

St. Francis And Friends

A Fictional Story About Animals In The Afterlife

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Introduction

“We say that when the King returns it will be wonderful. But why don’t we dream of it? If it will be real, it should be the subject of our fondest dreams. Even if we cannot be sure now what it will be like, dreams can sometimes glimpse the truth.”

The author does not pretend to actually describe in this book what the millennial reign will be like or to predict the time for the beginning of those 1,000 years. This is all fictional speculation, a sort of “What if . . .” story based on one historic position that there will be a literal reign for a thousand years from Jerusalem which still lies in our future.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” Genesis 3:1 NKJV

Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?” And Balaam said to the donkey, “Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!” So the donkey said to Balaam, “*Am* I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since *I became* yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?” And he said, “No.” Numbers 22: 28-30 NKJV

²¹ Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. Romans 8: 21-23 NKJV

03.11.997 C.R. My name is Timothy. I hold the titles Keeper of the Ancient Books, the Primary Interpreter of the books of Anna, the Chronicler of Imperial Truth, and the Spiritual Primate of the Mortals on the Earth. These titles have come into my family since my ancestress Anna was chosen as the first Keeper of the Ancient Books almost one thousand years ago. Therefore, I am the Keeper Tim, probably the last of the line. I am the 15th generation from Mother Anna by direct succession. It is the year 997 C.R. C.R. stands for Christus Regnus otherwise known as The Glorious Reign. This Reign began at the return of the King from the heavenly realm. He was worshipped by millions as the unseen King for over two thousand years

The old book says, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed," and "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" and "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." From this we understand that our Immortals can and do indeed rule the earth under the Glorious leadership of His Imperial Majesty in Jerusalem. He is the first born from the dead of the ancient mortals.

When the Emperor returned after his long absence in the other realm, he immediately subdued the entire earth by his glorious power. He established his capital at the ancient city of Jerusalem and appointed rulers over the earth. The earth was divided into two halves, the eastern and the western. Over each of these was appointed a Viceroy who reported directly to the Emperor Himself. The Viceroy of the Eastern half of the world is John the Beloved who rules from the Isle of Patmos where he was martyred in the 1st century of the Emperor's absence. The island was not big enough for the Viceroy's palace, so it has been entirely enlarged and rebuilt to hold his palace and his court. Both mortal and Immortal resources were used to accomplish this. Many mortal construction firms were employed and the finishing touches were put on by the Viceroy's angelic legions. The Western half of the world is under the rule of Viceroy Luis Cepata. He rules from his palace in Montevideo where he was martyred in the 21st century of the Emperor's absence. Cepata is not as well known or

remembered by the Immortals, but the Emperor's judgment in making him Viceroy has never been questioned by them. It has been questioned by some of us mortals, but mortals question a lot of things. We have no real authority so it doesn't make much difference. The Viceroys, like all other Immortals were resurrected at the Emperor's Glorious Return. Under the Viceroys are Territorial Governors or Over-Lords who are over large portions of the world. Under these Over-Lords are Metropolitans who rule over large cities and their surrounding areas. Under the Metropolitans are various local governors. These rulers are all Immortals who won their places by faithful service and often martyrdom for the Emperor during their mortal lives when the Emperor was not seen in this world.

Each Immortal, regardless of rank, rules from a Dais, a raised platform or out-door terrace which is always large enough to hold the entire local court. There is always an empty chair just to the ruler's left reserved for the Emperor who visits every Dais regularly. He arrives with a full angelic escort and everyone, Immortal and mortal alike, falls on their faces. The Emperor always bids the Immortals to rise immediately. One of the lesser Immortal Princes signals the mortals attached to the court when they may rise. The magnificence of each Dais depends on the greatness of the ruler, whether he or she be a Viceroy, An Over-Lord, A Metropolitan or a lesser Prince. The size and glory of the angelic canopy over the Dais also depends on the rank of the Prince. There are some Princes in Jerusalem with the Emperor, the primary ones being Peter, the Master of the Feast, and David, the Lord Chancellor of the Empire.

The angels of the Emperor are numerous and many are now visible in the world. They have their own hierarchy and they serve the Emperor and his Governors throughout the earth. The Immortals are often not found in this world but are with the Emperor on "the other side" or "beyond the veil" where mortals are not able to go. They fellowship and feast with Him there and come and go as they please. The Immortals and angels travel by means known only to them and appear and disappear throughout the earth at will. They are able to take a mortal with them to any place in this world, on this side of the "great veil." Our special

Immortal is the Governor Elaine, a sub-governor of the Metropolitan Henry Sawyer of Atlanta. Elaine is also the Imperial Legate in charge of the house of Anna. Anna and her descendants have been designated the Keepers of the Sacred records of the Empire. The Keeper is the only mortal with an angel assistant, his name is Lucius, and he serves each generation of Keepers. All mortals including the Keepers are born and live and die just as the Immortals did during their mortality when the Emperor was not seen on the earth.

The Story

05.12.749 C.R. My name is Ken. I began my duties as Keeper and Primate after the parting of my mother Mandie who was the niece of the great Keeper Joan. Joan was my great aunt and her influence as Keeper was the greatest since May, although for entirely different reasons. May was, as everyone knows, the most spiritual of the Keepers to date. She actually was recognized as a wife of the Emperor although the Immortals including the Emperor do not practice any sexual behavior like we mortals do. The obvious reason for this is that they have no need to bear children through the generations since they are Immortal. They say that they do not miss the sexual pleasure because what they have as members of the corporate resurrected bride of the emperor is so much more satisfying, both spiritually and emotionally, that they could not wish for more. Since we do not get to attend their “love feasts,” we have no way of affirming this. We take them at their word.

After May, Joan has been considered the greatest of the keepers in the now over 700 years since the line was started by the Immortal Elaine with our ancestress Anna. Joan, like May, did not marry in order to dedicate her life entirely to her work. Joan was great because she had three especially strong abilities. She was exceptional in her appearance before the public; she always made a strong, almost royal, impression. She had considerable administrative ability. She also had the ability to pick outstanding staff members. These staff members not only made the Keeper’s office run smoothly but they made the Keeper look even better at her job. I doubt that anyone will ever equal Joan in any one of these abilities, not to mention all three at the same time.

I truthfully do not understand why Elaine appoints some of the Keepers that she does. Speaking only for myself I do not know what particular contribution that I can make to the office. I am not as spiritual as May. Even without the sex it would seem to me to be inappropriate for me to “marry” the Emperor. Make no mistake, I do love Him. I love Him as my Emperor and as the head of a whole new race of Immortal people. I once thought that I might

petition to be “adopted” by the Emperor and in that way have a special relationship to His Majesty. Elaine said that the majority of the Immortals are adopted by the Emperor and His Father. I asked her who are the people that are not adopted. She said that these are his blood relatives but they also came to their inheritance in Him by faith just as the adopted ones did. Not completely understanding this, I did not ask any more questions of Elaine on the subject. I abandoned the adoption idea.

I have looked inside myself for some of Joan’s strengths. I am not that good with crowds. They frighten me. I often feel that there is someone in the crowd who wants to assassinate me even though I know that Lucius is an effective protector. By the way I am extremely fond of Lucius. He is so gentle and quiet. I do not feel that I am much of an administrator either, and as for picking a staff I haven’t a clue. I talked to Elaine about this and she told me that she was confident that I would find my place among the Keepers. I do like the research; the library is quiet. But there has been so much of that done since Anna. She did a lot herself. Mother was strong in research and pretty good with the staff. She dreaded public appearances and giving orders to the staff. At Elaine’s insistence Mother finally appointed a Chief of Staff who ran everything for her. We know from her dairies where Mother excelled and I can not do much in that area either.

02.12.750 C.R. If you have read my mother’s journals, you are aware that I have fourteen siblings, all the offspring of my mother, Mandie, and my father, Josh. Mother excelled at having babies fairly late in her life. My father, Josh, was also a very nurturing father and spent a lot of time with us kids while we were growing up while mother was about her duties as Keeper. I have wondered why Elaine has not picked one of my brothers or even one of my sisters as Keeper. They are a varied lot and have many talents between them. I asked Elaine about this just after Mother passed beyond the veil.

