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The Yearning of the Law

Written by BlueKittyTales as an entry for RedDeadFox and MaveriKat's Second Annual Carmelita Appreciation Day of 2018.

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Part 2 – Fragile Balance

Carmelita could scarcely believe her eyes or indeed any of her other senses. She had rarely imagined Sly to be interested in places such as the beautiful restaurant before her, although thinking about it, she didn't think she should have been surprised, following some of their previous encounters. The ballroom dance they'd shared was a night she still fondly remembered to this day. Indeed, when they had first met, one side of her had seen him as a creature who did all he could to survive in his profession, even if it meant turning against the strong arm of the law.

Subconsciously she found herself linking her tail with his, and when she stepped through the foyer with him, she was quite shocked when the suited waiter, a rather plump white husky with a thick black moustache, recognised both of them on sight.

"Good evening, Mr Cooper." he said in a booming voice. "And will it be a table for two for you and your fair Lady Inspector Fox this evening?"

"Yes indeed, my good man." replied Sly. "It's more than just the city that looks dazzling in the moonlight." *Of course you'd say that.* thought Carmelita.

"And Carmelita here too?" suggested the waiter.

"That really goes without saying." smirked Sly. *You're really enjoying this, aren't you Ringtail?* she thought, but then she managed a bright smile when they glanced at one another.

"Right this way." said the waiter as he guided them to a table sitting next to one of the front windows. Sly grabbed one of the menus, but he was slow to begin studying it, preferring instead to observe Carmelita as she took her seat. She couldn't help but stare back. Now that she thought about where she was now, she was unsure what to expect. But she couldn't deny it – tonight, he did look very handsome, especially when the street lamp's glow landed on their table. And the scent of his aftershave confirmed her thoughts that he saw the occasion as more than just a fluke. Trying to avoid it dominating her thoughts, she started to examine the menu.

"I suppose you could say it's been a long time coming." said Sly, his voice low, almost soothing in its sound. She almost bit back, but remembered just in time. *No, you can't rebuke him for saying that.* she thought. *You don't want to lose your chance.*

"Maybe it is." said Carmelita, putting on a shy tone. But soon she felt her cheeks starting to burn.

"There is but one thing that makes me wonder, my dear." he said.

"And what's that, Cooper?" inquired Carmelita.

"What you said on the phone," said Sly, making her heart jump beats, "I've only heard in my wildest dreams. Are you...starting to fall for me?" She wasn't prepared for this. She hadn't given very much thought to her words, but she was able to keep her face straight while she thought of her answer.

"That's what I will find out tonight." she said, avoiding the question.

"I had always sensed that there may have been something there," he said, "no matter how you try to deny it. But this is the wrong time to tease you about it."

"Then what is it the right time for?" she asked, more out of curiosity than suspicion.

"You'll see." replied Sly. They met eyes for a moment, and without realising it, Carmelita found herself enraptured, as though she was falling under the spell of hypnosis. She couldn't put her claw on why. Was she simply getting sidetracked? Was it the bitterness she felt for him? Or was it something entirely different?

"Perhaps I will." she said in agreement, wanting to move on from the subject. "Now, have you decided what you want yet?" She felt around her dress for her purse, but Sly wasn't slow to notice this.

"I wouldn't be concerned about that, Carmelita." he said huskily. "It's on me tonight." *It's more than just the price of this meal that's on your head.* she thought.

"That's surprisingly thoughtful of you, all things considering." she said, showing him a snide smile.

"Oh, don't mention it." he smiled. "This is our night. And I think the setting is just perfect." He turned around in his chair. "Waiter!" he called. The plump husky remained at the door guiding another couple in, so another waiter, a slender dark blue skunk with a huge bushy tail, arrived at the table.

"What do you require, sir?" he said.

"Do you have any candles?" smiled Sly. *You're definitely overdoing it.* thought Carmelita as the waiter nodded and left, before returning a moment later with two of them, one gold and one silver. He lit them and left, swishing his huge tail their way as he whirled around and left for another table. At that very moment, a waitress appeared, this one being an astoundingly beautiful amethyst coloured dragoness. She hadn't seen her in the restaurant before, leading her to assume she'd only recently been hired.

"Are you ready to order, you two?" she asked.

"I feel like having the Spiced Salmon Coulubiach and a red wine spritzer." said Sly. Carmelita studied the menu, and she couldn't help but smirk at what she saw. Every option looked delicious, and she was aware of her mouth starting to water, although it didn't look as though Sly had noticed this.

