

Of Reunions

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First few chapters preview

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CHAPTER ONE

LOSS AND DISCOVERY

Michael John Stone sat in the darkened apartment. It wasn't much, just a small two-bedroom place that allowed father and son to have their own rooms for once in their lives. It had been nice.

"Is anybody alive in here besides me?" Michael cried out in the empty room. "I'd like someone to talk to that's older than ten years old!" He picked up the phone and listened for the dial tone. It was dead.

Oh yeah.

The phone company turned it off, saying they didn't knowingly deal with fraud artists. The bank froze his accounts, the ones he'd spent two years building up, saying the same thing.

What had he done? If he had done something, who did he do it to?

His dream job working at Hamilton Film Effect Studios as a miniature builder and computer operator was lost. His calling card film was declared plagiarized.

"Mike, I'm sorry." Jake Hamilton told him after he pulled him into his office, "but this guy says you stole his film." Jake pointed at a pock faced, scraggly looking eighteen-year-old kid. Michael thought if this guy, whose name he didn't know, found his ass it was because someone showed him where it was.

"Jake, I can show you everything! As a matter of

fact, I did!" Michael shouted.

Shaking his head sadly Jake closed the door. "Mike I know you showed me. Trouble is he showed me the same thing. The exact same thing. Look I can't afford to get into a shit fight. Things are tight right now. If I get into the middle of this it could shut me down."

Michael staggered back. "Jake," he started to plead.

"Mike, I'm sorry." Jake said. "Look, I have your two week severance. Look, you can wait a couple of weeks let it blow by until you can prove he's lying, or you can reapply with me."

"Forget it! If I reapply and you hire me, he can drag you through the mud." Michael said.

"I know. I'm just saying, wait a week or two. Once this guy washes out I can rehire you." Jake told him.

"Yeah, and what will the other guys say? The black guy couldn't do it without cheating someone else." Michael fumed. "Or else they will say I stole from him and intimidated him so bad he was scared to come forward until now. Either way, I'm screwed."

"I can write you a letter of recommendation." Jake began.

"Don't bother. This will get out before I can." Michael said. He stalked to the door and left the office. He deliberately bumped into the kid and knocked him down.

"Damn it all." Jake said as he watched. Mike showed talent. He could see Michael directing some day. Now it was all gone.

Michael went to his desk, packed his tools, grabbed his Raiders coat. It had been cold out.

Now as far as he was concerned it was freezing. He shook Jake's hand and a few of the others who let him know they believed it was all bullshit. He left Hamilton Studios for good after almost a year.

Michael went to the bank to check on his accounts. He should not have been surprised to find out his accounts were frozen. The bank official was cold and efficient and told him the IRS was investigating him. His recently earned credit cards were taken from him and he was shown the door.

Michael walked out wondering what he was going to live on. All he had now was the severance check and what little he had in his pockets.

Michael made his way back to his apartment wondering what was going on. To his knowledge he had no ongoing arguments with anyone. There were no recent wrongs done.

"I feel like London after the blitz." Michael sank lower in his chair. The sun was setting when he heard the lock to the front door.

Ralton.

Ralton John Stone was all of ten years old, almost eleven. Coming into the apartment, he hit the light switch and nothing. Looking around, he spotted his father in his favorite chair, frowning. "Dad, what's going on? Didn't you pay the light bill?"

The frown intensified. "Kid, it's been a bad day." He spotted the package in his son's arm. "Whatchu got?"

"I don't know if you still want it. It's your birthday present." Ralton answered. "Happy birthday, I think."

Michael smiled at his son and ran his fingers

through his son's hair. It was Jessie's hair.

Both Michael and Jessie were fifteen. He was a virgin. She was well practiced.

Jessie was also curious about him; Michael was black all right, but his cheekbones were sharp and well defined and his eyes were a deep blue-green. Those eyes brought him much grief and teasing. Many of his classmates thought he wore contact lenses. He did have a black man's full sensual lips and his nose was typical. Standing five foot eleven in his stocking feet, well-muscled from years of hard work, he was deeply ambitious. He wanted college and a film career. His eyes and grasp were set far ahead of most of his classmates. He didn't succumb to Jessie's obvious charms.

She was a charmer, indeed. Café-au-lait skin, smooth and silky with laughing brown eyes over a perfect nose and full sensitive lips. Jessie was good looking and she knew it. She didn't even have to flaunt it. She discovered sex at an early age and truly enjoyed it. She didn't have sex with every boy she met, just the ones she liked. Jessie LaNisha Williams liked a lot of boys.

Michael was surprised when Jessie showed an interest in him. Every alarm in his mind told him this could be trouble. He went for the trouble.

In the back of Michael's used Chevy van (he'd just gotten his license three months earlier. After working on the van for a year to get it running, Michael took Jessie on a date. Mike explored Jessie to the best of his meager ability and the fullest of pleasure. They

did it three times slowly as Michael followed every instinct telling him to take his time. Jessie helped by showing him how to make all the right moves. They were lucky it was a Friday night. Michael drove her home even though she made him drop her off a block away. He followed at a discrete distance to make sure she got home safely. She waved to the back of the disappearing van before going inside. For a moment she leaned against the front door and thought, he was way better than she thought he would be. For his part, Michael thought he got very lucky. He was glad he wasn't her boyfriend. He hated to think she would be like that with every guy she went out with.

Four weeks later, she shocked him with the news she was pregnant and he was the father.

Michael knew the baby was his. He couldn't say how he knew, he simply knew.

Jessie's father was ready to kill him.

Michael made her an offer. Deliver a live birth and he would give her the money in his college account. He showed them how much he had. It would go into a nine month CD and she would get it only if she delivered. If she aborted she would get nothing.

Bill Williams protested loudly saying his daughter didn't need to have a baby for money. Jessie figured, why not if Michael was willing to pay for it.

Michael had the papers drawn up. Jessie signed, as did he. Michael didn't say why he wanted this baby. He was afraid that he would never have a child and this was a chance to have his family. He knew it was crazy but he didn't see any other way.

Nine months later Michael watched as his son Ralton John Stone came into the world. He held the baby in his arm and cried. Jessie was surprised the baby meant that much to him. Michael turned the money over in a certified check. Jessie signed custody over to the new father. Michael thanked her and took the baby home to the room behind the garage at his aunt's house.

His mind returning to the present, Michael gave a wan smile to his son and sighed deep and heavy. "Son o' mine, I've got bad news. First, I've lost my job. Second, we've got to move in two weeks. I don't know how we're going to do it since the bank froze my money. Lord above us all, I don't know what I'm going to do. I had enough of Bertha in the two years we lived with her." He opened his birthday gift. It was a book, "LAW AND CHAOS" by Wendy Pini. "Thanks."

"I could afford it at the time." Ralton turned thoughtful. "It sounds like that bad movie I saw on television last night."

"Six o'clock." Michael said looking at his watch. "If I'm going to starve, I'd do better on a full stomach. What say we get a pizza?"

"I'll eat to that." Ralt said.

"I thought you would." Michael got on his coat and checked for his keys. He also slipped on his studded leather gloves just in case.

When they were gone, two men stepped out of the closet. It wasn't a closet, it was a dimensional tesseract generated by a device that gave you more

room in the same space. It was handy for making sure you had the room you needed. If Michael and Ralton could see inside of it, they would see many people working in there speaking a strange language. The two men who stepped out of the space surveyed the room. The younger of the two went to the window and cracked open the shade. He saw the father and son make their way down the street. "They are gone my lord." He said as he turned to face his companion. "They will take about an hour if they go to the pizza restaurant three blocks down. If he holds true, he will indulge in an ice cream cone afterwards."