“You have been the Keeper Heir since you were born, Ken,” she answered me.

“But you can put anyone in the office,” I protested.

“I want you as Keeper,” she answered.

“May I ask why?”

“Certainly. I believe that you are the man for the job. You will do well. Just follow your heart and don’t be concerned,” she said.

Elaine was hard to argue with.

“Could I get some of my brothers and sisters to help?” I asked.

“So long as they understand that you are the Keeper,” she said.

“I thought I would appoint some of my siblings to do certain things.”

“Fine. That is your choice. But not Vice Keeper, that did not work out very well. They can be Assistant to the Keeper if you like, just as long as it is clear that you alone are the Keeper,” Elaine repeated.

I told Lucius to refuse all visitors except for emergencies and took a few days to consider my siblings.

Being the oldest Chloe and Jason and I have always been particularly close. There is only a year between us. It was two years before Anne and then the twins. Anne always stayed pretty much to herself, she is quite a scholar and a researcher. She helped mother a lot with research and writing. I will definitely make her an Assistant to the Keeper and head librarian. She will love that.

Chloe and Jason can help with public functions as they are both much more out going than I am. That’s two more assistants. The twins, Jan and Jean, are rudderless. Right now they wouldn’t be good for anything. Perhaps when they are older, if they stay out of trouble. They are both very attractive young women and have a lot of suitors like mother did. But they lack discretion. They were rather spoiled until Preston came along and then they resented not being the babies any longer. Little did they know that there would be eight more after Preston.

Going from the other end, Margaret, Denise and Candace are all too young. Margaret is the baby and she misses mother terribly. Denise and Candace are still in their early studies. There are five tutors here at the residence. All of us brothers and sisters pitch in to comfort Margaret and the other young ones, but Preston

spends almost all of his time with them. He is a lot like father. I believe I will leave that alone as long as it works well.

That leaves, going from the top down again, David, Pamela, Roger, Marie and Donald. They are all young adults and fairly close together in age. Marie is like her namesake, our grandmother. She is a great helper. She will be a great helper to me as Keeper. I shall make her Assistant for administration. David and Donald want to pursue their studies in Europe; David in philosophy and Donald in history. I shall help them to do that. That leaves, finally, Pamela and Roger. Roger likes the women too much. He is friendly to everyone, but not particularly ambitious. I will continue to consider him.

Pamela loves children, but she does not attract many men. She is attractive enough but somewhat standoffish around adults. May's childrens' centers are still with us and doing a great work. I will send Pam to work with them as my liaison Assistant; she will love that.

05.22.750 C.R. After I had been Keeper for about a year I had relaxed some about my calling. Elaine appeared early one afternoon.

"Ken, we're going on a trip," she proclaimed as she entered the residence. She always appeared just outside and walked through the door without knocking or being announced. This was her way of respecting my privacy without standing on ceremony. She is, after all, an Immortal Prince and the Imperial Legate in charge of the Keeper's office.

"A trip, mistress?"

"Yes, to the court of the overlord of the Mediterranean."

"Wonderful, wonderful," I replied while trying to think of who that is.

"That's Marco the Centurion," she said as if to read my thoughts. I do not believe that she actually can read my thoughts, it is just that she has been around for such a long time and is a student of human nature.

"Yes, Marco," I replied. "From the Second Testament."

"You know your Scriptures, Ken."

I was flattered. I read these writings over and over again. “Thank you, mistress. Wasn’t Marco the one who believed the Emperor when the Emperor’s blood relatives would not?”

“You know he is, Ken. Such a show off.”

“I do not intend to ‘show off’, Mistress. It’s just that there are so few things that I am good at.”

“I thought you were working through that,” she answered. See, she can not read minds.

“I am. I am, really.”

She smiled. I shut up.

“Actually, Marco is an excellent choice for a ruler as he so readily recognized the importance of authority,” Elaine continued after a short while.

I nodded again.

“His faith was actually based on his recognition of authority. He obeyed his superiors and expected his soldiers to obey him. So when he told the Emperor that he did not have to come and heal his servant but to merely say the word, it was because he understood authority. Now he has been given as lot of authority over the very part of the world where he served as a captain of a hundred.”

I nodded again.

“If you are ready, Ken, we will go. There is someone else there I want you to meet. He is a Prince in Marco’s court.”

We went outside where Elaine’s escort appeared and we were there in Constantinople or Istanbul as it is was once called. The Over-Lord’s Dais is just a few miles from the Metropolitan’s Dais there.

“My Brother, Marco,” Elaine exclaimed. “I haven’t seen you since the last Great Feast.” She hugged him long and hard.

I was a little surprised. I knew that they had not been mortal at the same time, but they seemed to be very close. Marco hugged her in return with some zest. But I soon discovered that Marco did everything with some zest. Something to do with his lineage.

“Marco, this is our new Keeper, who has been in office about a year now, I brought him to meet Francis,” Elaine chimed.

I approached the Over-Lord who was still standing from Elaine's arrival. His considerable court was standing as well. The sky was full of angelic presence and escorts.

"And so you come to us as Legate," Marco said to Elaine as he extended his hand to me.

"And as a sister and a friend," Elaine said smiling her biggest smile.

"I am so glad to meet the new Keeper," Marco said as he shook my hand so hard my shoulder actually hurt.

"Marco, your strength ..." Elaine said.

"Oh, so sorry young man," the Over-Lord said. "Didn't mean to injure you. Are you O.K.?"

"Yes, my lord, just fine," I said rubbing my shoulder.

He put one hand on that shoulder and it was immediately fine. "So you came to meet the Prince Francis?" he asked.

"Evidently, my lord."

"Evidently! Ha! So she only tells you so much my young Keeper. No worry, she is the same with us." Then lowering his voice slightly, "always some great secret, you know. But she is delightful."

He nodded expecting agreement so I nodded as well. Elaine just smiled. Do Immortals actually fall in love with each other? No, I know better than that. But this was new to me. I had never seen Elaine so 'delightful.' She must really like Marco. So they do have favorites.

Clasping me on the back Marco led me back to his seat and motioned for me to sit on a nearby stool. This was a high honor for a mortal and I was glad for it.

"Now, let's see," Marco continued as he scanned the area. His court seated themselves. "Where is our brother Francis?"

"I believe he went to his reserve in Australia," a female prince offered.

"Oh yes, Australia, such interesting animals there," Marco nodded.

"Trieste!" Marco called to a particularly impressive angel just above and in front of the Dais.

The angel swooped down and bowed to the Over-Lord.

“Please go and beg my brother Francis to meet with us here,” Marco said.

I thought ‘please beg’; this Over-Lord was extremely polite. Again probably his bloodline. In a few minutes Trieste and another escort appeared and Francis stepped onto the Dais. He had a beautiful parrot on one shoulder and a small shaggy black and white monkey in his arms.

“What animals do you bring us today?” Marco asked. Francis gave the particular names of the animals both technical and common. I was fascinated.

“No, my brother,” Marco continued. “I mean what do you call them, what do they answer to?”

“Oh, of course, this in Arthur,” he pointed to the multicolored bird on his shoulder. “And this baby has not been named yet. His mother was injured and I have adopted him.” He caressed the infant monkey who was very still.

“Say hello to the Over-Lord Arthur,” Francis said.

“Hello, your excellency,” the parrot said, “It is a great pleasure to be at your Dais today. I trust that the Over-Lord is quite pleased with all that is around him this beautiful day,” the parrot continued.

I was amazed. My jaw dropped open. Elaine clapped and said,

“Marvelous, Francis. Arthur is absolutely marvelous.”

Then she said to me. “Francis has expanded the talking abilities of many animals. He is quite fond of them all.”

“Mistress,” I said softly. She leaned in my direction. “Is this Immortal Francis from the Italian town of Assisi?”

“Smart Ken. You have guessed it. He is the great champion of animals.”

Now I knew who she had brought me to meet. Francis sat down on the other side of me and handed me the little monkey without speaking a word to me. I caressed it and loved it. The tiny creature almost appeared to purr like a cat.

“You like the monkey?” the parrot asked me.

I nodded before I could catch my own surprise. What had Elaine said? “Expanded the talking abilities?” I should think so.