"It's so hard to choose." she said. "It all looks so good."

"You don't have to hurry this along, my lovely vixen." crooned Sly. "Decisions like this are not to be rushed."

"It's not as if I'm choosing a new car." she said, thinking aloud. "But I do see what you mean."

"We are not in Paris now." smiled Sly. "We're each other's for tonight, Carmelita. We don't have to be at each other's throats here." She studied the menu again, and it wasn't long before she made her decision, aware of the raccoon watching her all the while. *I shouldn't drink this time.* she thought. *I've got to keep my mind as clear as possible for this.*

"I think I'll go for the Kedgere Haddock Pie and a raspberry juice." she answered, looking up into his garnet brown eyes. She didn't know why, but she suddenly found herself transfixed by them, as though they were a pair of faceted jewels. But when he spoke again, she understood why in an instant. Warmth stroked her heart like the petals of freshly bloomed tulips. Was she really starting to fall for him? No, it couldn't be, surely. In her book, while he wasn't completely irredeemable, he wasn't a saint either. *Alright,* she thought, *this is working.*

"Those are some great choices!" smiled the waitress, her huge wings unfurling before them. "A lot of creatures are going for those tonight. They'll be along for you shortly!" And with that, she took the menus and set off.

"A lady does need to keep her strength up." said Sly. "Especially when they're on the arm of the law."

"That is true." she conceded. "It is tiring work."

"At least your Shock Pistol always packs a punch." he smirked.

"Who have you been talking to?" said Carmelita, not being able to help but chuckle as she put on a mock offended look. "I'm not that bad at the job!"

"You have chased me all over the world these past few years." said Sly, sounding bashful. "I don't think many creatures would still be their sharpest after that."

"I suppose they wouldn't," said Carmelita. "Jetlag never gets any easier. And you should know."

"Why yes, I do," he said. "And Carmelita, there is one other thing that keeps me up at night."

"What would that be?" Sly leaned closer to her, carefully pushing the candles to one side.

"There's something about your desire to lock me away," he said, "that really adds to the thrill of the chase."

"Oh, let me guess," she mused aloud, "you think I'm pretty in the moonlight or something stale like that."

"Close," he said, "but not quite what I had in mind." Carmelita looked up at him, anticipating what was coming next. "I was thinking more of the daylight."

"The daylight?" she repeated.

"With that dress on," hummed Sly, "it's like you're a faceted diamond glowing in the sun."

"And with that suit on," she replied, "it's like you're an onyx glinting in the night sky." It was only then that she realised what she'd just said. *Oh no*, she thought, her heart sinking. *Did I just say that aloud or think it?* She had no further time to reflect on this, for Sly's face suddenly lit up like the many chandeliers dotted around the room. However, just when he was about to speak, the dragoness waitress returned, their dishes balanced on one of two trays.

"Kedgeree Haddock Pie and Spiced Salmon Coulibiac?"

"Right here!" smirked Sly. "Much appreciated, my lady."

"No problem, handsome," smiled the dragoness as she left. Carmelita watched her unblinkingly as she laid down the other tray at the next table. She wasn't sure why, but she felt a brief stinging feeling within her, until she saw the waitress make an advance towards the fox sitting at the table. *Did I just feel...jealous of her?* she asked herself. *Is this what I think it is? It can't be, right?* It didn't take long for the aroma of the food to distract her from what swirled around inside her head, but there was one thing she couldn't avoid playing on her mind as she glanced at the delicious looking meals.

"You offered to pay for both of us," she recalled.

"That's correct," confirmed Sly.

"You did bring enough money with you for this, didn't you?"

"Misers don't win fair ladies," smirked Sly. He pulled his wallet out of his suit pocket and flashed the small wad of notes inside. Her eyes widened in awe, and she had to admit – she was both surprised and impressed. But she was still suspicious. She almost went to confront him about it just as he put it away again, but she thought better of it. She didn't want to draw attention to this and thus risk ending the date early. *There must be about \$300 in there! It's likely stolen, knowing him*, she concluded. *That will be another charge to add to his criminal record*.

"So as you can tell, no washing the dishes for us tonight," smiled Sly. *I could just handcuff him right here!* she thought, feeling around her belt for her handcuffs. But then, several more diners came in. *Not yet*, she decided. *Not when it's so crowded. He's getting to trust you, but you need him when he's at his most vulnerable*.

"Yes," she agreed, keeping her muzzle straight with an effort. "There are better ways to spend an evening than that."