"That is true. It's plenty of time to rearrange this room and remove the breakables. That long club in the boy's room should be gone as well."

"Yes my Lord Urgess." His aide said, "Will there be anything else?"

"For now, Valegen, we should make ready for the emotional scenes to come; after all, when you ruin someone's life, they're bound to be angry."

Michael and Ralton came back to the apartment in two hours.

"That pizza was the bomb, dad," commented Ralt.

"Yeah, it was. I feel better when I've had something to eat." Michael replied, "Especially when I've had the kind of day I've had today."

As the pair came to the door, Ralt noticed the light under the door. "Dad, you turned off the lights, right?"

"Yeah, I did." Michael said suspiciously. "Kid, get back to the end of the hall. I'm gonna check this

mess out.” He pulled the studded gloves back on. Carefully, he slipped the key into the lock and was about to turn the key when the door opened.

A young pleasant looking man stood there with a warm friendly smile; he stood six foot two and had sharp distinctive features. “Good evening, sir, would you please come in?”

Michael stared at him, confused. Why was a stranger inviting him into his own apartment?

“If you and your son would please come in. You are in no danger.”

Michael motioned Ralton to his side. “Yeah right... and the St. Thomas Bridge is for sale.”

“Why do I think we’re going to die?” asked Ralt apprehensively as they cautiously stepped into the living room.

The stranger dropped to Ralton’s level. “You have no need to fear us young Ralton,” the man smiled, “there is so much for you to learn; I am called Valegen.”

Ralt pulled back as he saw the pointed ears. He looked at his father, ran a hand on his own ear. “Dad!”

Michael moved Ralt away from the man. “I don’t care if you’re Little Miss Muffet, what the fuck are you doing in my home?” This Valegen was part of the answer to what was happening to him.

“If I may take your coats?” Valegen asked noticing the rising anger in Michael’s voice. Father and son gave up their coats. “My lord awaits you.”

“I hope he’s awaiting an ass kicking.” Michael’s voice was ice.

“Dad, the furniture’s been changed.” Ralt said as they entered the living room from the short hall.

“You are observant, Ralton.” Valegen said. He looked at Michael who really didn’t want to hear it.

“You are justifiably proud of him.” A butter smooth voice came from one of the new wing back chairs arranged in a semi-circle in the living room. In one of them sat a man with dark red hair, the same type of sharp cheekbones only with a broken nose over a thin hard line of a mouth barely softened by the smile of welcome he wore. “I rather like these chairs, they are primitive but comfortable.” He gestured to the chairs that were opposite of him. Michael and Ralton took them with great apprehension.

“Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my apartment?” Michael demanded.

“We are your people, Michael John Stone. Why we are here is simple; your father needs you.” The man said.

“WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!” Michael shouted as he jumped to his feet. A light came on in his eyes as he looked at the two strangers. He was starting to make sense of it now. They had to be behind what was happening to him even if he wasn’t sure. Out of the corner of his eyes to his right, he saw two men in black step forward. Being no fool, Michael stepped back to his chair.

The stranger said. “I suggest you keep it quiet. Your neighbors will wonder what’s happening to you and may call the police.”

“Not in this hood.” Michael said.

The man smiled knowingly. “You are quite right.

They would not call, not over an argument. As I said; your father,”

“My father is dead you son of a bitch!” Michael snarled. “My mother saw him drown before I was born!”

“My mother was a good woman and you will not call the queen mother a bitch again. Do you understand me? You father didn’t drown, I was sent to collect him and bring him back home.” The man said coldly.

“Bullshit!” Michael said. “There were three witnesses that day on the boat. Are you calling them liars?”

“No. I am saying they did not see what they thought they saw.” The man said, looking Michael directly in the eyes. “His father wanted him back and he wanted him before he got further involved with your mother. It would not do to have an alien for a prince’s wife. It would have upset the plans already set for him.”

“So you let my mom think he drowned to keep him from marrying her? That’s just wrong!” Michael said furiously. “Do you know what you put her through?”

“Yes I do. She did what she set out to do even with children, becoming a lawyer. It was a great tragedy when she died.” The man said. The man’s face was pained. “Once I found out her goals, I admired her. Not even a bastard son could stop her. You father did not leave her un-provided for. There was a fund to make sure she made it through college and see to your needs.”

“I know about the money.”

“Then you should be glad about it. After all, it was some of that money that allowed you to get Ralton into the world. Your executor was quite upset about that.”

“He didn’t let me have any more after that. He thought it was crazy to do that for an unborn child.” Michael said. He stared at him. “How do you know about that? Not even my aunt knows about that money! There was more than what I paid Ralt’s mother. I couldn’t get to it until I hit twenty-one. When I did, I found out he was gone and I couldn’t track him down.” Michael felt a chill.

The man looked at him with sympathy. “He was ordered back home to Aboria. Unfortunately, we didn’t get around to finding a replacement for him. By the time we did get someone, you were working. You didn’t need our money.”

Michael felt a hole in his stomach. Ralt looked at his father with confusion. “I don’t get it. Why didn’t you just tell us you were here all this time?”

The man smiled. He genuinely liked Ralton. “Because young Ralton, we had to figure out a way to get you. It took time.”

“How long?” asked Ralt.

“A year. We had to figure out a way to make sure you would come with us.”

Ralton gave one of those kid looks that said he was full of it. “You could figure it out in a few days.”

“Very well. We took an extended vacation.” Valegen smiled at being caught. His lordship gave him a sour eye. “That much is true, my lord. After

all, we did see quite a few of the sights. I will admit to a taste for jazz.”

“Valegen, you’re telling tales.”

“But not out of school.” Valegen said. “My Lord Urgess, we should at least admit we needed to know what he was about. That did take time.”

“What did he call you?” asked Ralt.

“Urgess. It is my name. Urgess Petron.” The man said. “Urgess would translate to ‘knight’ in your language.”

“In any case my lords we have a big day tomorrow.” Valegen said. “Please understand lord Michael. What we do is for the best. Your father has need of you. His people need you even if they don’t know it yet. Please understand me when I say if there had been another way we would have done it.”

“Tell that to my fucked reputation and my bank accounts.” Michael said.

“Trust me when I say that you will have more at your disposal than you ever had.” Urgess told him. “I suggest you get some rest. Valegen is right, you have a big day tomorrow.” He stood and went to the closet.

Curious, Ralton followed him and looked in. “No way!” In the closet was the tesseract. In his wildest dreams he could not imagine there would be something like this in here. There were people moving around and doing things and working at desks and calling out things in a language he did not, could not know. Ralt’s eyes were as big as saucers as he took it all in. Like Urgess and Valegen and he and his father, they all had pointed ears. For once in his

life, Ralt felt like he belonged.

“Dad, you gotta see this!” Ralt said.

Michael joined him at the door and looked at the scene in astonishment. “Damn!” His voice very small, he stepped further into the tesseract. He looked at it slowly. “All this in here. We would have never known.”

Valegen came to stand beside the father and son. “In truth, it is a small one. We felt we wouldn’t need a large one since we didn’t need a large crew.” He looked at Michael. “It is very much like one of your stories.”

“Yeah, it is.” Michael shook his head. “I never expected to see anything like it in my life.” He looked at Valegen. “You’ve read my stories?”