This parrot seems capable of a conversation. I decided to explore this right there in front of the Over-Lord and his entire court.

“Yes. How about you?” I asked the parrot. “Do you like monkeys?”

“Yes, they are fine,” he answered and continued, “we are all God’s creatures, children of the Emperor, but I generally prefer birds.”

The entire court chuckled. I was dumfounded once again.

Francis leaned forward and said to me, “Yes, he can actually carry on a conversation. And I see that you like animals.”

“Yes, my lord, I do. Very much. They are so innocent and pure. Don’t you think?”

“Indeed I do.”

Then every prince on the Dais had to speak to the parrot who was passed from arm to arm. He readily accepted each new arm and chatted to everyone who talked to him. This went on for quite some time. I just held the little monkey while he took a short nap.

Later Francis held out his hands to retrieve his monkey. Reluctantly I gave it back. He saw my hesitation and said, “After the meal we should talk, Keeper.”

I nodded as I remembered how hungry I was. I learned that the Over-Lord Marco of the Mediterranean had many chefs and outstanding meals. I also learned that Francis was a vegetarian.

“These are just domestic cows and birds,” Marco said in an attempt to get Francis to try a meat dish. At the word ‘birds’ Arthur the parrot squawked loudly. I felt strange so I looked around and noticed that the entire court did not know just how to respond. Some smiled but did not laugh. Others acted as if they had not heard Marco’s remark or the squawk.

I waited for what seemed to be a very long time after the meal until Francis was ready to talk. By the time I saw him walking across Marco’s beautiful garden, I was sleepy so I stood and tried to be very much awake.

“I am so sorry,” Francis said as he approached me. Let us get you a cold drink. He motioned to one of the mortal waiters who brought me some wonderful lemonade. It was cold and it revived me.

“I remember when I was mortal how a big luncheon would make me so sleepy afterwards especially on a warm spring afternoon like this one. There now, are you ready for a little talk?”

“Absolutely, my lord.”

“You are just going to have to call me Francis. May I call you Ken, Keeper?”

“Yes, of course. And thank you Francis.”

We got along great from the start. Later when talking to a friend about my first meeting with Francis, my friend asked how I felt when he handed me the little monkey and did not speak a word. I said that this did not even occur to me at the time. Actually any one that Francis hands a defenseless infant animal to should be honored with the trust extended. I guess that somewhere inside I actually felt like that.

“You see, Ken, I would like to take you to see my animal friends. I feel like you would enjoy it tremendously. I loved animals as a mortal, but here in the reign it is so much better. They no longer have their natural fear and ferocity that they had before. And I am able to do so much with them.”

“Yes, the parrot Arthur,” I began.

“Yes, he is one. The Emperor has allowed me the power to actually improve some of them. If you come with me, you will see.”

I was ready to start right then.

“So, Ken, I will come to your house in about a week and we will plan our travels. Is that good with you?”

“Of course,” I said. I wondered how I would wait that long.

[N.D.] Almost exactly a week after I met Francis, I was reading in my parlor. I find the library too dark to stay in. When Lucius suddenly appeared and announced, “A large party is approaching, Keeper, a Prince from Italy.”

I bounded out onto the lawn. I knew it was Francis. His escort was not particularly large and it arrived and stood on my lawn. There was a short delay before Francis stepped through the portal. He, of course, had animals with him and they were mortal. There was Arthur the parrot, a baby giraffe named Twigga, who

was at least 8 feet tall and a beautiful red Irish setter dog named Ralph.

“Ken, my friend,” Francis began. We embraced and Arthur moved to my shoulder.

“Hi !” Arthur said softly as he was standing next to my ear.

“Hi, yourself,” I answered. I expected more but all the bird said was, “Um Huum,” followed by a slight rattling sound in his throat. Francis smiled.

“He likes you, really,” Francis said.

I nodded.

Arthur rode gently on my shoulder. He did not dig his claws in too deeply.

Francis introduced me to the giraffe and the dog. The giraffe nodded repeatedly and the dog extended a paw to shake. When I took his paw and shook it he chuckled out loud, “Heh, heh, heh, heh.” It seemed to be a friendly laugh.

“May they run,” Francis asked.

“Yes, yes of course. Tell them to feel free,” I answered.

“You just have,” Francis answered.

The giraffe took off and the dog scampered to catch up with the long legged juvenile. Arthur left my shoulder with a flap of his wings and caught them and landed on the giraffe’s back. And they were off running in large circles around my garden while skillfully missing the flower beds and shrubbery. I thought them to be very considerate animals.

“Arthur will ride on Ralph’s back when Twigga is not around,” Francis said. “But he always chooses the fastest ride.”

I learned that Twigga was Swahili for giraffe. But Francis had made it this giraffe’s proper name. I wondered who had named Ralph.

Francis asked for a table and I had one brought out. He unfolded maps from a large pouch carried by an angel who was always at his right hand. He called him Genile.

I had no idea of the number and sizes of Francis’ animal preserves. I remember one report by one of my ancestors but I had no idea about the size of Francis’ ‘reserves’ as he called them. We planned an initial trip that would take just over six weeks. I hurriedly considered how to rearrange my schedule with as few

‘pop backs’ as necessary and enlisted the aid of my best administrator sibling. Finally, we rested and I had some drinks brought for us. I was expecting Elaine to drop by at any time. Arthur landed on Francis’ shoulder and whispered something in his ear.

“Some drinks for my friends?” Francis asked gesturing towards the animals.

“Oh, yes, I am so sorry,” I said. “I thought they would help themselves with the ponds.”

“He says they don’t taste very good.”

“No doubt.” I ordered three containers full of fresh water for them. They all drank heartedly. The bird and the giraffe drank very politely. Ralph drank long and loud. When he finished, he approached me.

“Than Kweu,” I heard the dog say.

Still taken by surprise I answered, “You are most welcome.” I could see that I had a lot to learn.

“Each type of animal has different strengths,” Francis said. “The parrot, of course, is a good talker.” He thought for a few seconds. “And wait until you see some others,” Francis said patting my knee. “Just wait until you see them. Wait until you meet the dolphins, oh yes, the dolphins.”

“Very smart, the dolphins,” said Arthur. “Very smart.”

That night I thought of the words from the sacred scriptures, “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,” and I promptly looked these words up.

[N.D.] In contrast to the enormous animal parks that Francis oversees in the world are the thousands of smaller ones in the midst of human neighborhoods throughout the world. When I say human neighborhoods, I mean places where people live both Immortals and mortals. In most areas the Immortals have their own enclave which spreads out from the local prince’s Dais and blends with the homes of the mortals in the area. However, there is a place in almost every area where this blending meets that is what you could call a mixed neighborhood or blending area. Such neighborhoods can be in the city, the small town or even in the

country areas; mortals and Immortals living sometimes next to each other. Although there is never any doubt who is the mortal and who is the Immortal, the fact remains that most of the Immortals are not rulers. They evidently did not do anything during their mortality to warrant being a ruler of any kind during the present great Reign. Some of them even keep up the homes they had as mortals. These Immortals are not required to do this. They can live in the Palace beyond the veil or even off world. But those who want to can live among us. There is even the strange case in some instances where a mortal family continues to occupy the house that their ancestors have always lived in next door to an Immortal that their ancestors knew in mortal life.

In many places, but especially near these blending areas Francis has established animal reserves where people can bring their animal friends to play and frolic. Sometimes these parks are quite large. These animal friends were once called “pets.” The only thing about the animal friends is that there are no Immortal animals; they are all mortal and die like the mortal humans in a matter of years.

Regarding this I have found Francis’ animal friend Ralph somewhat unusual. One day Francis told me that Ralph was nearly 40 years old.

“Do all the animals live such long lives under the Reign?” I asked.

“Not really,” Francis answered. “I have extended Ralph’s life, but he will die one day as well. There is only so much that I can do. I keep some of his puppies around so he can live on in them.”

“I see.” Or at least I think I did.