"You're not wrong there," crooned Sly.

"And there's still plenty of the night left, Ringtail," she said silkily. But she realised what she'd said too late, and it took all of her self control not to clap her paws over her muzzle. Even as Sly dug into his meal, he caught on quickly and showed her an encouraging smile.

"Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?" he mused after swallowing his first mouthful. Nervously Carmelita took her first bite. And she wasn't going to deny it – despite everything the raccoon before her had

done, despite all of their interactions, he did at least have a very good taste in cuisine. Each ingredient and spice blended to create an amazing flavour that flooded her mouth, and one bite wasn't going to be enough to satisfy her now. *He knows the way to a woman's heart.* she found herself thinking wistfully, before her face contorted. *No, stop it! You can't let yourself get distracted. Even if he is looking very handsome tonight.*

"What were you thinking?" she asked.

"Things we could do after our date." said Sly after his next mouthful. Watching him, Carmelita sipped from her drink. "We could start with a walk in the sunset, or the stars if they've come out by the time we leave." This time, his voice was like music to her twitching ears.

"I wouldn't mind that." she said. "It'll be just like our ballroom dance."

"Like old times too." agreed Sly. "All those times we met, and all those times we had to cut it short. We could never resist each other forever."

"I guess not." replied Carmelita after each of them had another mouthful of the delightful food, Sly sipping from his wine. She realised only after taking another sip of her drink that she had sounded affectionate when she'd instead intended to sound aloof. An awkward moment of silence hung between them as they continued to eat, each of them savouring every bite. *Is this the chance I need?* thought Carmelita. She looked up at him as he drank a little more of his wine, the one time he was turned away from her. *He's watching me, pondering what advance he can make on me next. He already thinks he's got me wrapped around his tail. I'll keep playing along. Even if I'll miss him at the end of the night.*

"You never told me what it was that made me chasing you such a thrill to you." noted Carmelita, by now halfway through her meal. "You just brought up my dress – and this is only the second time I've worn it in your company."

"Sorry." said Sly courteously. "Forgot to wrap that up. There's more to it than just the dress." *I knew it all along.* she thought. "You make it interesting for me. Fun, even."

"You've told me that before. But why do you think this way?" inquired Carmelita. "Because chasing you everywhere has not been so fun for me, even if there is something about it that makes it different from going after many other criminals. It's got me ticked off more times than I can count." *And there's no way I'm letting you use my handcuffs against me again, Ringtail.* she thought. But her scowl was not enough to put Sly off. In fact, he bore his teeth in a wide grin.

"You've got something that none of the other police officers who have been on my tail have." he answered. "And that, my dear, is that nothing beats being pursued by someone who's quite a catch."

"That's it?" said Carmelita.

"I rather admire you, Carmelita." said Sly. "You're a lady of substance. It wouldn't be any fun if I was being chased by someone who doesn't take their job seriously or lacks your integrity. I do get why you chase me down, but I also get why you're not going in for the kill even though I'm right in front of you."

"Hm," pondered Carmelita after her next bite, "and why is that, do you think?"

"This is what I'm talking about." answered Sly as he ate some more. *Go on.* she thought, showing a fond smile as she took another forkful. *I really want to know more.* "You don't get to be promoted to Inspector at your age without having not just beauty, but your desire for justice and peace and your determination to leave your mark in your district and beyond. Even if that means we do cross paths while you're chasing criminals much worse than I could ever be." *Yeah, that's debatable with your record.* thought Carmelita. *But at least you're not a killer or a drug dealer.*

"I'm not going to lie," she conceded, "you did me a favour. You weren't the only one who had a score to settle with the members of The Fiendish Five. By having to chase you down, I was able to bring them into custody."

"Not just anyone can achieve that," smiled Sly, "but let me answer the question. I think the reason you haven't just dragged me out in handcuffs in a heartbeat is either because you're waiting for another chance at bringing me in...or you might have something waiting for me inside you, no matter how much you deny it." Carmelita could feel her cheeks burning under her fur again. *He's figured me out.* she thought, her muzzle twitching. *I never had him pegged as anything but a common sneak thief.* She looked up at him again, locking eyes with him. Again, she found herself captured, almost getting lost in his garnet eyes. What's more,

she could feel her heartbeat starting to race and a light layer of sweat begin to coat her back. Was this a crush? Was she in love? If it wasn't either of those things, then why did she feel her mouth starting to go dry and her imagination starting to go into overdrive? *I've been missing so much. I'd love to walk with him along the beach.*

"I always sensed there was a spark there." smiled Sly.