“Yes, we have. You know, the engineering is easy enough, and we know how to do it.” Urgess said. “We created a stable tesseract address system and a stable tesseract.”

“That goes without saying.” Michael said as he ran his hand over a console’s top. “This is stuff made from dreams.”

Ralt watched a woman with a stylus draw an arc around some objects on the screen. He didn’t know what she was doing, but it looked cool. He walked around the room looking at everything. Suddenly, he was living in a science fiction world for real. The personnel watched Ralt with indulgence. They knew the boy was completely fascinated by what he saw.

“Wow,” Ralt breathed softly. “Wow.”

“Do you wish to see what I see?” one of the technicians asked Ralt. The boy nodded yes. The

tech stood and allowed Ralt in his seat. He put the goggles he wore on the boy and allowed him to see the multicolored scans of the sun he was watching.

“Whoa!” Ralt gasped as the scene danced in front of his eyes. “This is too awesome!”

The tech smiled at his companions. They knew exactly what Ralt meant since they felt the same way when they first looked through the goggles. The boy most likely never saw anything like it. They also knew that what lay ahead of him was far more impressive than this.

“My Lord, young Master, I suggest sleep. Tomorrow is a big day for you. I think you will want to be at your best for it.” Valegen said.

Ralt reluctantly removed the goggles. He knew the tech had to get back to work. Michael and Ralton followed Valegen out. Ralt found new pajamas laid out for him. Michael found the same. First Ralt was settled in for the night. Michael went into the other bedroom.

Michael looked at his clock on the table. “Eleven o’clock. I am glad this day is over.”

“But a new one tomorrow and the start of a new life,” Valegen said.

“Did it ever occur to you I wasn’t done with the current one yet?” asked Michael as he pulled off his shirt. “Then again, you’ve been in my closet for a year. Lord only knows what kind of wackos you’ve got where you come from.” He stripped down to his shorts. Valegen realized he was going to sleep in the nude. He had to admit he admired Michael’s lean muscular form. “You like living in someone else’s

closet or do you have claustrophobia?"

"A research team was assigned to you a year ago; we came here six months later to do the final work. We had to know where you were vulnerable, of course, in order to make sure you would come with us. If there was any other way, we would have found it." Valegen said.

"Still, you didn't leave me the option of refusal. Very neat." Michael said.

"We have read your stories, examined your drawings, listened to your music. You are beyond talented. You are what we are looking for." Valegen said. "Aren't you nervous with me in here?"

Michael chuckled. "You've been in my closet for a year. You've probably sent back some spectacular photos. Now you want to get nervous?" He slipped the shorts off. "Here's the real deal. Enjoy the view. Goodnight." He climbed into bed and pulled the covers over himself. "Turn the light off, will you?" he yawned, "Thanks."

Valegen watched as Michael turned on his side. Then he heard snoring. Valegen hit the light switch and left closing the door. "Remarkable! This will be interesting."

CHAPTER TWO

BENDING THE DIME

The next morning Michael and Ralton woke and found a set of clothes laid out for them and a well-made breakfast ready. While they ate, Urgess and Valegen told them what was in store.

“Today will be a shopping spree so you may get things you have always wanted.” Urgess said. He smiled. “Last night you asked us who we were. As I said, we are your people. Your father is from our home world, Aboria. You notice we have many features in common,” He indicated the pointed ears, “while it is true there are fairing races with pointed ears, you’re special. Your father is our king.”

Michael dropped the spoon he held, snorted derisively and then laughed out loud.

Urgess held his next thought and then said. “We find ourselves needing you. It will all be explained to you when you meet him.”

“I can’t wait to meet daddy dearest.” Michael said.

“I have no doubt of that.” Urgess replied noticing the anger at the edges of Michael’s voice. “Valegen will take you shopping. I’m sure there are more than a few things you have always wanted like mementos of Terra. Today you can get them.”

“Right,” Michael held his verbal fire. Urgess and Valegen knew they weren’t whom Michael wanted. “Let’s cruise for a while. After all, the really good

shops don't open until ten o'clock." He got up and stretched and went to clean up.

Ralton finished his plate and watched as Urgess stood up and went to his "room". Valegen shook his head sadly. Ralton caught his expression. "What's the matter?"

"This is not the way I would have done this," Valegen mused.

"What do you mean?" asked Ralton.

"It seems our arrogance has betrayed us again." Valegen knew he shouldn't speak of these things to the ten-year-old. It had to be said. "Have you ever noticed how some people think they are so far superior that they may do what they want to others? It does not speak well of us when we do not think of how we affect others."

Ralt put his spoon down. "You mean they don't respect others?"

"Exactly. We did not respect your father or you. We have disrupted your lives for our needs. We may end up botching this. I am pleased it is not my decision to make."

Ralt shrugged his shoulders. "It sounds like somebody goofed."

Valegen smiled. "I did think you were bright."

"Yeah, well, I'm glad I'm not an adult yet," said Ralt.

Valegen touched Ralton's hair marveling at the soft thickness. "Do yourself a favor, Ralton,"

"What's that?"

"Don't grow up too fast. Savor this time you've got. There will be time enough later for adult

worries.” Valegen smiled as he stood from the table. “We have a busy day ahead of us. I suggest you get cleaned up.”

“Okay.” Ralt swallowed the last spoonful of oatmeal and fruit, hopped off his chair and then headed for the bathroom.

Valegen knew he genuinely liked the father and son. This made what they did even harder. He like Urgess understood one thing after more than a year of observation Michael was made of stern stuff. Then again Valegen thought that may be just what was needed. He knew Michael didn’t like the way this was handled, and he was furious. Whatever toys and things they bought today meant nothing. Michael would never, if he could help it, be a victim. Valegen chuckled. Yes, Michael was just what they needed.

“Take good care of them, Valegen.” Urgess said to his aide as Michael, Ralton and Valegen got into the rental limo.

“Of course I shall, my lord.” Valegen said as he settled in for the ride. “I’m sure this will be fun.”

“Spending someone else’s money always is. Enjoy your selves. I’ve some work to finish, that’s why I’m not going with you.” Urgess told them.

“Well, gosh darn the luck!” Michael said in the sappiest voice he could manage. “Give us all a break. I figure you have to report in since you have your objective.”

“In one of my preliminary reports, I said you were quite intelligent. I’d hate to have to revise that

to asshole.” Urgess stood away from the car and slapped its fender. Ralt doubled over in laughter. Valegen struggled to keep a straight face. Michael had a sheepish expression as the limo pulled smoothly away from the curb.

Urgess shook his head sadly as he went back inside to the stares of the neighbors. Once inside, he went into the tesseract room and sat down at a console, slipped on a headphone/microphone and spoke. “This is Urgess Alm Petron, code white. I have made contact with the half-breed and his son. Yes, yes, we will be ready in two Terran weeks. I cannot say he will calm down. You have threatened his son! My brother, this one has fire and you will be burned! He sighed. “The boy is about nine or ten Terran years old, quite bright and perceptive. From all of our interviews we have conducted, he worked hard for his dream job even with a child in tow. My lord, destroying him was not pleasant. I do believe he will hold a grudge. Were I you, I would be careful. I am not worried about me, he is not angry with me. Your will be done, Majesty, but I don’t think it will be the way you want it.”

Urgess listened closely and then replied. “I fear we have made a mistake in how we did it. I believe we brought some long buried feelings to surface. As I said, brother, your will be done.”

Urgess pulled the headphones off. “Thail, you ass. I hope the boy drops you like a rock. You will have deserved it.”