03.11.756 C.R. The residence has changed. Some say that I have made it a menagerie; there are a lot of animals here. It has gone from many children to many animals. All of the animals are well trained; they train very quickly and easily. They never leave droppings in the wrong places and they are not destructive to people or property. Francis says that this is because their natural instinct of fear of humans has been removed and they no longer have to worry about food or survival. The animals no longer eat

each other, they eat fruits and vegetables instead. Animals raised for human consumption are raised on farms for that purpose and do not seem to be aware of their end; this is an obvious mercy. There are not many species of these.

I was surprised at the number of Immortals who have animal friends now during the reign. Most of them are near replicas of the beloved “pets” they had as mortals. They simply pick parents and allow them to breed. Then these Immortals touch the mother and bless the offspring with certain characteristics which cause them to be born an almost exact replica of their beloved departed pet. The mortals are less picky; they usually just chose the young animal they want and take it home to raise it as a companion. I have heard of cases, however, where a mortal will ask an Immortal friend who lives nearby to bless a mother animal for them in order to get a near replica of one of their own departed pets. The Immortal animal lover is more than willing to do this for a mortal neighbor. I asked Francis why there are no immortal animals and he said that this is not granted to them. However, most everyone seems quite happy with their blessed animal offspring.

Francis even has some angels who help care for the animals. They all seem to be from the lowest rank of angels like Lucius. Some of them are smaller than Lucius. I assume that they take this form intentionally in order not to scare the animals or that may be their created form.

I asked Francis why he thinks he is more remembered for his love of animals than for the religious order that bore his name. He says it is because Immortals during this reign are more interested in their animals than in an ancient religious order. There are many Immortal brothers from the order who help Francis with his animal work.

[N.D.] Francis was correct; I was very impressed with the dolphins. They live at the aquatic reserves. They speak human languages fluently. They are obviously the smartest of the animals. But my fascination is not reserved to dolphins.

All serpents now have legs; there are none who crawl on their bellies now. That was the result of an ancient curse that the Emperor has lifted during the reign.

I love lions. They are so gentle now. I have moved several to the residence where I have had to construct appropriate dwellings and exercise lawns for them and the other animals. There is plenty of room at the reserves for all of them, it is just that I want to have many of them around me at the residence. If the next keeper does not want them, they will not be forsaken. Francis and his brothers and angels will take care of everything.

[N.D.] My favorite lion pair, they seem to pair for life with one mate now, is Casper and Grace. They live with me here; I mean they really live with me. They have the run not only of the property but of the house as well. Casper is a medium size male with a great golden mane and Grace is a perfect match. They eat lots of soy beans and other grains. They are gentle and intelligent. They can speak a few words and understand almost anything in the universal language. They aim to please. Nearby children come to see them and they ride them all around on their backs. If they attempt to enter the house when mortals are here who might fear them, Lucius blocks the way and forbids them. They obey angels absolutely as do all the animals. Sometimes I think they see angels that we do not. I have always thought that it was a matter of which angels appeared, not a matter of our ability to see them, but that may not be the case.

[N.D.] Angels and animals would seem to be at the opposite end of the wonderful creation spectrum. In other words, we are most likely to think of angels as very intelligent and eternal super beings and animals as stupid and very short lived. Some of this is, of course, true and actually we mortals are closer to the animals than we are to the angels. But I have found some similarities between the angels and the animals. In the first place, neither of them is as confused as we mortals tend to be. They both know who they are and accept it absolutely. We mortals are frequently trying to be what we are not; we are either trying to be more than we are or we are acting as less than we are. We are either grandiose or we are debasing ourselves. Not true with angels or animals. Because they do not try to be anything that they are not, this gives them both, angels and animals, a sort of built-in

dignity that we often miss as mortals. This is strange since we mortals are actually made in the image of the Emperor. But somewhere along the line we have lost something. When our original parents lost their favor with the Emperor and His Father, we all fell out of favor with them. Of course, the Immortals have regained this favor. Until we discover our chances of regaining favor, I often prefer the company of angels and animals. I have never seen Lucius angry, embarrassed, sad or ecstatic. He may miss out on some of the joy, but he is certainly spared the sorrow that we often experience. The animals from time to time get to share our sorrows. Sometimes they are abused in spite of the present laws.

But even then they bear it with dignity. Now they are free to be our friends. Francis and I find them to be fine friends indeed. When I want to move some of my animal friends from a preserve to my residence, I have found that Lucius will do it for me.

The first time I confronted this problem Lucius informed me in his own way that he could help. Actually I wanted to move Casper and Grace from Francis' preserve in Africa to my residence. I had asked Francis about this and he had agreed. I told the Lions about this and they acted very excited. They had never been out of the preserve that they had been born in. I began to make arrangements with a local transporter to send them to Atlanta by ship. The trip was to take over three weeks and I hoped that they would not get seasick. I was traveling openly so it was known who I am and Lucius was visible just above and behind me. The transport man was temporarily called away on another matter so I sat there in his garden drinking some tea.

Lucius moved directly in front of me. I thought that it was a summons to go somewhere. When he did not speak, I asked. "What? Lucius, what is it?"

"Keeper, I can move the animals for you," he responded.

What a marvelous idea. Why had I not thought of it. After all, Francis travels with animals and his angel opens a portal for them.

"Great, Lucius," I said. "I don't know why I did not ask you in the first place."

“That is quite all right, Keeper,” he answered. “You and I have not encountered this before.”

When the transporter returned, I thanked him and apologized. “You see, sir,” I said. “I had failed to ask my angel here if he could do it. But he can. So sorry, I will be glad to recommend you to other mortals.”

He was polite, but I could tell that he was a little angry about me getting his hopes up about the opportunity of serving the Keeper. That would probably increase his business. I really should be more careful.

[N.D.] As it worked out, I ended up by returning to the residence with Casper and Grace, a pair of ostriches named Bwana and Binti which is Swahili for Mister and Miss, a gorgeous Parrot named Bertrum who talks almost as good as Francis’ friend, Arthur, a pair of Zebra named Horace and Herminie, a hippopotamus named Pounder, and the tiny black and white monkey that I held when I first met Francis’ named, Kidogo, which means ‘small.’ He is grown now but he will never be very large. Francis had named the monkey and the other animals had been named by the mortal game helpers which Francis keeps at that preserve. When we arrived without warning in the middle of the lawn in my front garden, it was quite a surprise to my staff.

“Everyone just stay calm,” I shouted. “There is no reason to get excited. My librarian’s little highland terrier named Gordon came running at full speed half barking and half trying to form some words. The animals who had arrived with me were still recovering from their first instantaneous journey and, as it turned out, they had never met a highland terrier. They were all just about to bolt when I commanded, “Hold it! Freeze. Every animal just stay where you are!” They all did as I ordered. “Gordon, that means you as well!” I bellowed. Gordon stopped. “Sit,” I said. Gordon sat and the new arrivals looked at me with a look of great thankfulness. We took a few minutes for them all to get acquainted and I talked to my head gardener Jimmy about where to house them all. It was not too long before I redesigned my garden to accommodate animal visitors from all over.

“A highland terrier?” Bertrum said. “Where do they come from, Keeper?” Then he cocked his head expecting an answer from me.

“Uh, Scotland, I believe, Bertrum.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” Gordon managed to say. It was part growl and part speaking. Terriers don’t take well to speech even during the Reign.

All in all I have to give my gardener Jimmy credit for being both creative and patient with my new found love of animals. However, after about a week he came to the library for me quite disturbed.

“Sir, Keeper, really I must . . .,” he began.

“What is it, Jimmy?”

“The Hippo, er, Pounder. He has ruined our small pond. He has eaten the water lilies, flowers and all, and he had made a mud bath out of half of the pond. What am I to do, sir?”

“Now Jimmy please calm down. I am afraid that is Pounder’s nature. As a matter of fact, we will probably have to enlarge the pond and put up with the muddiness.”

“But I thought you enjoyed the lilies,” he said.

“I do, and so does my staff. We will put in a smaller pond in the back for the lilies and enlarge the front one for Pounder. That is his native habitat, you know? A pond.”

“How will we keep him out of the new pond?” Jimmy asked.

“I will ask him to stay out. He is a nice fellow; he will cooperate,” I said.

“Oh, it’s that simple then?” Jimmy asked.

“Of course, let’s go talk to Pounder now.”

We went to the front pond where I must admit that the Hippo had made a glorious mess.

