground laughing.

Kay walked up to Bull who was still open mouthed at her earlier comment. She held the package out in front of her.

Bull took it and looked at her, saying, “Whahts’s this? It ain’t heavy enough t’ be the slippahs.”

“It’s a gift from me to you, Bull. The slippers are out of your reach, but maybe these can help you toward your goal. No hard feelings?” she said.

Bull opened the package and looked at the contents. A large grin split his muzzle, which was rather disconcerting due to his missing teeth. He looked back at Kay, and a small tear rolled down his cheek.

“Thank ya, Doctah Kay. No, no hahd feelins. All’s faiah in love, wah, an’ politics, right? C’mon, lackeys, we got work ta do,” Bull said as he turned and headed back to the Learjet. Revis managed to get to his feet and toddled to the jet, still laughing.

As But-Ted turned and began to dejectedly walk back to the aircraft, Kay walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder. When he looked around, Kay handed him back his credit card. He smiled broadly and practically skipped the rest of the way onto the plane, which made it sway and bounce on its gear alarmingly. The engines started, and the Lear taxied out to take off.

As the Lear headed skyward, Kay walked over to the jet where Tigermark still sat. Maxx came over and joined them. Both Tigermark and Maxx said at the same time, “Okay what was in that package?”

Kay laughed and said, “I figured out why Bull wanted the slippers. He’s the original Bull in a china shop. That’s why his career didn’t go so good. Hardly any natural balance at all. He wanted to improve his walking so he wouldn’t embarrass himself in what he wants to do.”

“And what is that?” Maxx said before Tigermark could.

“Politics. He wants to go into politics like his cousin. The items in the package were a copy of Roget’s thesaurus, a copy of How to Make Friends and Influence Furs, and a copy of the ‘Ballet for Klutzes’ tape. Bull was embarrassed by his clumsiness, and felt it would hinder his chances in the political arena,” Kay said.

“Think he has any chance?” Tigermark asked.

“Probably, politics is already full of bull, one more won’t hurt,” Kay answered. She noticed another jet, larger this time, landing and taxiing toward them.

She pointed to it and said, “That’s my fast-mover lift to In-Dia, I’ve got an assignment there to see a fur about an ancient dagger.”

The jet, Tiger could see, was a Gulfstream IV. It came to a stop, and a male feline form in a leather jacket opened the door for her. The Maine Coon waved at Kay to come on when she didn't run over right away. She turned back and looked up at Tigermark.

"Later, Tiger, I'll be in touch," She turned and hugged Maxx, saying, "Bye Maxx, have a safe flight home!" Then she was off and into the other aircraft in a few seconds. The pilot closed the door behind her, and in a few more seconds taxied out to take off.

Tigermark looked down at Maxx and said, "Independent, isn't she."

Maxx looked up, and for the first time grinned at Tigermark.

"Yep, she is that. Hey, thanks for making the run, and for not hitting on her. That's my job," he said.

Tigermark grinned back and said, "Tough line of work, had any luck at it?"

Maxx started to stand up straight and bluster, but something in the tiger's eyes said he already knew the truth. "Nah, she teases the heck outta me, but nobody ever claims Kay," he said, slumping back down.

"Well, don't worry about me, I'm only interested in friendship," Tigermark said.

Maxx snorted as though he didn't believe a word of it, but he reached up and shook paws with the tiger.

"You need any help?" Tigermark asked.

"No, I'd just figured out what was wrong when all the excitement started. Spark plug had backed out. I'll be good to go in a minute. Hey. Fly safe heading home, okay?" Maxx said as he turned back toward his plane.

Tigermark closed the canopy and started the engines. Soon, he was airborne and winging his way home to his wife and cubs. The sudden thought struck him that he hadn't told Kay he was married.

"Oh well, next time," He said to himself, "I have a feeling life's going to be pretty interesting, being friends with Adventure Kay!"

THE END

POSTSCRIPT

The dragon slid the top off his sleeping chamber and poked his scaly head out. Looking around bleary-eyed, he noted that the roof stones were down, and that the slippers were gone.

“Damned archeologists and treasure hunters,” he mumbled, “That’s the third time this millennium.”

He waved a scaled paw, and the stones rose and refitted themselves to the ceiling. He stepped out of his bedchamber and glided silently on smooth, comfortable slippers over to a hidden door in the side of the room. Sliding it open, he removed a pair of gold-gilt, bejeweled slippers from among the dozens of identical pairs kept hidden there.

Closing the door, he turned and walked, still without a sound, over to the stand beside the chamber. He placed the ornate footwear on the stand, wrinkling his nose and flicking the foul smelling boots that had been left there off onto the floor. He considered flaming them where they landed, but decided that would only create a worse odor. He wrapped them up with his tail and walked to the rear entrance of the pyramid he called home. With a flick, he tossed them far out into the surrounding jungle.

Returning to his bedchamber, he prepared to settle down to sleep again. Just before closing the lid, he looked up and winked, saying, “You didn’t think I’d leave the real ones lying around out here, did you?”

With that, Somnaquetzl, the Sleeping Dragon, closed the lid, slipped off his soft, comfortable magical slippers, and settled back to sleep.

Let’s let Sleeping Dragons lay, shall we?

FIN