In the limo Valegen asked “what are your first

purchases my lords?"

Ralton spoke up; "How about a blu-ray player dad? You always wanted one!"

Michael smiled. "Video it is. Son I like your style." He knocked on the partition glass. "Driver, do you know where Ken Crane's is in West Los Angeles?"

The driver nodded.

"Good," Michael said, "We'll go to Rogersound after that. I always wanted to see if they have the selection they say they do."

"You can afford it now." Valegen told him.

All fell silent. Valegen recalled the conversation with Urgess.

"A year of following him and his son my lord," Valegen massaged Urgess' back. "Michael has earned the life that he can make for himself. To destroy him is wrong."

"Don't I know it my dear one? I don't like it any more than you do. However, after two failures, Thail is determined to get this right. You know how it was with Jatis and Brok." Urgess sighed as Valegen kneaded a tight spot. "He's got twenty bastards. He should know by now that he can't just do anything to any of them."

"Poor Jatis and Brok. They didn't work out so well, did they?" asked Valegen. "With poor Brok in a coma for six years and Jatis taking refuge in drugs, it must hurt him greatly."

"Jatis did that to himself. He couldn't take the pressure." Urgess said. "He was only a boy, much younger than Michael."

"Do you think Michael can take the pressure?"

asked Valegen.

Urgess gave a hearty laugh. "What do you think?"

Valegen sat upright and wiped his hands on a hot towel. "I think if the King keeps out of the way, he may get what he wants. Perhaps even more than he expected." He applied more oil to his hands and bent back to massaging Urgess. "I still don't think its Michael's problem to deal with."

"I agree." Urgess gave a soft moan as his muscles began to relax. "It seems to me that Thail should give as much as he is asking. You know, I think Michael will take it out of Thail for not coming here himself. There are a lot of issues that need to be dealt with. I don't think my brother gets it. Michael's anger might be taken out of his father's hide. I can't wait to see it!" He ran his hand along Valegen's inner thigh and gripped his manhood and sighed. "Why don't you give me a full body massage. I'm sure your hands are tired."

"Not yet my love," Valegen said as he slid next to Urgess in the bed.

"Ken Crane's, my lords," The driver said as they pulled into the parking lot of the electronics store.

"Right," Valegen said, "are we ready to shop?"

"Yeah!" Ralt said as he allowed the driver to open the door.

"I think so." Michael said as he got out. "You got the big dime, and this is one of many toy chests. Ready to see your dime bent?"

Valegen gave him an indulgent smile. "If you think you're up to the task. Are you ready to go inside?"

“You make it sound like you have a mark for us to hit.” Michael said as they entered the store.

“If you must know it is two hundred fifty thousand American.” Valegen informed him.

Michael looked at him. “So where did you get the money?”

“Let’s just say your account is full and leave it at that.” Valegen said as he made his way to a display. “We also have some credit cards that will be paid off the moment you purchase something.”

“You got that much jack in the box?” asked Michael.

“Yes.” Valegen said. “You should see the size of the box.”

Michael’s eye went wide with disbelief. “Damn, Sam! We got to spend your money.”

A pleasant looking sales woman greeted the two while they stood in the middle of the store getting their bearings. “Good morning, how may I help you?”

Michael spotted her name tag. “Good morning Marge.” They shook hands. He pointed to Ralt. “Do you see that young blood over there looking over the blu-ray players? That’s my son. In two days it will be his birthday. I promised him he could have a flat screen television and blu-ray for his room, and this year I can afford to spoil him rotten. I’d like it if you would help him pick out his present. I figure, this sort of thing will only happen once.”

Marge said “it sounds like you will be paying for a lot this year.”

Michael smiled. “You don’t know how much I’ve

paid already.” Valegen gave Michael a shot in the ribs with his elbow. Michael rubbed the spot. “What was that for?”

“Gauche crypticness,” Valegen returned. “I want to check out their plasma units.”

“Wait a minute. Call me slow, call me stupid, but don’t you guys have major video systems of your own? Our stuff isn’t even a blip on your radar,” said Michael as they made their way to the display of thin plasma unit televisions.

“For your information you can tell a lot about a people with how they entertain themselves. Besides it is easier to do a retrofit. This isn’t for your benefit alone.” Valegen explained. “In any case, I must admit to a great love of your animation films. We have them, but yours has so much more to them, more life. I also like the James Bond films.”

At that Michael had to stuff his fist into his mouth to stifle the laughter.

“They’re good fun movies! What’s so strange about that?” Valegen defended himself.

It took Michael a while to finally calm down.

“For you information, I also like the blues and the music of the British Invasion.” Valegen told the still gasping Michael. “Urgess likes American Standards and jazz.”

Michael held up a hand as he gasped for breath. “It’s cool, it’s all good. I’m just surprised, that’s all.” He turned to see Ralt taking a stack of DVD and blu-ray DVD to the counter. There were two blu-ray DVD players and Michael heard Marge talking about the plasma screen TV that was being brought out of the

back room.

Michael looked at Valegen. "I think the boy is ahead of us."

"You think we should catch up?" asked Valegen.

"Sounds like a plan." Michael and Valegen looked over the selection and made their buys. Valegen handed Michael an American Express card with his name on it. "Platinum, very nice."

Michael looked at Valegen slightly cockeyed.

"We know you know you don't like to think about money all the time." Valegen said. "You just like to make sure you can pay for everything."

"True," Michael said nonplussed, "I just guess it's the modesty." He handed the card over and watched, as the purchases were totaled. Fifty-two thousand, nine hundred and seventy dollars at this store. "That's just with three of everything."

"It's not just for your benefit alone," Valegen told him, "it allows us to gauge where your people are. You can tell a lot about a people by watching how they play."

"That's why we got five of everything," said Ralt.

"Yes, only one of what we brought will go to Urgess or I, the rest will go to our archives," explained Valegen. "Besides, there is a lot of your entertainment I like."

"Can't buy me love, everybody tells me so," Michael sang. "No, no, no."

"Very funny my lord," Valegen whispered in the grinning Michael's ear. Valegen gave the store an address to take the goods to and led father and son out to the car. Ralt had a portable DVD player and

several movies he would watch between stores. Valegen and Michael watched Ralt as he enjoyed his new toy.

“Where next?” asked Valegen.

“Let me ask you something first. When did I get the card?” asked Michael turning it over in his fingers.

“We set it up six months ago. It has a great credit rating. We had to make sure that it was ready for you,” replied Valegen.

“How convenient, make sure the velvet cage is well lined.” quipped Michael.

“If you insist, yes. Of course, the equipment will be modified,” Valegen saw the look on Michael’s face, “we’ve done a good job on you.” He made sure he said it, not Michael.

Tower Records was next in West Hollywood along with every video and record store in the area. Valegen made sure that everything went to the address. They had several people in a pair of vans waiting to take everything they bought.

Bookstores were next. Trash and time honored were put into a library of some fifteen thousand titles. They knew they got multiples sometimes, but it was worth it. Valegen produced several other credit cards so the one they were using didn’t run too high. Michael thought it was silly since he now knew they had the money to cover everything.

They hit computer stores next including the new Apple store in the Grove at Farmer’s Market.

“Guitar Center, driver.” Michael turned to Valegen, “your dime is about to be seriously hurt Val.”

“Let me guess. You are about to completely take the store with you.” Valegen smirked. “It is not as if you haven’t tried already.”

“I’ve got my music Jones up. There are things in there I have only dreamed about.” Michael said.