“Pounder,” I called.

The big animal surfaced in the water where before only his eyes could be seen breaking the surface.

“Siiiiir?” he said in a deep bass tone.

“Can you come here?” I asked pointing to the shoreline.

He came directly to us and started to emerge from the water. I motioned for him to stay with his massive legs still in the water.

“Pounder, we are going to enlarge this pond for you,” I said.

“Gooooood,” was his answer. Then, “I caaaaaan heelp.”

“Yes, fine,” I said. I presumed that he would act as a mighty earth mover. But I left poor Jimmy to discover that.

“Now I want you to work with Jimmy here on this,” I said.

“Yeeees, Jiimy. Niiice maaaaan,” he said. Jimmy seemed surprised but pleased.

“Now, Pounder,” I said. “We are going to build another pond around behind my house,” I pointed. “It is for flowers. I am asking you to not go there. Will you help us with that?”

“Yeeeeess, Keeeeeper,” he answered.

“Does he really understand?” Jimmy asked.

“What are you going to do for me now?” I asked the Hippo.

“Nooooo swimmmm iin ooootheer poond,” he answered.

“There, you see, Jimmy,” I said. “Everything will be fine.” Jimmy seemed to be convinced.

“If you would like for me to help communicate with these, I would be glad to,” Bertrum said to Jimmy. I had not noticed him follow us from the house. He was riding on the back of the terrier. They had become great friends. Bertrum would much rather ride than take the effort to fly.

“Uh, yea, great,” Jimmy said a little surprised to be approached by a Parrot.

Bertrum shouted something to Pounder in another language. The Hippo rose up out of the water and shook his head vigorously. We didn’t ask about this.

[N.D.] This afternoon during my tea break in the rear garden Bwana and Binti approached me. It seems that they like to race. They shifted from one long leg to the other as they stood in front of me. They started to speak, but it just came out as a series of shrieks. Then Bertrum flew in and landed on Binti’s back. This got my attention as Bertrum is usually too lazy to fly and I have

never seen him on the back of another bird, even the ostriches. Bwana and Bertrum exchanged a series of peeps and squeaks, then Bertrum said something to Binti and she moved closer to me so that the parrot was practically in my face.

“They have a concern, sir,” Bertrum said politely.

“And that is . . .?” I said.

“They like to race. Actually they need to race, you know, race and run.”

“I have noticed that,” I answered.

“They have set up a sort of a course around the residence, but they frequently step on some flowers or ruin one thing or another. So, they have stopped running as much.”

“So, what do they want?” I asked.

“Well, if it does not offend you,” Bertrum went on cautiously. “They would like to know if they can run outside the residence grounds, and if you could bring some more of their kind here to run with them. They, realize, Keeper, that they are asking for a lot and if it is not possible they . . .”

I interrupted at this point. “No, that is not too much,” I said.

The ostriches jumped around and clucked excitedly and Bertrum almost fell off of Binti’s back.

“Aawwwk! Steady now, Steady!” Bertrum shouted.

They calmed down a little.

“I’ll tell you what,” I said. “I will send for two more couples and we will lay out a great circling path for them to run on.”

This time Binti was careful not to throw Bertrum in her excitement.

Jimmy was not thrilled with his new assignment, but he got the path laid out and I fixed it with the local civil administrator so that the community was ready to see ‘the ostrich races’ on a daily basis. The only complication we have had is that the local children and pets love to join in the race. So far no mortals have been injured and it is a great thrill to the community. Of course, the ostriches always win so that does not count. The runner up is considered to be the winner of the race. It is usually an especially fast young man and sometimes one of the faster pet dogs. My

residence is pretty much of a menagerie, but everyone seems to enjoy it and no one better than I.

10.17.759 C.R. Today I had a most unusual report come to me and I have had to refer it to the Dais. It is a little known fact that Elaine has her own small Dais not far from Henry Sawyer's. She occasionally uses it to deal with matters within Buckhead. There are even a few under rulers for her there. I decided to take this matter directly to Elaine. One of my jackals, yes I brought in two pairs of jackals to my menagerie, sat muttering at my front door for quite a while. Lucius shooed him away several times, but he just kept coming back. Finally my cook brought it to my attention. I went out to see the animal. At first she seemed surprised that I had actually come. Then she said in her usual whiny yammering tone, "It's jus not right, eggs-cellen-see. Jus not right."

"What's not right?" I asked as I squatted down by her.

"They hurt tham, eggs-cellen-see. They hurt tham."

Suddenly she was joined by her mate who had been waiting in the bushes.

"Tha cow-herds, Keeepr," he said. "They hurt the petttts."

I was beginning to catch on.

"Izz it nut against the coode?" the male asked.

"What are your names" I asked. "I'm sorry I have forgotten."

"I em Jeth," the female said. "He em Raa ."

"Alright Ra, Jeth, you are telling me that some mortal is abusing some of the pet animal friends near here?"

"Yaz, yaz," they both answered.

"Lucius, get Bertrum," I said. In a few seconds Lucius was back with the parrot who was quite shaken by his ride. Lucius had traveled the angel corridor to get the bird and then flashed immediately back to my side.

"Awaaaaakk!" Bertrum said shaking his head as though to clear his thoughts.

"Is he all right, Lucius"

"Yes, Keeper."

"Why did you bring him back that way?"

“It is my way, Keeper. Did I do wrong?” Lucius asked.

“No, no, of course not,” I answered. I was not quite accustomed to dealing with so broad a range of creatures.

With the parrot’s help I pieced together the entire story. It seems that there is a group of young men with a few young women in Buckhead that although not in open rebellion do not have enough to do and they started tormenting some of the pet dogs and even some cats. At first it was simple enough, hiding their food or making them beg for it. Then they started hurting the animals and seem to get some sort of perverted satisfaction out of that. Some of the animals have been partially crippled and one has apparently lost the vision in one eye as a result of this treatment. Since the local animal pets are not improved by the Immortal Francis, they can not express themselves like the members of my menagerie can.

The jackals have taken some tours of the community and have somehow been ‘told’ about this treatment. The male, Raa, was afraid to approach me but Jeth just could not hold back. When Raa saw that I was willing to listen, he came out of hiding.

“So, Elaine, that is the entire story,” I said as I stood before her Dais with a jackal on either side of me and Bertrum on my shoulder.

“Ken, you were right to come to me. But I would have met you at your residence,” Elaine said.

“Well, since this is an official matter I thought that I should present it officially, mistress,” I said.

“I can deal with that,” she answered smiling. “It is against the Imperial code to abuse any created being. And we, the princes, think that it is terrible.”

“Now, tell them to tell us through the parrot, it will be more efficient that way, where and when this activity can be observed and we will put a stop to it,” Elaine instructed.

Bertrum spoke quickly to the jackals and reported to us in clear language. It seems that this activity occurs at irregular times and they could not pin point a time and place to catch these pet abusers. Then Bertrum told us that all four jackals would go into the community and send us word through some of my own sparrows. The sparrows would report to the parrot who would inform me and Lucius and Lucius would get Elaine or one of her

under governors and we would flash directly to the scene. That sounded rather round about to me and to Elaine but we agreed to try it. They cautioned us that it would most likely be in the early evening hours.

[N.D.] It was only two days before the whole string of contacts worked perfectly. Elaine and Lucius and I were on the scene in no time. Two dogs, barely more than puppies where being mercilessly gouged with sticks. Our appearance was quite startling there in that dirty alley. Of course, they stopped their activity immediately and the young woman even started stroking one of the pets very lovingly. As soon as we arrived, Raa and Jeth emerged from the shadows. When these young people saw the jackals, they were obviously frightened. The jackals made good use of this by growling deeply and narrowing their eyes to look as threatening as possible.

Elaine saw their fear and said, "Perhaps I should just let these jackals have their way."

"No, mistress, no please, we did not really mean any harm," the young woman said.

"But you have. You have hurt these animal friends and others," I said angrily.

One young man recognized me. "Keeper, excellency, we did not start out to hurt them, please."

"Nevertheless you did," I said. I could barely hold my temper. I approached the two puppies and scratched them behind the ears. They received it with joy and seemed forgiving towards everyone as they are so prone to do.