"Maybe there is." said Carmelita sheepishly, chowing down another mouthful. "All this time I was hot on your tail, and I hadn't counted on another of your thefts. It's one that INTERPOL doesn't know about." He quickly finished what remained of his meal.

"What theft is that, my dear vixen?" he asked. "There are many things I've never told, you know."

"I imagine there are, Cooper." said Carmelita earnestly, leaning closer to him and giving him her paw. "I can't arrest you for this theft, because there's no DNA evidence on it except mine." Sly looked confused.

"I'm not sure I'm following you." *Let's bring it on home now.* she thought, finding herself gazing into his eyes again. *He'll be like an open book after this.*

"This is because," smiled Carmelita, her heart starting to race once more, "what you've stolen is my heart." That did it. These very words rocked her very being, as though they were a classified secret only she was meant to possess. Part of her felt discomfited having said this, but a bigger part of her felt like these were the sweetest words she'd ever uttered. She found herself eager to see his reaction, rose petals dancing around her heart. She could sense jubilation in his expression and she thought he was about to leap into the air with a swing of his cane. But he remained seated.

"All this time," said Sly softly, "I thought I would be the first one to accuse you of that particular theft. Only, I would never be able to convince your colleagues to convict you."

"It's amazing what dating can bring out of you." crooned Carmelita.

"It takes two to tango." smirked Sly. Her ears twitched at these words.

"Isn't that what I heard you say to Constable Neyla when I came in?" she asked, eating the final two mouthfuls of her meal.

"Hm," said Sly, "I don't quite recollect."

"If I'd recognised you before you'd run off on me," she said, "I don't think we'd be sitting here now. It all seems so obvious now, but at least we don't have to worry about Neyla any more. I never did like her."

"Bentley's never forgiven her for what she did to him." said Sly sombrely.

"I know I never could." she said. "But we have other things to discuss right now, Ringtail."

"Yes, my dear vixen. We do." agreed Sly. Carmelita downed the rest of her raspberry juice and reached out for his paw, which he gladly took. Their eyes met once more and they stared longingly at one another, each wondering what more the other desired.

"You know, Carmelita," said Sly, "I think this could be the start of something beautiful."

"And now I'm realising just how much I've been missing." said Carmelita. But before she could continue, their tender moment was interrupted when the dragoness waitress appeared at their table again.

"Aww, now that's so cute!" she simpered.

"Hey!" cried Carmelita, looking up at her with a scowl, but Sly grinned. *We're both many things,* she thought, *but I like to think cute isn't one of them, even to your species.*

"It is, isn't it?" said Sly.

"Enjoy your meal, Mr and Mrs Cooper?" asked the waitress.

"What are you suggesting?" blurted Carmelita.

"He's a good man, he is." said the waitress. "You're a really lucky woman, managing to pin him down. We don't get many men here as charming as he is." *Do you even know who I am?* she thought. *Don't you know I've spent years trying to bring this raccoon in? This charming...handsome raccoon...stop it, Carmelita! You're losing track again and you're letting your feelings take you. He's a thief through and through.*

"You just need to take one look at her." chuckled Sly. "I'm starting to think I'm the lucky one." Carmelita couldn't hold back a soft chuckle to herself.

"I think you both are." said the waitress. "Would you two like any desserts tonight?"

"Not tonight." they both said in unison.

"We've seen there are sweeter things than even the sweetest desserts this restaurant has to offer." said Sly.

"Oh, that one's as trite as anything, Cooper!" smirked Carmelita. "But I like where this is going."

"Ooh, a romantic evening!" smiled the waitress, pulling a small printer out of her blazer pocket. "You ready for your bill?"

"I believe we are." said Sly. "And don't expect me to skimp on the tip!" With that, Sly paid the waitress and Carmelita followed him out, aware of her and one of her colleagues watching them as they ate several after dinner mints each.

"Bye bye!" called the dragoness.

"I'll see you soon, Agnes!" called Sly back. *So that's her name.* thought Carmelita. *I doubt she'll recognise me if I see her again.*

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They walked down the street paw in paw, looking over one another and gazing up into the young night's sky. As rich a blue as the most splendid of sapphires, soon to be as dark as the blackest of shadows, Carmelita couldn't help but start to pick out various star constellations. Sly looked around him too, although she suspected not at the same things she was. However, it didn't look as though he'd brought his cane with him this time, so he wouldn't leave her that way, at the very least.