“In that case let’s have lunch. We need to give the crews time to take the other purchases to the storage.” Valegen said.

“You mean we bought that much stuff?” asked Ralt.

“Dear boy, I doubt we have truly gotten everything your father has ever wanted.” Valegen said. “As a matter of fact I’m surprised you haven’t gone to the places where you can get video equipment.”

“That’s afterward.” Michael said.

“Forgive me, I didn’t know.” Valegen smiled.

“You are such a liar!” Michael said. “You know full well I’m into all things motion picture. It’s been my biggest dream to direct film and television. Hell, I was working a project after work.”

“You mean the “Mister Beaujay” project?” asked Valegen.

“Dad based that on a story he wrote when I was little. He couldn’t afford books for me, so he wrote his own. I think there’s about ten of them.” Ralt said as they came to the Guitar Center.

“Actually, there are twelve. I know I looked.” Valegen told him.

“You read them all?” asked Ralt as he turned the DVD player off.

“My favorite is ‘Mister Beaujay and the Great Steamship of the Air’. The fact that the drawings

look like you and your father helped a lot.” Valegen winked. “Did you do that so that there was an adventure story that had a black male in the lead and a black child as the sidekick?”

Michael smiled. “Yeah, I wanted something Ralt and I could relate to. I wanted him to see that we were capable of great inventiveness like everyone else.”

“I like the part where the steamship lifts off for the first time and the great race with the jealous rival around the world.” Valegen enthused. “Trust me when I say this. Those stories are going to be published when we get to Aboria. They are too much fun not to be. The drawings will have to be copied. The books you made are a little ratty and falling apart.”

“You are kidding, right?” asked Michael.

“No, I’m not. Those books will be a hit.” Valegen said as they got out the car.

The three of them stood outside of the building, Michael thought of all the times he came in this place and made a wishing shopping list. All the things he wanted. All the instruments. He owned a used Fender electric piano and some inexpensive electric guitars and basses. The drum set was worn and needed new heads. There was a pair of low-end synthesizers and now he was about to put that wish list to sleep.

Valegen saw it. He knew the young man next to him had big dreams and now those dreams were real.

Michael reached into his pocket. Behind him the

two crews Valegen hired pulled into the lot and parked behind him. They stood behind him and one of them saw the list on the tattered piece of paper Michael kept in his wallet. One item was crossed off. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a pen. He looked at his list again and smiled. "Gentle people," he said, "we are about to put the dime in traction." They went inside. Their party was spotted and a young man with a set of three earrings in on ear and five in the other came up to them. Michael saw the extensive tattoos on his arms. The young man whose name tag said "Gary" asked; "can I help you with anything?"

"Have you got the afternoon?" Michael asked.

"Well, yeah. I am here to help." Gary replied.

"Gary, my brother, we are here to do serious damage to your stock. Do you still have that Mini-Moog?" asked Michael.

"Yeah, we do. We get one in every so often." answered Gary. He could see a major sale in Michael's eyes. It was the kind of look Gary had in his own eyes when he could afford something important to him.

"Ralton?" asked Michael.

"Yes, dad?" replied his son.

"Pick out the basses you like. I'm in keyboards." Michael told his son. Michael strode into the keyboards section of the store stopping to survey the lot. He knew what he wanted, knowing the drought was over.

Valegen and Ralt hung back with Gary, who look at the two and asked, "Is he serious?"

"Yes," Valegen said, "and that scares me!"

He turned to Ralton. "shall we pick out your instruments?"

"Yes." Ralt answered. "Gary, I think you should go with my dad, he may hurt somebody." Suddenly, there was a wicked rendition of Stop! In the Name of Love from the keyboard room along with an impassioned vocal.

"I didn't know you father could play that well." Valegen said. "He really means it!"

"Well, when you've been playing on crappy instruments for as long as he has, you get real good to make up for it." Ralt said. "Dad has been promising himself something like this for a long time. I'm glad it's happening."

"Amazingly enough, so am I." Valegen said as he followed Ralt into the guitar section.

Another two hours and they were out of the store. Virtually everything Michael wanted he got including things to help him on video projects. He supposed there were far more advanced versions of the same thing where they were going, but at least, he now finished off his list. They also went to Goodman's Music on Cahuenga Boulevard and bought what they had as well.

They went to Samy's Camera on Fairfax and bought all the video equipment they had; they also hit the other camera stores Michael knew of and bought what they had as well; all of his video dreams were fulfilled.

All in all, it was eight o'clock when they finally slowed down and saw they had time enough for dinner before they went home. Ralt fingered his new

Fender bass and Michael ran riffs on his Stratocaster guitar. Michael was proud he taught himself and then Ralt how to play. It made for a sweet noise in the back of the limo as they rode to a small restaurant for dinner.

The driver followed them in and took a table opposite them and had them clearly covered.

“The driver is one of yours, right?” Michael asked.

“Yes. He had been trained to deal with Los Angeles traffic.” Valegen said.

“I guess I am important to you. You want to make sure you don’t lose me before we get to this Aboria.” Michael lifted a fork full of mashed potatoes to his mouth. He’d get to the roast beef and green beans next.

Valegen cut into his New York strip steak with a baked potato and green beans; Ralt had the t-bone even though he knew he’d never finish it.

“You don’t know how important you are. Our people need you.” Valegen told him and then lifted a forkful of food to his mouth.

“Yeah, I guess. Michael said. “If I’m so important, why didn’t my father come down here and get me himself? Hell, all he had to do was tell me who he was. I’d drop everything and take off with him.”

Valegen looked down at his plate. “We were afraid you wouldn’t come. We wanted to make sure you would leave the planet.”

“Would you have left Ralt?” asked Michael.

“Would you kill us if we did?” asked Valegen.

“Yeah, I would.”

“Then we’re not as stupid as you thought.”

Valegen said as he began on another piece of his excellent steak. He swallowed. "Look. Michael, if it makes you feel any better, we simply wanted to make sure that you would come. We had to make sure you had no real ties to keep you here. Ralton is too powerful an inducement to make sure we got it right. You would have to come if we simply took the boy. Not being complete fools, we made sure Ralt was included." He cut another piece. "You never deny the parent his child. That would have brought a madness I don't think any of us would survive."

"But you still screwed me over. That's not going to stop hurting for a while." Michael said.

"I know." Valegen sighed. "Sometimes we forget John, that we don't have all the answers, nor do we know all the questions. Many people are in the house. That's your greater family and they didn't want to do this. My problem is, was there another way? If we had known of your desires that would have been the way to you. I think our research was incomplete."

"No kidding!" Michael said. "Look, this thing, whatever it is, is going to affect Ralt too." Michael spoke firmly. He kept the harshness out of his voice. He was beginning to like Valegen. "What you did was flat out wrong. You simply had no right to do that. I had a life, damn it all! What gives you the right to destroy it?"

"There is a world that has lost its way. It needs to reconcile with some of its children. You are one of the children made and abandoned by their fathers. They need to learn to respect you." Valegen's voice

was quiet. “We haven’t done that, have we? Our arrogance, our pride.” He slammed his fists on the table making Ralt and his father jump. “We keep doing it wrong, wrong, wrong!” He hung his head and then broke into unexpected tears. “We have done you wrong. All the shit we’ve bought is nothing to what we have done to you.” He put his face in his hands and shook with rage and grief and the other patrons watched as he sobbed into his hands. He looked at Michael as if seeing him for the first time. “I’m sorry, John. We are so very wrong. There is nothing in my power I can do about it.” He hung his head down again.