Elaine spoke directly to the puppies and the jackals. "Go get every animal who has been harmed by these mortals." She snapped her fingers and a dozen of her angels appeared. These mortals cowered in fear. Elaine continued, "If they can not come on their own, bring them," she commanded the angels. Then she snapped her fingers again and we were all at her Dais. Within half an hour every abused animal and every abuser stood before her.

Elaine touched and repaired every animal. They were all very affectionate and seemed most thankful. She sentenced all the youths to community service and threatened them with harsh

judgments if they failed in their duties. The terms of their punishments were left open and they were commanded to appear before her every month. Her patrol would see to that. Then she had the guardians, some might call them owners, of these animal friends brought before her and charged them to better care for them. They were duly impressed and I expect that they will not forget this. Then she went to the Metropolitan and asked him to issue a public directive that no animal friends were to be abused.

12.02.765 C.R. I have decided to open shelters for needy animal friends everywhere and to send spies far and near to uncover instances of abuse. I have decided that birds will probably be the best spies. Bertrum now has three assistants to help take the reports from these birds. I have also had Lucius coordinate with the angel patrols in this project. The Immortal Francis is quite pleased and has given his full support.

[N.D.] Last night at about three A.M. Lucius woke me. I was very fast asleep and it must have taken him some time as he is always very gentle when awakening anyone in the family. In my dreams I remember feeling like someone was washing my face with a very soft damp washcloth like mother used to do. It was Lucius stroking me face with his ‘hands.’ When I opened my eyes he was very close.

“Uh. Lucius. What is it?” I asked.

“Keeper, Chloe has been attacked in London, during a speech,” he said softly.

I was instantly awake. “Where is the Legate?” I asked.

“She will arrive here momentarily,” the angel answered.

I jumped up and got dressed. As I was tying my shoes, Elaine appeared in my room.

“Ken, my dear boy,” she said. She came directly towards me. I had been giving myself a hard time for using Chloe so much at speaking engagements. She was so good at it and loved doing it. She was probably the most recognized of any of the fifteen of us for her public appearances. She always represented me exactly and never gave the appearance of having any office herself even though she was my Assistant for public affairs. I was blaming

myself for her hurt and wondering how bad it was or whether Elaine or another prince would fix everything. Elaine touched my head and I immediately felt calmer.

“This is not your fault,” she said immediately.

“What is there to know, mistress?” I asked.

“She was speaking at an early morning rally in London, talking about the history of the Reign and where we are now in it when someone threw a large knife at her, a knife designed for throwing, it pierced her exactly through the heart.” I blanched white.

“Easy, easy now, Ken. The prince of Chelsea, Mary Pearl, has removed the blade and effected some healing. Do not be concerned. Are you ready?”

“Yes, mistress.” We were in London. The crowd was being held back by the mortal police. Chloe was sitting on the platform that she had been speaking from. She looked at me and smiled. She still looked shaken and pale. Several Immortals were holding her in an upright position. Elaine had brought her full escort as Legate in order to purposely make a large impression, and together with the various other escorts the sky was thick with angels. The Metropolitan of London was there. They were all fusing over my dear sister. The culprit was being held just in front of the stage, a makeshift Dais, by two angels. He was angry and snarling. I talked to Chloe for a few minutes and she still seemed to have a hard time catching her breath. The Immortal who had helped her, Prince Mary Pearl, seemed a little concerned. After a few minutes Elaine motioned for me to join the Metropolitan’s examination of the culprit. I listened.

The Metropolitan of London is one Alfred Hotchkins. He is big and burly and still speaks with his mortal accent. The man who attacked my sister freely acknowledged his guilt and did not ask for mercy.

“Recommendations?” the Metropolitan asked of me. “She is your sister, Keeper.”

“Put him out of his misery,” I said angrily.

To my surprise he did just that instantly. He barely pointed with his finger and the man dropped dead. Some mortals removed the body. Later I wished that I had taken this more seriously. Could

the man have been reformed? What was his motive? I learned not to speak hastily when ask for an opinion on judgment from an Imperial Prince.

Elaine and I took Chloe back to her London residence, but she was not quite right.

“Elaine, what is it?” I asked. “Is there something that you can do?”

“Possibly. But I don’t think that I am to do it,” she answered.

“Then what?” I asked.

“We don’t know everything always,” she answered.

“You think and meditate on it for a while. Meanwhile let her rest, that will probably help.”

I agreed.

“Ken,” Chloe called to me just before she dropped to sleep.

I hurried to her side. She still had that same sweet smile.

“Why? Who was he?”

“I didn’t ask,” I answered. She looked at me quizzically. I encouraged her to rest. She would have forgiven the man and tried to rehabilitate him. I hoped she wouldn’t ask anymore.

08.17.777 C.R. Chloe did not improve any over the next week and a half. She did not complain, but I felt responsible. Elaine was gone to the other side. I finally decided that I had to go to the Emperor himself on the matter. I went to the Metropolitan Alfred Hotchkins and he arranged an audience.

I expected enormous crowds and a long wait before I could speak to the Emperor. This was not the case. I arrived in a beautiful room overlooking the capital with only Lucius to keep me company. I sat in a nice chair near a window and Lucius hovered contentedly. After about ten or fifteen minutes Lucius dropped to the floor and bowed deeply. I still did not see or hear anything, but I got down on my knees and faced the doors opposite the windows. I would never ignore a clue from Lucius. In a moment the doors actually opened and the Emperor walked in by himself. The doors shut behind him. I looked down then I stole a glance as he approached. He walked casually but purposefully like he had nothing to do, but whatever he did do would be full of

authority. His robe was white and plain. As he approached, I looked down again. Then I saw his feet in his golden sandals. I saw the scars on the top of his feet between the bones. I felt his hand under my chin raising my face to his. He was smiling and I was overwhelmed. Here was the epitome of love. Here was peace. Here was eternity in the flesh. Here was the Emperor. We looked at each other for a minute or so. The room vanished from my consciousness. It felt like I understood everything, everything about Chloe and me and about the whole world itself although I could not explain a thing. Finally, he sat on a chair and motioned for me to sit facing him. Then he spoke.

“Ken, son of Amanda.”

“Yes Majesty.” That was all I could say.

I felt personally recognized. He said my name. He said mother’s name, her real name. I felt that he knew me; he knew us; he knew everything that we ever thought or did. He was in no hurry. I wanted to choose my words carefully. Finally I managed to say,

“My sister, Chloe, Majesty . . . “

“She is not completely well.” He said.

“No, Sire.”

“What do you want me to do?”

What an incredible question from the Lord of all.

Then it struck me. I remembered Marco.

“Just say the word, Sire, and she will be well and strong.”

“You have learned well, young Ken. She is well and strong. Come, walk with me now,” the Emperor said.

I did not doubt for one second that Chloe was wonderfully fine back in London from that second on. I walked for over an hour with the Emperor in his private gardens and I have never been the same since.

Chloe has spoken for me many times now since her restoration and she never experiences any fear.

[N.D.] I was reading over some of Joan’s journals this morning when Bertrum flew into the library and landed on his perch that I keep for him there.

“Awk! Abuse Keeper. Abuse,” he said as he moved from side to side on his perch as he does when he is very upset.

“Where, Bertrum?” I asked.

“Borneo, Keeper. They beat the donkeys without mercy,” he answered.

“Are the donkeys there pulling vehicles for them?” I asked.

“Yes, Keeper. But they pull as hard as they can until they are exhausted. Why beat them?” he asked.

“There is no reason for that,” I said. “Lucius!”

Lucius was at my side and we were gone. Lucius knew when to bring a small contingent of Francis’ patrol, so we arrived at a silver mine in Borneo with four patrol angels, myself and Lucius and Bertrum.

Bertrum had taken to this kind of travel right off, but Alan, my gamekeeper, did not. Perhaps it was because Bertrum was accustomed to flying. I wanted Alan with me on this mission, but I also knew that while he was recovering from the trip the offenders would certainly stop their abuse of my animal friends and possibly even make a run for it. I wanted to catch them in the act, so I told Lucius to take us to a place nearby where we could observe and I took my binoculars with me. At this request Lucius departed for a few seconds and returned. I knew that he was checking out the situation without mortals because he could be in a place without appearing. If we were with him, he would have to place us immediately as we could not become invisible or wait in the ‘in between’ during the trip.