When they turned around the street corner, they met eyes once more and exchanged enraptured smiles. And it was at this point when Sly did something that made her heart skip a beat. He suddenly stopped and took her into his arms, his eyes glowing with passion deep enough for her to swim in. She thought he might say that he wanted her with him for the rest of his days. And she had to admit – she had rather enjoyed herself this evening. *He's more charming than any criminal I've ever met.* she thought lustfully. *And whether he's in that suit or not, he looks amazing. And I can't believe I've only now noticed his aftershave.*

"That was a great meal, Sly." she smiled.

"That's why I chose this restaurant." said Sly wryly. "If you'd come here more often, perhaps I'd be in custody now."

"You really don't want to tempt me." chuckled Carmelita.

"Something tells me I might be too late, my dear." crooned Sly, pulling her closer to him. Carmelita's body began to relax, completely at his mercy as the next stage of the night was soon to be set into motion. She held onto him, and before she realised it, their lips were slowly getting closer and closer to one another. Her body was burning with the glow of an inferno, and her brain was threatening to release its already weakened control over her body.

But then, in a very quick moment of lucidity, her passionate thoughts were interrupted. She noticed they were standing next to a rail used for securing bikes, and she'd got a sneaky idea. *Yes,* she thought, looking down at her belt for no more than half a second, *this'll work, just like it did on me. He's open to me now.* She let herself sink into his kiss, and immediately, warmth rushed through her body like she had sunk into a piping hot bath. It was a feeling that was unrivalled, impassioned, free of any vice or anything other than encapsulating visions. But it wasn't enough to completely collect and capture her like a wild butterfly.

The sweet taste of his kiss sent shockwaves through her, but she was able to retain just enough control over herself to swing her tail around to her right hip and unhook her handcuffs with the end of it. She swung it up and she caught them, and while using her left arm to pull him closer and give her more of his lips to explore, her right arm was reaching behind her with the handcuffs around her fingers. All she had to do was wait for his paws to reach her lower back. And reach they did, for without realising it, they linked paws for a mere moment.

This was enough. With a mischievous smile she was sure he didn't see, she opened one half of the handcuffs before shutting them over his left wrist. However, she had not been as prepared as she thought. She hadn't been fast enough to catch the other one, and the moment the cuffs closed, he abruptly pulled away and leapt up, leaving her stunned.

"Huh?" she murmured. And then she spotted him leaping off the bike rail, scaling the wall of the adjacent building with the handcuffs dangling from his wrist.

"Using one of my old tricks, Carmelita?" smiled Sly. "You're even more slippery than I am!"

"Cooper!" roared Carmelita. "You know I don't fall for the same trick twice." But none of his confidence had left his face.

"You're a really good kisser." he said. "You should relax a little more – not let yourself get worked up so easily. Let's not end this date on a low, shall we?"

"This time, you're coming with me!" snapped Carmelita, whipping out her Shock Pistol.

"We had a lovely evening, Carmelita." said Sly wryly. "But duty calls."

"You just mean your next theft, don't you?"

"Until we meet again, my love!"

"You can't evade me forever!" snarled Carmelita, and by the time she'd aimed it his way, he'd already vanished into the night. She looked around frantically, but there came no sign of him. It had been as though he'd vanished into thin air, and this time she'd lost a piece of her equipment too. Furious that she could have let him manipulate her throughout the date, she let out a roar to the night sky.

"You're a marked man, Ringtail!" she yelled, looking all around the buildings for him. "I'll find you, and then I'm gonna put you inside! And when I'm finished with you, I'm gonna convict your two little friends. You hear me?" But no semblance of him came, not even the scent of his aftershave. Eventually, she let out a resigned sigh as she gave up. Dejected, she took her radio out of her belt.

"Inspector Carmelita Fox to Dispatch." she said. "I've had a sighting of our wanted party, Sly Cooper. He was last seen in the vicinity of *The Singing Clam* seafood restaurant. I need you to get officers over here searching for him."

"Received." said the dispatcher.

"Detective Benny Walton to Dispatch." said another voice. "I'll take that. I'm in the area." But once the radio had fallen silent, her anger began to fade. She felt a fond smile creeping into her lips once more as she recalled Sly's kiss and the events of the evening. *You might be a wanted criminal*, she thought, *but there's a place in my heart for you*. But she soon put this out of her mind. *Stop telling yourself that!* said another voice in her head. *His record deserves a long prison sentence.*

The End