Michael could see that Valegen had no idea what to do or say. He silently wept and Ralt watched as he father placed a hand on the guilt wracked man’s shoulder and said “I don’t blame you. You’re not responsible for what happened.”

“I played a part in it, John. I am as responsible as anyone in this.” Valegen said. Michael relieved him of the responsibility. Still he felt it no matter what Michael said.

“Valegen, no matter what, you’ve been pretty nice about all of this.” Michael said. “Hell, you’ve given me and Ralt one of the best days we’ve ever had. Something like this can’t come from someone who is a total bastard. So, maybe there is something good in your people. Maybe you’re not seeing it.”

“Maybe I see them all too well, John. It hurts to see your people in a pain of their own making.” Valegen said as he wiped his face with the hot towel the waitress brought him. “I’m sorry. I’m acting like

an infant.”

“Babies are more honest than adults anyway.”
Ralt said.

“He’s right you know.” Michael said. “Now tell me
about my father’s people.”

CHAPTER THREE

TRUTH AND DARES

“I’m not sure if I should do that here.” Valegen said.

Ralt sat up. “I wouldn’t mind.”

“You heard him.” Michael said.

“I have a near complete breakdown and you want to hear about your father’s people.” Valegen said. “Have you no mercy?”

“I have plenty of mercy.” Michael said. “I think you owe me.”

Valegen looked away. He wasn’t really sure what to say. This was not the best place to say what he had to say. Then again, the restaurant was perfect. No one else was really listening.

“All right,” Valegen began “my world is called Aboria. We of course are Aborians. Your father, our king, is called Thail Marius Petron.” He smiled. “In fact, your name Stone and Petron means the same thing. Twenty-nine years ago, your father came to this world. To be honest he was running away from his duties and himself. He really didn’t want to be king. He didn’t want to be tied to the throne nor did he want the responsibility. I don’t blame him. That crown can be so damned heavy.

Any way, he met your mother and amazingly enough, they fell in love even though your mother never knew this. He was betrothed to his queen. We had an idea he may have impregnated her. Later

reports proved this to be true.”

“You had people watching my mother?” asked an incredulous Michael.

“Yes. Once you were born, we had a watch placed on you to insure your safety in case we might need you.” He saw the skeptical looks on both their faces. “That’s what I was told. I do know one thing. The queen kept notes on all of his children.”

“All of his children? How many children did he have?” asked Michael.

“Outside of the marriage? He had, including you, twenty children. Within the marriage, ten children.”

“You’re kidding, right?” asked Ralt. “He had that many girlfriends?”

“Damn! The boy’s seed works!” Michael said.

“It worked quite well. He of course couldn’t know all of them well.” Valegen continued. “As I said, the queen kept records on the entire group of out of wedlock children. She also made contact with the mothers and made sure they were taken care of.”

“Why would she do that?” asked Ralt. “I mean these weren’t her kids, right?”

Valegen smiled. “She thought of the women as a sisterhood, a sisterhood of the betrayed. The trouble was it was an old, old, story. We make the children, but we don’t acknowledge them. Therein is our biggest mistake. We keep making enemies we don’t need.” He took a drink from the wine and then continued. “The queen told him she would suffer no more women in his life. If he wanted to have another woman he would have to stick with what he knew. The women who bore his children.”

“Didn’t it bother her that she would be sharing him with those other women?” asked Ralt. “I mean, he was her husband!”

Valegen looked at Michael. “How does he know these things?”

“You have seen the soap operas we have here?” asked Michael. “It’s total schooling in all the lurid arts.”

Valegen shook his head in amazement. “I didn’t pay attention to them. In any case, he actually stopped playing around and settled down to being the king and a husband. His wife made sure that he was as happy as he could be.” He saw the look on Ralt’s face. “Understand something, she likes being queen. She will not trade that for anything. She does love him, hard as that is.”

“Y’all messed up.” Ralt said. “If the man made all these children, why doesn’t he know them?”

“The fact is I don’t think any man can really know all his children as well as he could.” Valegen told them. “The king tries.” he shook his head sadly.

“What’s my part in all this?” asked Michael.

Sighing again, Valegen continued. “John, thirty percent of our population is mixed-blood. That is part of the problem. We have been in space a long time. The children of many a dalliance had one thing in common, their fathers refused to and did not acknowledge them. We have written bad laws against them; we have abandoned our honor, we have lost our way with them.” He drained his wine and filled the glass again. A second thought crossed his mind but he kept the glass at hand.

“Too many people both half-breed and full-blood live in the worst kind of poverty, without hope. John, from everything we’ve learned, you never gave up hope. Even at your lowest point, you never stopped believing. You kept your faith, you kept trying.” He stared at Michael. “You have what we lack, the courage to do the right thing.”

“Was anyone else tried before?” asked Michael.

Valegen nodded. “Two of your brothers were tried. Jatis and Brok. Our problem was we tried to make them something they weren’t, and they paid for it. If the king is smart, he will leave you be who you are and let you grow into the role. If we are wise, you will get the ancestri, your blood knowledge. In that you will have a strength the others lacked, the power to do what needs to be done.”

“I’m no messiah.” Michael said.

“Yet that is what we are trying to make you, isn’t it?” Valegen said. “Yet that may be what saves you. I don’t think Aboria is worth it. I pray we can keep you whole.”

“Did they die?” asked Ralt.

“For all the good they did, they may as well have died. I don’t want to see a repeat, not again.” Valegen said grimly.

“Look, Valegen, I won’t tell Urgess we talked about the mess I’m headed for, okay?” Michael said.

“It won’t matter, my lord knows me well enough to know we did talk.” Valegen said.

“I guess so. I saw how fond you are of each other.” Michael said.

“That much is obvious? Our relationship goes

back a bit. He may know me better than my mother.” Valegen admitted.

Michael turned to Ralt. “Are you ready?”

“I got to go to the bathroom.” Ralt jumped off his chair and went to the bathroom.

“Why is it called a bathroom if you can’t take a bath?” asked Valegen.

Michael broke up laughing.

“It’s an honest question!”

“I just never thought of it!” replied Michael after he stifled an embarrassing snort.

Ralt returned from the bathroom. “I’m ready.”

They paid their check and then left.

By the time they got to the apartment, Valegen had been silent the entire ride. Apparently, Valegen was still feeling something. Even the driver noticed it.

“You okay Valegen?” asked Michael as they got out of the limo.

“I won’t be all right for a while. I still feel bad about all of this.” Valegen told him. He saw Ralt pulling the bass out with him. “You can leave it, Hovak will get that.”

Ralt left the instrument in the car and joined his elders with a worried look on his face. Valegen looked as if he would have a complete breakdown, this time worse than in the restaurant. Michael saw it too. He grabbed Valegen by the shoulders. “Damn it, Val, get out of it! It’s done and you can’t change it! Whatever we have to go through, we will go through it and deal with it!” Valegen looked away.

Michael turned his face back to him and stared him in the eyes. "If you weren't good at what you do, Urgess wouldn't have you, and you know it!" He let go of the shoulders as Valegen stared at him. The half-breed was not going in the apartment until he pulled himself together. "You knew what you were doing the minute you set out to get me." He pointed to the driver. "Hell, even Hovak knew what was up! So don't give me the regret now." Michael could see that Valegen was starting to see what he meant. "You've handled the heat so far. Don't ever forget that you can handle it and don't ever show the regret." He got closer. "If you like me and Ralt, thank you. But do your job."