“Ready, Keeper,” Lucius announced. “I have chosen a place just up the hill where you can look down on them.” He glanced briefly at my binoculars. I never asked how Lucius knew exactly where Bertrum was talking about as the coordination between the animals and the angels is usually pretty good. We emerged at this place just up the hill and I assured Alan that he was still alive and uninjured. As I watched, I saw the cruelty that Bertrum’s ‘agents’ had reported. There were several parrots screeching at the men from the trees. Probably part of Bertrum’s network. I did not have to watch for long before I was anxious to get down there; these small animals were suffering terribly. There were four teams of six donkeys each just outside the mine entrance.

“Are there any more in the mine?” I asked Lucius.

“Yes, Keeper. Two teams,” he answered. “But they can come out here.”

“Good. Take us down there,” I said. Alan begged to run down and meet us there but I refused. If he was going to be any good to me, he had to learn to travel with the angels. We appeared right next to the teams in front of the mine. They were all quite startled.

“Do you know the punishment for mistreating these animals?” I asked.

“They all looked dumbstruck.

“Sir, we, that is, they . . .” one man, apparently a foreman, stuttered.

“No excuses,” I said. They were all looking at the angels. Bertrum had taken his perch on my shoulder. From there he squawked to the surrounding parrots who answered in kind.

“He says he has witnesses,” I said nodding towards my shoulder. “You have been mistreating these small loyal burden bearers for some time.”

“He? You mean that bird?” the foreman asked.

“Yes, that bird,” I answered.

Before I could continue Bertrum spoke. “You are a cruel and unfeeling man,” he said.

All the men looked surprised. “Did you teach him to say that?” the foreman asked.

“No. He says what he thinks,” I answered.

“Oh, get serious,” the foreman said. He looked at the other men and they all laughed.

“You won’t laugh when the Keeper is through with you,” Bertrum said.

“The Keeper?” the foreman said. His face turned very serious.

“Sir, are you the Keeper, er, Keith?” he asked.

“Ken, Ken is my name,” I answered. “And I am the Keeper. And this parrot is of the improved variety. And these are real angels from the patrol of the Immortal Francis. And you are all in deep trouble.”

They all turned very sober and hung their heads.

“Since I am not an Immortal, I can not judge you,” I said. “But I am sending for Francis,” I nodded to Lucius and one of the patrol angels left. “We will wait right here until he comes.”

After a few minutes the foreman spoke, “Sir, my men are thirsty. Can they get a drink?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “But they can release the animals and take them to water.”

They released the donkeys leaving their whips on the ground where they had dropped them. By then the other two teams had emerged from the mine and had been quickly informed by the foreman. After all the animals had a drink, the men started to drink from the troughs.

“Stop,” I said. “No drinking of any kind.”

“But Sir, that is cruel,” the foreman said.

“You should certainly know about that,” I answered him.

Francis arrived with another larger escort in a few minutes. The foreman got down on his knees and the other men followed. Francis inspected each of the little burros stroking them softly and speaking softly into each of their ears. Then he turned to the men.

“Why?” he asked.

The foreman answered. “Excellency, unless we apply the whip they will not work. Our employer requires so many tons of ore a day. We have no choice.”

“I do not believe you,” Francis said. “A little gentle urging and they will pull your wagons. They are glad for the work.”

Silence.

“And your employer. Where is he?” Francis asked.

“At the home office,” the foreman said.

Francis instructed some of his escort and they vanished to return in a minute with a well dressed man who was obviously quite frightened.

“You are over these men?” Francis asked.

“Yes, excellency,” the man answered.

“Did you know that they beat the animals?” Francis asked.

The man looked surprised. “Excellency?”

“Yes, they abuse these animals. Do you know the Imperial code?” Francis asked.

The man seemed befuddled.

“Then listen clearly and I shall tell you all that you need to know before I lay punishment upon you,” Francis said.

“Firstly, it is against the code for you to treat these animals with cruelty. Secondly, I am Francis the friend of all animals and I have the authority of an Over-Lord-At- Large in these matters. Thirdly, this will not be allowed to continue.”

Still a stunned silence. By this time the local Over-Lord and his escort had arrived. He and Francis embraced and talked briefly. There was no doubt as to their unity. The local Over-Lord nodded to Francis and stepped back.

All of these men were now assembled in front of them.

“This is what will happen,” Francis announced.

“First, these animals are taken from you along with the reserves in that pen.” At this several angels approached the animals and disappeared with them. They were taken to my reserve for sick or injured animals in Brazil.

“You,” Francis pointed to the executive, “will be fined heavily for your lack of action in this matter.” An amount was announced which received a severe wince from the man. It obviously hit him where it hurt.

“You men,” Francis pointed to the foreman and the drivers, “will pull these carts yourselves for 30 days for 12 hours a day. No animal help will be allowed. The company will just have to bear this loss and replace the animals as well. And you will not slacken in your efforts or worse will happen to you.”

“But excellency,” the foreman complained. “These carts are very heavy.”

“I know,” Francis answered. “as you are about to find out. And you mister executive, these particular animals will never be returned to you. They are honorably retired.”

Again a wince from the company man. Silence prevailed among the other men for some time. Finally, the biggest of the drivers spoke.

“Sir, Excellency,” he said.

Francis nodded.

“Is there, can there be any other punishment for us? Some of us may not survive this work.”

“Death. Now.” Francis said flatly.

By now the seriousness of the situation was firmly established. I paid my respects to the local Over-Lord, and I was back at my residence in Atlanta.

04.12.786 C.R. The twins, my sisters Jan and Jean, continue to be an embarrassment to me. I keep getting reports of their inappropriate behavior through mortals channels. People would usually draw me aside and say something like, “I don’t want to bother you about this, Keeper, but I felt that it was my duty to let you know. Your sisters, the twins Jan and Jean, well, . . . they, you might say, overdo it from time to time.”

When I would ask for more details, they would say, “Well, sir, it is primarily drink and men. They have no discretion. I am so sorry for your sake.”

Then they would repeat reports from one city or another. The Keeper’s office is well established and known throughout the world by now, and because they are my sisters, they are given a lot of leniency by the mortal authorities and by people in general. They are smart enough to stay clear of any Immortal Dais’. I knew that they were rudderless, but I did not know what to do. Elaine suggested that I have Lucius bring them home and even offered to talk to them with me. One evening soon after Elaine’s offer, I instructed Lucius.

“I want you to go and collect my sisters, Jan and Jean,” I said. “Find them, wherever they are and whatever they are doing, and bring them immediately to me. Do not give them any time to clean up or change their appearances. Just snatch them up and bring them here in front of me in this room.”

Lucius seemed to meditate for a short time, no doubt communicating with his network and then blinked away.

I had already sent for Chloe and Jason and Anne to join me for moral support. Anne was, as usual, in the library. Chloe and Jason had to be brought back from Holland where they had been speaking.

“What! Brother?” was all that Jan could manage when they arrived. She was furious. Jean looked more ashamed than anything,

she was the milder of the two. They were both dressed in identical skimpy dresses except for the color; Jan's was pink and Jean's was yellow. Chloe and Jason and Anne and I stood. Lucius hovered just over where he had dropped them. I glanced at Lucius. The twins saw this and looked his way as well. Jan calmed down considerably. It never ceases to amaze me how a wrong-doing mortal's attitude will change at the sight of an angel.

"What is it, brother?" Jan asked more softly.

"Yea, what?" Jean echoed quietly.

"What were they doing?" I asked Lucius.

They knew that the angel would not lie; they had been raised with him. They also knew that he would absolutely obey the Keeper. They both lowered their heads and stared at the floor.

They were with some men, Keeper," Lucius said.

"Doing what?" I asked.

"Mostly drinking," Lucius answered. "But the situation was going bad very quickly."

"I can imagine," I said. "Like turning into an orgy!"

As I shouted the last word they dropped to their knees.

"What am I going to do with you two?" I asked.

"We don't know, brother," they murmured in unison.

