Redemption
by Servali

To be honest, when I decided to return to what was once the Treetop Village, I was rather surprised to see Tygra still alive. And I still am. No, he hadn’t aged well at all, most likely because his addictions had gotten the better of him. Here I am, standing before a once noble ThunderCat, but now a decrepit build of ragged fur and tattered clothing, protruding bones and unconquered vices. His breath is audible, painfully labored. His voice, phlegmatic and raspy. He sits before me on his wooden throne, and his sunken and rheumatic eyes stare not at me, but at something beyond me. Death, perhaps? Does he even notice that I am here?

He had better.

I do wish Tygra would say something. I hate -- no, I detest these overly long periods of silence, especially since time is of the essence. It won’t be long before they find me, and I don?t want them to know I’m here.

Not yet, anyway.

"Twenty seven years," says the aged being before me.

I nod politely and smile -- all feigned, of course -- but I am relieved to hear Tygra’s voice, disturbing as it is.

"Yes. Twenty-seven years since our last meeting, and you still rule, I see. Should I congratulate you on such a long and prosperous reign"

Tygra’s feeble eyes are focused directly upon me now. It’s nearly an empty gaze, oblivion in his eyes. His gaze remained constant, never changing, never shifting during our conversation. In all honesty, it frightens me a bit, the way he’s staring at me. To think, Tygra in his final days, frightening me. Long ago, it would have been the other way around. At least, it should have been.

"And you have gotten younger. Again."

I nod again. I detect a hint of envy for the youth he'll never have again.

"Still playing around with that Geyser of Youth?"

I detect a hint of bitterness, too. No, make that resentment. He feels that I'm unworthy of anything that would benefit me. It's his own fault that he became the useless sack of fur which he is now. He was never worthy, and we know this. I grin impishly and nod again.

Tygra snorts at my silent answer. Then he goes into a rage of vile coughing. He made no effort to cover his mouth, so the projectiles of spittle and the phlegm sprayed before him. They land on his chest, his legs, his throne, and they cling to where they landed like so many leeches attempting to siphon away what little life was left in him. Warrior Maiden attendants -- or rather, Maiden attendants, as Tygra mentally deluded the Warrior part out of them -- quickly dashed to his side to clean up the foul mess with wet rags. They daintily dabbed and wiped his body, here and there, and made him clean again. Superficially clean, that is. What's inside him can never be clean again.

"I received a message from one of your couriers that you have something for me. Might you have one of your attendants show me?" Before he dies, I do so hope.

"In time," he says.

I wonder if he can sense how annoyed I am with him right now.

Tygra slowly raises a trembling arm and points at the Sword of Omens at my side. "That should not be with you."

"Yes, yes," I say with an accompanying mental sigh. We've been through this so many times before, he and I. "I possess it now. I've possessed it for decades now. Surely you can remember that."

"Yes, I do," Tygra says. "Ever since that day." He adds a dramatic pause before speaking again.

I don't care about his supposed senility. I think he's prolonging this conversation deliberately to annoy me further.

"I should be the one to wield the Sword of Omens," he resumes. "Lion-O appointed me the next to claim it should he die, and—"

I've had enough of his ramblings, so I decide to interrupt him. "But Tygra, Lion-O died and you ran. You ran away, coward that you always were, and hid here among the Warrior Maidens. Then, somehow, you managed to bend their wills to serve you, to pleasure you, for decades at a time." I smile in an almost sinister way as I deliver my next utterances to Tygra. "I claimed the Sword of Omens during the commotion of that battle. No one else bothered to claim it, nor did anyone try to take it from me all these years. I've even put it to good use, and you know this. Not only did I claim it, I can control its powers. Even better than Lion-O himself could. You've heard the tales of my deeds, no doubt. No, Tygra, this sword was never meant for you. You never once deserved it. It's mine, and, dare I even say, I'm a much better owner of this great and powerful artifact than you'd ever be." Tygra's near-blank expression never changed, but my words did make him silent. "Now, am I wasting my time here, or is there truly something you wish to show me?" I more demand than ask the aged Thunderian.

Tygra gradually turns his head to one side and nods to one of his enthralled servants, who rushes away to one of the treetop huts. I stare at her physique as she departs. I will not deny that Tygra

has taste; that much is certain. I then return my gaze to Tygra, and he and I exchange a moment of uneasy silence until her return. The servant carries a long wooden chest in her arms, and my curiosity is piqued. She gracefully makes her way to me. She stands before me, and she opens up the chest.

I admit to being not just surprised when the object within the chest is revealed to me, but absolutely shocked. Never once in my life did I think that I would see it again. I glance at Tygra, who has what appears to be an impish grin upon his withered face.

"I won't be needing it anymore" he says in a near-whisper.

I look back at the item within the chest. I ceremoniously reach in and withdraw it. After all this time, I've finally been reunited with it.

"I suppose I should thank you--" I begin to say, but, as my view settles upon Tygra, I realize that the life once possessed by that feeble body upon the throne had just expired. "But apparently it was not meant to be," I utter to myself as I begin my departure from the now rulerless Treetop Kingdom. There are wails of the mourning Warrior Maidens behind me, but I don't notice. I'm simply in awe of the fact that I have my psyche club once again.