Valegen was shocked. Michael accepted what was happening to him, why couldn't he? He knew why. He was afraid for the father and son, afraid his world would eat them alive. Why this fear would hit him so hard was beyond him. He looked away from Michael then back at him. "I'm sorry, John. I'm so very sorry."

"We both know that. Now we got to do what we got to do." Michael turned on his heel and went up the stairs to his apartment.

At the top of the stairs Ralt spotted him first.

"Come on, move it Ralt." Michael told his son.

"Dad, Godzilla's landed."

Michael saw him, and saw what Ralt meant. The man at the top of the stairs had a heavily sculpted face with a scar over his right eye. The natural eye was replaced with an artificial eye that glowed red

from the socket and both the eyes regarded the group coming up the stairs coldly. To Ralt, the man was a living daemon, coldly surveying its next meal. Michael's reaction was almost as bad. Worse, the man was staring directly at him with the coldness in his eyes intensifying if that was possible. "Who the hell is that?!" He asked Valegen.

"That is Gherrict, another uncle of yours. If he's here, you're getting the ancestri here on Earth. A word of caution. He doesn't have a sense of humor." Valegen was sympathetic.

They finished the climb of the stairs. At the top, Ralt tried to slip past Gherrict. The alien caught him by the arm. Michael moved to get to them, but Valegen stopped him. The voice was harsh and cold. "Do you fear me boy?"

Ralt nervously nodded yes.

"Know this. Unless you are foolish or do wrong in my presence, you have very little to fear." Gherrict softened his voice for Ralt. "What I have to show you is very special for you and your father. You will learn so much in the short time we have. It may frighten you. Do not be afraid, no harm will come to you." He cupped the boy's chin in his hand. "I do not lie to you." He stood and let the boy shoot into the apartment.

Gherrict's coldness returned to him. "Are you done with your foolishness, Valegen? I have need of them now."

Valegen could hardly keep the fear out of his voice. "Yes Lord Gherrict, they are ready for you. We are done for the time."

“Good. This will take one Terran week.” Gherrick did not take his eyes off Michael as he spoke with Valegen. “You may have them back after that, albeit changed.” He went inside.

Michael was visibly shaken. “That is one spooky son of a bitch.” He hadn’t met the person who could scare him like that before now.

“I most certainly agree with you.” Valegen said as he followed Michael in the apartment.

The next morning, Gherrick woke Michael.

Michael looked at the bedside clock. He looked at Gherrick. “It’s three in the morning. Do you know how early that is?” He pulled the covers back over his head.

Gherrick’s eyes narrowed to slits as he grabbed the sleepy younger man and pulled him out of bed. Michael landed on the floor surprised. “Get up, boy! I am not your idiot father. You will not speak to me without respect and obedience! Is that understood? When I tell you to do something, I expect it done. Now get up!”

Michael sat on the floor not caring what Gherrick did. “Are you some kind of fool or what?!”

The huge man was having none of it and grabbed Michael by the hair and stood him up. “Don’t give me trouble, boy!

“I am not a boy!” Michael got into Gherrick’s face and stared into his eyes.

Gherrick locked his stare with him. “Are you one hundred and eight years of age?”

Michael stared back. Gherrick didn’t look a day

over forty. "No."

"Then you are a boy. Come along."

Michael hesitated. "I'm naked. Do you mind if I dress?"

"If you will notice, this is all I'm wearing." Gherrict threw him a male thong.

Michael saw what Gherrict wore. "The girls would love you in that.

"You are an ass, boy. Did you know that?" Gherrict was disgusted. "Put it on and come along."

"Do you always hold people in contempt or do you think your shit don't stink?" asked Michael.

"I am better than you. Don't forget it." Gherrict said as he left the room. Michael got the 'g' string on and then followed him out muttering "motherfucker."

Gherrict was standing at the front closet when Michael joined him. Gherrict regarded the younger man. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, and then spoke. "What you are about to experience is most holy for those who achieve it. The ancestri allows you full knowledge of whom and what you are. It is...how do I put this for you? It is attainment of a glimpse into your soul. A recognition of all your strengths." He looked at Michael. "Even you should appreciate this. It is more than I can express in words." He opened a door into another "room" in the tesseract. It was dark in here. There was a flat metal bowl on legs with oil in it. Gherrict lit this and watched as the oil burned brightly illuminating the room.

"Look at me, boy. What do you see?" Gherrict asked.

Michael knew this was no time to be flippant; this mattered to Gherrick. Whatever was going to happen was happening. "You're wearing interlocking earrings with black stones and . . ."

"Say it!" Gherrick demanded.

"Your nipples and navel are pierced." Michael finished.

"Do you know why?"

"No."

Gherrick pointed to his left nipple. "Gheron world of my birth. The right is Abor. The navel is me."

Michael thought about it. He related it to a story he'd read about people who symbolized who they were with jewelry or tattoos. He noticed that the tattoos wove their way across his body and formed intriguing patterns on his body. "The copulation of two worlds resulting in you."

"Very good. Abor is in you, Michael, only you don't know it. You are half complete. You, whether you can say it or not, understand Terra. That is a given." There was a circle on the floor. Gherrick went to one side and sat down. Michael, not knowing what to do sat on the other side of it. "I am not your father who fucked his way across the galaxy. I am your teacher and you will respect me and obey me. Do you understand this? If I have to, I will beat you into the bloodiest pulp possible."

Michael saw the fire in Gherrick's eyes. He also saw the huge hands resting on the man's knees. "I understand." Michael said.

"Good. Let us begin." Gherrick said.

One week. That's all it took. By cutting Michael off from all outside influences, Gherrick was able to concentrate his effort and lessons and double them. He pushed Michael like he never was pushed before. He could do so since Michael was a fast learner and an intense student as Gherrick was a teacher. His estimation of Michael rose considerably.

That first day had Michael deep inside the ancestri as Gherrick explained what the ancestri were. Michael was nervous, and the lessons forced him to look deeper inside than he ever did. It made him nervous to see the great nexus of worlds, bright shining crossroads that led to every world that was. He could see the people that were connected to him, even if it was all theory to others, imaginings that took him away from his own doubts. Mikal could feel the connections going deeper than he ever thought they could.

At one point. Gherrick had Mikal spread his arms to his sides, palms up. Small glowing spheres hovered just above his palms, and Michael could feel power, real power, coursing through him.. As the sarcasm was gone, there was only truth revealed. What it meant to be a soulmage, what the ancestri meant, and where his place was in all of it. All of those, even the most primitive of beings were part of the lineage of his family. Now that family included all men, of two worlds.

There was shuddering new knowledge of his place in the universe, and it scared him. The responsibility of it!

Gherrick took him to a place where time slowed

considerable. He trained him in martial arts just for the physical discipline.

The beauty of the stars washed over him.

Then he saw himself, and others on his world and was saddened. They were all made of the same star stuff. They were all the same dust and breath and gifts granted by the universe. He saw the same on the new world he was to go to, Aboria. He saw how crooked and bent out of shape, how lost people were. He didn't want the responsibility, even if he knew he could not walk away from it.

Again, Gherrick had him take the pose of a cross. This time, the spheres looked like Earth and Aboria, and he could feel the true power pulse through the spheres.

"They are yours, nephew. none can take them away from you.." Gherrick told him, Michael's body covered in sweat again.

Michael and Ralton even sang a deep healing song. But Ralt's voice was strong and pure and Michael could feel deep power in his son's song. "Ralton, you are blessed with a great power, all your own."

