

The Transformation Story Archive

Spells 'R' Us

Sweater

by Zhara

Paul Wilkens was your prototypical college booster. He had played for the football team thirty years ago, second string, although he tended to ignore that detail in his memories. He had made a small fortune in the plastic bag business, and then a somewhat larger fortune in the real estate business after that.

Nowadays, he had a box, near the 50 yard line, and made it to most of the teams home games and more than a few away games, if they were in the area, or he could find a business excuse to be in the right town at the right time.

Paul's best feature, in most ways was a stubborn doggedness. When he put his mind to something, it happened. He could dig his heels in and push, cajole and otherwise lobby until everyone involved gave in. This was a big asset in his business dealings. He had pulled together deals other people had been sure were impossible, and made them work. Made the partners commit to them, made the partners pull together, and made the project profitable.

So, when four years ago, Paul had decided that what the football team really needed was a team mascot, he had slowly, steadily made it a personal Crusade. Alas, no matter how hard he pushed, nothing came of it.

Back when he had played, every school had a team mascot, and they had been displayed proudly on the sidelines. These days, however, people were mostly uninterested. Some complained of cost, some of the hardship an animal would surely experience. Others just thought it an odd and quaint tradition from times gone by, surely out of touch with the current college scene.

He wasn't sure if it was his failure to get the team a mascot that caused it, but he had felt restless of late, watching the football team play not so much poorly, as strangely. He normally was familiar with every player, but this fall, for some reason, he couldn't keep track of who was who. He did have to admit that the cheerleading squad was really impressive this year. Rarely had he seen a sexier line up of young women cheering on the team.

Paul had watched the team scrimmage this afternoon, and then felt like he wasn't doing enough to support the team. He had taken a stroll to think about what else he could be doing. His walk had taken him to the local mall, and then within.

Paul looked at the odd shop. "Spells R Us" he mused. What people won't do for a gimmick! Still, the storefront was intriguing. The large display cases, showing off a magnificent Arabian carpet next to a small brass lamp were very well done. He pushed open the old fashioned door and nodded with approval as a silver bell tinkled. Not enough shops thought customers important enough to justify letting the help know they had arrived.

The old man tending the shop was quite in theme with the store's name. He was wearing a long, strange looking black robe, and the odd gleam in his eyes helped make him look even more mysterious.

"Why Hello, Mr. Wilkens." The old man's voice was hearty, and cheerful. Paul didn't think it terribly odd that this man knew his name, especially since he had a team jersey hanging in one of his display cases. Clearly the man followed the football team. Paul frowned. He couldn't remember any player by the name of Kelso, but no matter.

"What brings you here?" asked the shopkeeper, as Paul wandered deeper into the shop.

"I couldn't exactly tell you. I'm looking for something to show my support for the college football team." The old man nodded. He had procured an item last week just for this meeting, so he could hardly be said to be surprised.

Paul drifted deep among the odd looking display cases. What could one make of the rack of vacation brochures, or the small canary cage? He shrugged and turned a corner between rows of costumes, neatly hung on hangers. The shop sure seemed larger inside than he would have expected from the front.

Suddenly, Paul's eyes lit. An old fashioned football sweater was on display, complete with an intricate embroidered picture of the team's mascot. That was perfect. He took it up front, and caught the old man's eye.

"This is perfect! How much for it?"

"I'm sorry," the old man said, sounding quite apologetic. "That's a costume, one of my best sellers. I couldn't sell it to you, although I'd be glad to rent it."

"Nonsense!" Paul's voice was firm, his matter certain. "I have plenty of money. I will gladly pay you whatever you want."

"Are you certain?" The old man asked calmly, although perhaps the gleam in his eye was a little too bright, and his voice a little too quick.

"Within reason. It is only a sweater after all."

"Indeed. Very well. Let me draw up some papers."

The old man pulled out a scroll of paper, and quickly jotted down some lines of ink on them. Paul smiled and waited for the old man to finish.

Once the man finished writing, Paul read the paper. He was too good a businessman to not at least skim anything he was going to sign. This seemed simple enough. A plain "lifetime" lease of the costume, with rights reverting to the shop, at the end of its use. The old man could sure write up a storm, thought Paul. There were several paragraphs of legalese which seemed the normal boilerplate disclaiming any fault for anything that happened to Paul while he wore the costume. Finally, he got to the punchline. It was steep, but hardly beyond his means. Paul nodded, and signed with a flourish.

The shopkeeper carefully took the sweater out of the display case and packed it neatly into a box. Paul shook hands with him and headed out of the shop. The big game tomorrow would be the perfect time to show off his new sweater. He could use it to help make another pitch to the athletic coordinator.

The next morning dawned bright and cold. Paul had a leisurely breakfast at his hotel and then went upstairs to get dressed for the game. He was quite pleased at having bought the sweater, it was certainly going to be sweater weather.

Paul tugged on the sweater, pleased at how nicely it seemed to fit. He bundled on a heavy coat and tugged on his gloves and headed to the stadium.

As soon as Paul got to the stadium, he felt oddly relaxed. Instead of going off to the box where he had season tickets, he decided to take a walk along the sidelines and watch the team warmup.

Paul paced the sidelines, and watched the special teams begin their drills. He felt warm and took off his coat. He couldn't quite understand why, but he seemed to be hearing things with remarkable clarity. He shook his head and tugged off his heavy hat. Ahh, that felt better. He focused his attention on the kicker, and could hear the solid thump as his toe contacted the football. He could have sworn he felt his ears swivel to better hear the sound, but that was a silly thought.

As he continued to watch the practice, Paul tugged off his gloves, his hands feeling oddly constrained. He stared, at the hand that was revealed. A dark orange fur covered the back of his hand, and his fingers seemed folded under. He flexed his hand and watched, in puzzlement as large black claws sprang out from sheaths, hidden in his paws. He suddenly pitched forward, and found himself on all fours.

Puzzled, Paul felt his ears fold flat against his skull, and his face contort for a moment. He twitched his whiskers, in concern, and then sniffed the air. He looked around, and found himself looking up at people from a low to the ground position. He stared, his arms were now short, and quite covered with orange and black stripes, just like the tiger on his...

Paul's entire body shuddered, and he felt totally disoriented. He tried to say something, and a low, odd growl emerged. A tug at his neck got his attention, and he spun around. There was a long, solid looking chain that ran to a collar on his neck. He was forced to walk along, following the cute girl in the cheerleader's outfit. He felt his tail twitch in anticipation, as he padded out to the middle of the field.

Lisa smiled, as Paul followed her out to the midfield area. He sat calmly, his tail twitching, while she waited for the speaker to make his Introductions. Finally, She unsnapped the lead and blew a short toot on her whistle.

The sharp tweet penetrated Paul's awareness, and he sprung into motion. He pranced out onto the soft grass, following steps drilled into him in hours of training.

Paul's whole being quivered with delight as he danced and cavorted on the field. He felt his muscles bunch as he launched himself towards the large hoop with the sheet of paper stretched across it. He sailed through the air and punched through the paper, and landed, with a roar on the fifty yard line.

The cheerleading squad framed the team's new mascot. The drum majorette tossed her baton high in the air, and led the way off the field. Lisa blew her whistle, and Paul, every bit the large, sleek looking Bengal Tiger, followed her, tail held high, to his place in front of the band.

Tim, the band's best trumpet player, leaned over to whisper to Gene, who sat next to him.

"Isn't it amazing how he seems to follow the game!"

"Yeah I know. I don't know why the team waited so long to get a mascot!"

On the sidelines, in front of the band, one could almost believe that the toothy smile on the team's mascot grew a little broader.

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