Trials

Chapter 6

By Aria Moonsinger

As she made her way out of the swamp; she came to a fork in the road, she looked at the map and didn't see the fork on the map. As she studied the map; a snarf appeared, “Hello there snarf, snarf, are you lost?” he asked. “Hmm oh no; I'm on my way to the Dreary Canal, there is a fork in the road, but not on my map.” Jolene replied. “Perhaps the map is wrong.” offered the unknown snarf. “This map was made by the thundercats; I can't imagine they would make a mistake like a simple fork in the road.” Jolene answered. “Perhaps they did it on purpose.” the snarf said. “They wouldn't; to give me an inaccurate map could be dangerous and they wouldn't put me in any form of danger.” Jolene chided the creature.

Jolene wondered why a snarf would try to convince her that the thundercats would purposefully try to mislead her into danger; then she said, “Nice try Tygra; I happen to know that snarfs and thundercats work together in harmony. Snarfs wouldn't speak ill of any thunderian.”

Suddenly the snarf changed into a form Jolene had only seen in her nightmares. “No; you can't be her, I saw you die...” Jolene cringed from the form in front of her. Then she heard Tygra's warning at the beginning of the trial. 'Before this trial is over, you will face your greatest fear.' Then the form started whispering, “You are just like me; you'll hurt those closest to you and like me you will become alone....” Jolene held her ears and shook her head as she said, “NO! I'm not like you; I'll never be like you. I'm not evil; I only want to help others not hurt them.” “Hahahaha foolish child; you have my power in your very bones, I shaped you to suit my needs. Do you think your Lord Lion-O would love you if he knew the whole truth about you. Really little wolf; how you love to delude yourself.” the form taunted.

Jolene stopped shaking her head and looked up at the torturous form; then said, “I don't care what you say Snake; I've held the Sword of Omens, if there was even the smallest ounce of evil in me I wouldn't have been able to hold it.” “Lion-O's little toy wouldn't and couldn't detect my kind of evil; little wolf, mine is subtle and seductive. Pretent to be good if you wish; but I will have you non the less, perhaps even the handsome Lion-O himself will someday fall to my charms.”

The thought of Lion-O being touched by this being started a fire of rage inside Jolene that she screamed, “NEVER!!! YOU'LL NEVER TOUCH HIM SNAKE!!!!!” and she leaped at the form; but found herself wrestling with Tygra. When she pinned him; he said, “Enough Jolene, you've won.”

When Tygra had rested; he gave her his insignia. Back at the palace; the sword flashed to show that she had won the trial. Lion-O looked down at it and thought, 'This night you won't have me next to you; Blue eyes, I would be too tempted to tell you what my trial is for you.'
Jolene reached the final checkpoint right at sundown. “Hello Jolene; I have supper waiting for you.” said Snarf. “Thanks Snarf; I'm starving, is Lion-O here yet?” Jolene replied. “Reow no, he left you a note explaining why he won't be here tonight.” Snarf said; then Jolene noticed that there was only a place set for one person at the table. Jolene saw the note next to her plate; she picked it up and read it.

“Blue eyes; as much as I wish to be there with you on the last night before my trial, I can't. I would be too tempted to tell you what to expect. Good luck reaching my, my love. Lion-O.”

Her eyes filled with tears as she sat down at the table; Snarf patted her arm, he could see that she loved Lion-O very much. She ate very little; dressed for bed, then cried herself to sleep. All the while she was wishing he was next to her. The trial with Tygra had unnerved her and she wanted to tell him about it; if she waited until the trials were over, she knew she would loose her courage and never tell him. Long ago they had promised to never have any secrets between them; but there was one secret that she had to keep, less she put those she loved in danger. She needed to tell him though; “Perhaps I'll tell him some other time. Father would understand; I'm sure of it.” she said to herself.