Gherrick taught Michael and Ralton through that deep and satisfying week.

"Very well done, nephew," Gherrick said after a particularly intense lesson. Once again, this lesson left Michael in the middle of the great nexus of worlds, leaving both men sweating profusely. "Assume the position." He and Michael slipped into the lotus. "What are the eight steps?"

“The eight steps are honor, duty, responsibility, kindness, forgiveness, compassion, courage and trust.” Michael responded.

Gherrict smiled. He was doing more of that as Michael came to understand what was being taught. He touched fingertips together, brought them to his lips and then spoke. “Now we come to a most difficult part. All that you have learned leads to this. I know you are ready. Your hunger to learn is phenomenal.”

Michael smiled. That much was true.

“As Valegen has told you, for far too long we have neglected all of our children, not just our half-breeds. I was the first half-breed in our house to be acknowledged by your grandfather Raniu Petron. He realized Aboria made many of these children and was failing them. Then it got worse. Three hundred years ago, laws were first passed to try and stop breeds from integrating into our society. There were miscegenation laws, laws blocking half-breeds from inheriting estates even if it were the parent’s will. These and other ways were used to keep these unwanted children from truly integrating into our society.”

Gherrict sighed. “Nephew, your father has sired some twenty children out of wedlock. He has ten by his queen. Thirty children total.”

“The boy’s tool is limber.” commented Michael.

“I agree.” Gherrict continued. “As you know, the queen tracked these other women down, became friends with them. However, two died leaving orphaned sons ripe for the picking.”

“Jatis and Brok,” spoke Michael.

“Yes. My mistake is that I did not give them what I am giving you. Like most others, I thought they would not need it. The worst mistake I could have ever made. Abor ate them alive. Brok is in a coma. He was put there by an extremist who did not believe he should be governor of a sector. Brok was ambushed as he was going to his office to begin a day’s work.” He shook his head sadly. “Jatis turned to drugs to keep the world at bay. He may as well be in a coma. I failed them by not acting in their best interest and giving them the ancestri before we gave them to Abor.” He leaned forward. “The ancestri will be your edge, Michael. You know yourself in ways you have not imagined. Your father didn’t want this to happen. However, his queen asked me to do this. She understood all that knowledge would be needed.”

“Dang, behind his back!” Michael said. “Is he that clueless?”

“Your father is a proud and stubborn man. Even when he admits he’s wrong he loathes to truly change.” Gherrick told him.

Michael saw the heaviness in his uncle. “The Queen was willing to change, was willing to embrace these other women. Why couldn’t he do the same?”

Gherrick shrugged. “If I could understand why Aborians could lay with so many people and leave them with children the fathers didn’t want, I would. You know, your grandfather took pity on me and gave me the ancestri just as mother gave me Gheron. Father knew I wasn’t the one. I could teach the one

who could.”

Michael buried his face in his hands and then leaned back as frustration and a welling anger showed in his eyes. “I’ll tell you what I told Valegen. I am no messiah.”

“Nor should you be. Yet that is what we are asking you to do, be a messiah.” Gherrict could feel the growing reluctance and pain from his nephew. He reached out with his soul to comfort Michael and steel him. “Jon, I call you Jon. Let me give you the ancestri, then you decide. If you say no, at least you will have your full self.”

“Do I really have any choice?” asked Michael.

“You already know the answer to that, don’t you?” replied Gherrict. The two looked at each other. Finally, Michael spoke.

“You’ve taken me this far. You might as well take me all the way.”

Michael thought he saw pride in Gherrict’s eyes. “My nephew, thank you. You are the most courageous man I know.”

“Don’t bet on it. One of my teachers used to say sometimes you have to eat shit and bark at the moon to get where you need to go.” Michael said.

“This is not shit, Jon.”

“Don’t tell that to my mouth, Uncle.”

Gherrict lit the brazier on the floor between them. The flame leaped, illuminating the room. He assumed the lotus again and Michael did the same. They both closed their eyes as Gherrict began to chant:

“Hear me, oh blood,

That flows through me
That is of my forefather's
That is of me
Begs to see thee,
Begs to learn from thee,
Hear me, oh blood
That flows through me!"

When Gherrict finished his chant, the room began to swirl from darkness to warm shimmering light. The swirls of light took form and voice.

"WHO CALLS?"

"Keep your head bowed until you are told to look, Michael." Gherrict whispered. He then raised his voice in humble supplication. "I call you, oh honored ones. My soul begs to hear thee."

"YOU ARE CALLED GHERRICT, CHILD."

"As I am called, honored ones." Gherrict said.

"WHY DO YOU CALL US, CHILD?"

"I bring before you one who may be able to heal our sick and grieving world."

"LET US SEE HIS FACE."

"We look up at the same time." Gherrict said; they did so and Michael opened his eyes slowly. "This one is called Michael John Stone. He brings with him new blood, a son of his own that has risen since his sixteenth year."

Suddenly, the ghostly forms took on solid shape, looking like every person, of all stripes and all colors from both worlds with glows around them, lifting him causing him to whisper "oh, my god." in a

small voice. Suddenly, the nexus of two worlds was around him and he could feel the power coursing through him. Gherrick and Ralton were there and their bodies pulsed with power. But Michael and Ralt were side by side at the center point of the nexus, and the father and son could feel power, in the form of light and water flow through them again. It was the greatest love that made Michael fight for his son's life and choose to raise him. It was the connection that made father and son so powerful, because Michael did not run from the responsibility of being Ralton's parent.

“WE ARE NOT GODS MIKAL JON STON-PETRON!
WE ARE OF YOU AND YOU ARE OF US!”

“WE REJOICE THAT YOU DID NOT RUN FROM
BLOOD BUT DID ACCEPT IT AND LOVE IT ERE BIRTH!”

“OH SWEET JOY TO KNOW THAT HONOR AND
LOVE HAS NOT DIED!”

“BE WELCOME, OH CHILD OF OURS! BE LOVED
AND CHERISHED! BE IT KNOWN TO YOU WE SHALL
NOT DESERT YOU IF YOU DO NOT DESERT YOURSELF!”

“HE IS THE ONE! HE IS WHOLE! HE IS THE ONE!”

So solid now. They were holding him and touching him and it all went straight to his soul. It was celebratory, erotic, nourishing and healing. He could tell that hearts, minds and souls rejoiced that Mikal did not turn from his unborn son but chose to raise him with all the love and courage that he had.

When they set he and Ralton down, they was covered from head to foot in sweat. There was

a fire in their eyes that matched Gherrict's. There was pride in his uncle's face. "You have been ringed, nephews."

"THE THREE RINGS OF YOUR SOUL, CHILDREN; YOU ARE OF US! GO WITH OUR BLESSING, SONS OF THE HOUSE OF PETRON. IN YOUR MANNER, DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO."

The figures faded from sight, but Mikal and Ralton knew they would be there in his heart. They now understood what the ancestri were; they were the souls of their people and they could be with them if they so chose. Mikal looked at his uncle, and then at Ralton.

"I guess you know we're going to Abor." Mikal said. Then he smiled as he looked again at Gherrict. "I'm speaking Aborian, aren't I?"

"You speak it nicely." Gherrict told him. "Is what you experienced still shit?"

"No, it isn't." Mikal said. Both men and boy were covered in sweat

Mikal's face grew somber. "I can't go without explaining this to one other person at the least."

"Who?" Asked his uncle

"My sister, Jennifer."