Chloe and Jason and Anne and I sat down. We all sat in silence for a few minutes. Chloe got up and went over to the twins and sat on the floor with them. She raised their faces and kissed them both on the forehead; they started to cry and Chloe cried with them and held them. Before long Anne was into it as well. Jason and I looked at each other and waited. Perhaps the love of their sisters would help. I did not know. After all this calmed down, I sent the twins to their room under restrictions. They could not leave the residence grounds without my permission. They knew better than to try to slip past Lucius. They seemed sorry for things this night, but I did not expect this to last long.

I saw the twins around the residence for the next few days and they would smile weakly when we passed. There was still no lasting solution.

"I could bring charges against them before you officially," I said to Elaine one afternoon in my study.

“Yes, you could,” she answered. “And I would put them under supervision.”

“Together?” I asked.

“No, I don’t think so,” Elaine answered. “I would separate them as part of the punishment, each with their own supervising angel. They would need jobs somewhere. Not hard labor but something unpleasant. Perhaps just as farm workers here in Georgia until they showed some signs of change.”

“What should the charge be?” I asked.

“You are the head of the family now. It can be disrespect for the family head, tarnishing your good name or even illicit sexual actions. I am sure that we could come up with plenty of evidence against them.”

“Ugh! What a choice,” I said. “To either let them run rampant or this.” I thought for a while. “And if I punish the twins, I have to wonder what young Roger is doing.”

“Roger is more discrete,” Elaine said.

“What do you know?” I asked.

“That is he more discrete. You don’t need to be burdened with any more,” she said. I nodded in agreement. If Roger was being discrete, then that was enough, for now.

“Why did mother and father want so many children?” I thought out loud.

“Because they loved each other very much and they loved children,” Elaine said. “Twelve out of fifteen are productive and loving people. That’s actually pretty good for mortals, you know.”

“Yes, I guess so, mistress. I guess so.”

Elaine departed and I decided to give the girls a few more days.

[N.D.] Today I noticed the twins romping with a baby giraffe, one of Twigga’s offspring. The twins had on jeans and shirts but they were still identified by the scarf holding up the pony tail; Jan’s was pink and Jean’s was yellow. As I watched, I thought that they aren’t really bad girls, they just have no sense of calling in life and so they drift to the lowest forms of entertainment with men; at least they have never been reported in any form of perversion, they just drink and sleep around a lot.

[N.D.] Today my gamekeeper Alan came to me with an idea.

“Good morning, Keeper,” he began.

“Alan, how are all the animals?” I asked.

“Fine, Keeper, just fine. The hippos keep overrunning their boundaries. It is hard for them. But we speak to them again and they are all right for another month or two.”

“I have full confidence in you, Alan.”

“Thank you, Keeper. I am honored. Keeper, I came about, . . . well, I have a suggestion concerning your twin sisters.”

“Really? What is it?” I asked. He had my attention.

“They seem to really like the animals. They have started helping around the residence animals and I could find full time jobs for them if you so desire.”

I could have kissed the man. But he would have gone into shock. I calmed down and managed a better response. “Yes, fine, Alan. Anything that would give them a sense of purpose would be a great help. Thank you, please proceed.”

“Yes, good. I will get back to you later, Keeper,” Alan said and he departed hurriedly.

[N.D.] It has been almost five weeks since my conversation with Alan about the twins and today Jan approached me for permission to leave the residence grounds. At first I thought, ‘here it comes, she wants to party some more.’

“To go to the preserve of the Immortal Francis in Africa,” she said. “Jean and I. We can be of some help there.” She looked at me quite innocently.

“Let me think about it for a few days,” I said.

“Yes. Brother,” she replied. No argument. No attitude. Perhaps she was improving.

I inquired of Alan how the twins were doing and he said that they were working out fine. He said that recently they had stayed up two nights looking over a zebra and an leopard who were having a hard time giving birth. When the colt and the kitten were finally born, they cared for them for days and for the mothers. They seemed to be very involved in their work. I commended them to the supervision of Francis’ people who assured me that I would

be informed if they wandered from their work. Things seem to be going quite well with the twins now.

[N.D.] Today my sister Pamela came to me with what was to be a surprising complaint.

“Brother, I do dearly love your animal friends, but May’s children should receive at least equal consideration from you,” she said.

I was shocked. I thought that May’s children were receiving all that they needed. I had put Pam in charge of the children’s centers that were started by the great Keeper May and she had taken to the task right away. I rarely heard anything from her and all praised her work and dedication to the task. I was pleased that I had known where to put her to work and I felt that she was very satisfied with her work.

“How are the children slighted?” I asked.

“There are still too many in each home,” Pam answered. “And I need more mortal help in caring for them. There are more and more of them every month.”

“I did not realize this,” I said. “Of course, I will help. But why do you think there are more of them every month? Are more children being neglected? If so, this should be taken to the highest level.”

“There are more being neglected, Ken. There are more irresponsible people having children and not caring for them than ever before,” Pam told me.

During the glorious Reign? I thought. This can not be. What should be done about it? We asked to see Elaine immediately.

“There certainly should be something done about this,” Elaine said. “This is unacceptable behavior during the Reign. The Emperor has always been the friend of children. Something will be done and it will be severe and effective. I am going to talk to the Chancellor right away.”

[N.D.] An Imperial decree has been issued and summary judgment promised to anyone who conceives children and does not take care of them. I don’t know why this was not caught earlier.

Surely it was not merely waiting until Pam made a issue of it; at least I don't think so. But I have learned not to question the timing of justice in the Reign. How ever it comes out, I must presume that the timing and the end result are under the ultimate control of the Emperor and his governors.

The decree unfortunately did not do much for the children already in the homes. Most of their parents had already died due to their unsavory practices or as the result of judgment for other crimes. I have issued a public request for help and the response has been most encouraging. Pam says that she now has all the helpers that she needs and that loving adoptions are now much greater than before.

[N.D.] As I talked to Pam and Jason today, I again assured her that I did not intend for my animal friends to be treated any better than the children. Jason is my assistant for public liaison and he is a great help in this matter.

"Oh, I know, brother," Pam said. "You have so many things to do. Jason has been a dear in this. We also have a suggestion."

"Suggest," I said.

Pam looked to Jason.

"Ah, it is merely this, brother," Jason began. "We think it would be wonderful if we could combine the care of the children with the care of the animals." He paused and I waited.

So he continued. "You see, we think that they could get a lot from each other. Many of the animals have a very good calming effect on the children, especially the furry ones. But some of the other do as well. It mostly depends on the child. And the children need to get their minds off of themselves. They need someone to care for so that they can learn responsibility. They have not had a lot of care or much responsibility. So, if the children could help take care of the animals and the animals could help to comfort and calm the children, we think that it would be a great combination."

"Well, many of our people have pet animals," I said.

"Yes, brother, they do. But they are the healthy families. Pam's children, er, May's that is, don't have that kind of a

background. Yet, they also need pets, or animal companions, and they need to learn how to take care of them.”

“I see,” I said. “That sounds like a wonderful idea. How would we proceed?”

“Well,” Jason answered. “That is where we would need your backing. We can work and ‘sell’ the idea, but the animals caretakers and the child caretakers would have to cooperate in this. We would need the full authority of your office and perhaps some Immortal authority as well. At first this might look complicated and difficult to many, but we believe that the benefits would far out weigh any problems.”

“You two have convinced me,” I said. “Let’s get started.”

“Great,” they chimed in unison.

“Also, brother,” Jason added. “The twins could help a lot here too.”

“Do you two think they are ready for that?” I asked.

“Oh yes,” Pam said. “They would be a great help and they would get a lot out of it as well.”

The twins were thrilled to be asked to help.

07.22.808 C.R. I am in my 79th year. As I look back on my term as Keeper, I often wish that I could have done more. The animals are my great comfort. I have seen many generations of them come and go. I am always amazed at their nobility. I am very thankful for the work of the Immortal Francis. He has done so much for his animal friends. My siblings have all done well as the children and brothers and sisters of the Keeper. Some of them are already gone. My daughter Merle will succeed me. The Emperor be praised!

This book is a chapter from
Reign II: A Story Of The
Seventh Millennium and
Reign: The Millennium

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