The next morning; Jolene dressed in a fresh tunic and boots, ate a few bites of her scrambled eggs and a gulp of coffee. Then she made her way to the Valley of Stone Giants; there she found Lion-O waiting for her. He looked at her and could tell she had cried all night; she looked at him and saw he hadn't slept well either. “Lion-O.” Jolene said. “Jolene; so now it comes down to me.” he said. “Yes, it does.” she replied. “At the beginning of the week; you said that you felt like you were challenging me, do you still feel that way?” Lion-O asked. “Yes, I do.” Jolene answered. “Are you challenging my right to rule and lead?” he asked. “No, God no; I couldn't do what you do. All of you didn't have to go through this; but you did because you respected my decision to prove that I can stand beside all of you in battle.” Jolene replied. “You do now.” he said. “As an ally; not as a fellow thundercat.” Jolene corrected. “Do you still

feel the need to prove yourself worthy of being a thundercat?" Lion-O asked. "No, I don't." she answered. "Then this trial is done." Lion-O said and removed his insignia and handed it to her.

She looked at it; then looked up at Lion-O and said, "I don't understand; how could I have won yours without performing some task, or at least fighting you." "By not challenging me; you have proven your loyality and accepted me as your lord and leader." Lion-O answered. "That's why you wouldn't tell me, or anyone the type of trial I would have with you." Jolene said. "I knew you would pass mine; because of what you told me at the start of this. Not only have you earned my trust, but my insignia as well." Lion-O replied. 'What I need to tell you; just may shake that trust, Red. I hope I can someday tell you my deepest secret.' Jolene thought. "So what now?" she asked. "Later; after everyone has assembled; I'll anoint you, and you'll have your own insignia." he answered. "Has there ever been a human-hybred thundercat before?" she asked. "Not to my knowledge; you know we've never had a thundercat named Jolene either." Lion-O answered. "Guess there is a first time for everything." she said.

Back at the palace; the sword signaled that the final trial was over. "She's already passed Lion-O's trial?" asked Snarf. "What do you suppose the type of trial he had for her?" asked Cheetara. "I am not certain; but it must have been one he knew she would pass since the trial was to take place just outside the gates." replied Lynx-O.

Later in the Council Chamber; all the thundercats were seated around the table with Jolene sitting next to Lion-O. "Stand Jolene; through the trials you, yourself insisted upon you have proven not only to us but to yourself that you are worthy of being a thundercat. Therefore I anoint you as one of us. Welcome thundercat Jolene." Lion-O said as a red bolt of energy shot from the tip of the sword; making the symbol of the Eye of Thundera appear on the disk at her chest.

To everyone's amazement; a hint of facial markings appeared, her slightly pointed ears became fully pointed and her fingernails became firm and clawlike. At first; Jolene was wondering why everyone was looking at her strangely, then she caught a glimpse of herself in the window. She looked around at her friends and asked, "What does this mean?" "I'm not sure; we knew you had a thunderian ancestor, perhaps the sword brought your thunderian DNA forward and surpressed the human." answered Tygra. Jolene looked at Lion-O and saw a strange look on his face. 'I must look hideous to him now.' Jolene thought.

Lion-O looked at her and thought, 'I thought she was beautiful before; looking as she does now, she's a vision of pure beauty.' Jolene was still stunned by the change and felt uncomfortable with everyone looking at her; so she did what she would normally do, she made a wisecrack. “I hope Janae and Bruce still recongize me.” Everyone laughed; thus showing that the change was only skin deep.

When Jolene returned to her quarters; at first the children didn't notice, then her son asked, “Mommy; when did you paint your face?” “I didn't sweetheart; it seems that now I'm a thundercat, Mommy has face markings.” she answered. “Will we changed too?” asked Janae.
“I don't think so honey.” Jolene replied.

There was a knock at the door; Jolene answered it and saw, “Lion-O, come in.” she said. “Thank you. I came to discuss the wedding.” he said. “Okay; when do you think we should have it?” Jolene asked. “Well; considering how long it will take to make your wedding dress and my wedding attire, not to mention the groomsmen's attire and the bridesmaid dresses. I would have to say in about three months.” he answered. “That sounds reasonable.” she agreed. “Good; three months it is.” Lion-O said and kissed her.

In his pyramid; Mumm-Ra watches as the royal couple plan their wedding. “So she has passed the trials and is now a thundercat. Her children look to Lion-O as they would a father. I have tried to keep them apart; but they cling to one another all the more. I must find a way to stop this wedding; but how? There must be a way.....”