

CAMALUS

A STORY

By Jordi van de Weerd

In the Beginning...

“Enough!” spoke King Muscio. The murmurs of the court ceased immediately, and all focus lay on the king.

“I have decided.” said the cat-king, “and it shall be the Caelians who are to be sent to this new island.”

The badgers applauded their king's decision, and with a gesture of the hand the king dismissed his subjects. The dodo Camalus was not as pleased. He fidgeted with his black tie in discomfort. He had been trying to persuade the king of the irrationality of his decision, noting that his nation's people were not suited for the exploration of these foreign lands. Against him had been Dadahus, who had made every effort to see the dodos leave the kingdom, and had admittedly been quite successful.

“Damn those creatures.” Camalus said to himself.

He had not been able to understand what it was that Dadahus and the rest of the foxes had against him, but it had become more evident over the past few weeks that they wanted the dodos gone. As he watched the badgers and foxes leave the throne-room, he turned around and walked out. However, before he could reach the door, a barely audible whisper reached his ears. Curious, Camalus turned and moved in the direction of the sound. Following the whispers, he could see two bright eyes in the corner of the throne-room. He recognised those eyes anywhere, for it could be none other than Cerridwen the Wise. Her coat of black feathers barely visible against the darkness that surrounded her. He continued to move until he too was hidden in the dark in that very corner, and Cerridwen hooted and said:

“I have heard of your journey, and I come to offer assistance. You must seek the help of the Halcyon if you wish to reach the island, for without them, you will fail. They will not be easy to find, but their support is of undeniable importance to your quest. With these words I leave you, for you know now what to do.”

After Cerridwen finished speaking, she flew up and vanished from sight. Camalus was grateful for the advice, but secretly wished Cerridwen would not be so cryptic. But at least now he had a plan, where before there had been none. Being glad to leave the throne-room, he flew off towards Caelia, hoping to find some peace before the inevitable quest.

Caelia

Upon reaching the palace in Caelia, Camalus was greeted by his trusted advisor, the quail Coturnia. Coturnia, with her plump, motherly figure and brown vests, always managed to soothe his spirit, and this time was no exception.

“What news do you bring from Solum?” asked Coturnia.

Camalus knew well that Coturnia had already heard about the events, but felt pleased to know that she still wished to hear it from him.

“None good, I'm afraid,” said Camalus. “We are to depart for this new island and explore it, by order of the king.”

Coturnia nodded, never having been one for many questions. It was something Camalus liked about her; she knew what to say, but more importantly, what not to.

“When will we be leaving?” asked Coturnia.

“I do not yet know, for we have another task which we must attend to first. But let us not speak of this here,” said Camalus.

Camalus motioned for Coturnia to follow him into the more secluded chambers of the palace. Satisfied that they could not be heard, Camalus continued:

“Before leaving Solum, I was visited by Cerridwen the owl. She spoke of a species called the Halcyon, and said that they were the key to our passage across the ocean. I do not know of these Halcyon, or what they are, but I trust Cerridwen's judgment.”

Coturnia, with her immovable, unreadable expression, carefully listened to her leader's words. When he stopped speaking, she asked:

“Then we must find these Halcyon, if you truly believe them to be of help?”

Camalus appreciated the honesty in Coturnia; she would not simply accept Cerridwen's words merely because they came from her. She would learn, Camalus thought. Realizing he had been lost in thought, he returned to the present scene and spoke.

“Indeed we must, and indeed I do. We must consult the Caelian archives. If there ever were Halcyon, there must be records. Furthermore, bring me our master scouts, we will have need of their expertise soon enough.”

Nodding at his decision, Coturnia left the room to do as was ordered. Finally being able to collect his thoughts, Camalus retired to his bedroom and sat down in his chair. Most of the palace was open to the public, many species in fact called it home. But this room was not home for him. Camalus had always preferred the openness of the lands outside. To him, it was ultimate freedom, but for now he was content to sit in his chair. His thoughts wandered to this new island which had been spoken of these past few weeks. It had started as nothing more than a fairy-tale, a promised land for the oppressed. Over time, its illustrious reputation had begun to spread like wildfire among the peasantry of the kingdoms of Solum, Caelia, and Incendia. Camalus had thought nothing of it, and paid no heed to the tale. Just a week ago, he had received a letter from the king of Solum. The letter held very little information, but it contained an order for Camalus to come before the king. This in itself did not surprise Camalus, for it was not rare for him to receive such an order. What struck him was that the letter contained no information on the matter to be discussed. By sending out his scouts, Camalus was able to discover that he was to discuss this new island.

“It is still hard to believe a king would put his faith in such strange tales of foreign lands,” he said to himself.

A soft knock on the door startled him, but he quickly regained his composure and stepped outside. It was Coturnia.

End of part I