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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meigh

Chapter 10 – “A Call To Arms”

It was growing light outside, interrupting the Immortal Couple's sleep. They were laying in bed, watching the day break, making small talk while they cuddled in the meantime. Victoria had finally found a 'sweet spot' for her arms, snuggled against the berserker tightly for warmth while they chatted, discussing the previous day.

“Tor, it was nice of Cami to bring that portable bunkhouse trailer up here.” she offered up.

“We need to thank her for that properly.” he replied. “I was worried about how we were going to bed down three extra furs last night.” Torvald had been prepared to give up his bed to either one of the femmes until Cami had intervened.

“I guess we had better check out that marriage issue this morning.” the tigress brought up.

“We should, but look at the facts; Maryanne and I were married in Eighteen Ninety-Eight. That was over one hundred years ago.”

“Well, I see your point.” Victoria agreed. “That doesn't change the fact that she's pregnant. We need to help her with that, at least until the kit is born and Maryanne has a job or finds a husband.”

“And what about Wilhelmine?” Tor brought up.

“Dana and Gytha both offered to let her stay with them. As much as I'm their modern-day mother, I think they were very happy to see their original birth-mother again.”

“I noticed that, too.” the stallion agreed. “Maybe we could help . . .” That thought was cut short by Cami shouting from the kitchen.

“TORVALD!! VICTORIA!! WE HAVE A PROBLEM IN HERE!!!” the femme wolverine chimera shouted out in a very panicked tone, loud enough to be heard clearly through a closed bedroom door.

The Svensen's bodyguard held the small fur of indeterminate origin at bay with her Armalite AR10-A4 Carbine rifle chambered in .338 Federal, hoping like hell she wouldn't have to ventilate the coach if the fur in question made a move. The rifle was currently stoked with armor-piercing ammunition that would literally shred their temporary home. At least the black-furred being hadn't tried to do much, except continue to eat the sandwich that he had most likely made for himself.

The little fur was probably the source of the mess on the counter, too. There were several slices of bread scattered about on the kitchen island and a jar of strawberry jam sat open with a piece of silverware in it. How he had made such a mess without her knowledge, she didn't know.

“What's going on?” Tor asked after he made his appearance, holding his favorite indoor persuader, a 12 gauge double-barreled pistol that his son-in-law Brett had made for him. It was most likely stoked with OO buckshot or hunting slugs.

Cami nodded in the black fur's direction. “He was in here, sitting on the counter, eating when I found him.” The dark fur smiled widely at them, then took another bite of his sandwich.

“Who are you?” Tor asked the fur in question.

“Me?” the small fur queried back, pointing at himself with a questioning look on his muzzle.

“Yeah, you. Who are you?” Tor reiterated.

“Watcher.” was the reply.

Tor shook his head, having a bad feeling where this was going. “Who are you watching?”

“Watch all,” he replied, pointing to the huge fur, then Cami, then several other places. “I watch.”

The stallion nudged Cami. “You know what he is, right?”

“A Minion?”

“I think so.” Tor replied. “Okay, so we've established that you're a watcher. What's your name?”

“Stupid,” the small fur replied, then thought about that answer, appending to it. “Hey You Stupid Come Here!” he corrected cheerily.

“Gah!” the stallion spat out, shaking his head. It was a minion, a fur-made construct. And not a very bright one, either. “Okay, so who do you work for?”

“Boss!” 'Stupid' replied, proud of that answer.

“Give me a break.” Tor muttered. “So, who does your boss work for?”

“Boss Boss!” the small Dark Operative replied, using his free paw to show 'Boss Boss' was bigger or higher on the food chain than his direct employer.

“Drat . . .” Torvald knew this was getting nowhere fast. “What is the name of the big Boss?” he

questioned.

“Boss Boss!” the small fur replied, seeming to be pleased with that answer.

“Honestly!” Torvald muttered. “You know, I can't call you 'Stupid', even if it fits. I'm going to call you Eddie.”

“Eddie?” the small fur questioned, pointing at himself.

“Yeah, you're Eddie now.”

“Eddie!” the minion blurted out.

Tor tried a different tactic. “Eddie, why are you watching all of us?”

“Keep the others away.” he replied in a serious tone. “If others come, I tell Boss.”

“Eddie, who are the others?” Cami asked.

“Dark Agents.”

“So, Eddie, why would a Dark Agent show up here?” the stallion asked, hoping this question was not over the small fur's head.

“They want to hurt you all.” he replied in a very serious tone of voice. “If I see some Agent that doesn't belong, I tell Boss, he tells Boss Boss, then Boss Boss comes and banishes Dark Agent forever.”

“Cami, things just changed for the worse.” Torvald pointed out. He started to ask another question only to hear a knock at the door, followed by a familiar voice.

“Torvald? Victoria? It's Judge Talmadge! I need to speak with you!” the canid announced from beyond the front door.

“Come in,” the stallion bid once he had opened the front door. The judge entered followed by a rather oddly-dressed pachyderm. The gray fur in question was wearing clothing that would be very appropriate for a construction site.

“Boss Boss!” Eddie blurted out, bowing to the elephant.

“Rumjal, do you know him?” the canid asked, seeming to be a bit confused by the small fur's deferential treatment of the huge one.

“Yes, I do know the minion.” was the reply. “Erm, I guess I had better introduce myself.” he stated to Torvald. “My name is Rumjal and it seems you have met one of my Construct Operatives. I'm sorry but I don't know you, Miss.” he directed to Cami.

“Camille Carter, Security.” she offered up. “Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't you a fallen Angel?”

“I prefer 'Displaced Minor Deity'.” he replied, giving the femme chimera a crooked smile.

The stallion seemed concerned that a Underworld figure was standing in his temporary home so he made his feelings known. "What is so important that you needed to see us at this early hour?"

"What I need to speak to you about is important, Torvald Svensen." Rumjal agreed. "I've been blackmailed by Jennifer Longbow. Actually, more like screwed over royally. She says that I need to give you and your entire extended family complete protection from the Underworld or she's going to let Wendi and Aslaug work me over."

"We know Jennifer personally." Victoria offered up, once she had struggled to get out of bed, get into her wheelchair somehow and wheel herself into the main part of the coach to join the party. "She was the one that rescued us from that explosion."

"Then you know exactly what she's capable of." Rumjal retorted. "And I really hope that information about her assisting you never gets back to Zagam. He would literally go on a rampage."

"We would have died if she hadn't assisted us, as you put it." Torvald put forth.

"I would not doubt . . ." The pachyderm stopped talking when he finally noticed the injuries to both warriors. "Um, did all of this happen in that explosion?" he asked, pointing to the numerous stitches and scratches on the stallion's arm and shoulder nearest him.

"Yes, this is the aftermath of that explosion, Rumjal." Tor replied. "I had almost twenty pounds of steel embedded in my body and Victoria had huge lag bolts driven through her wrists and insteps that were torn out when the explosives went off. It's a small miracle that either one of us survived that blast. If it hadn't been for our niece' help, Victoria would have had a hide full of steel, just like I received. Without Jenna's help, we would have surely died."

"I know who was responsible and I am sorry you have had to go through all of this." the pachyderm offered up. "I actually wanted the two of you as my personal Agents. I was hoping to overthrow the Malefic Council and I knew the two of you could bring in other Agents, ensuring we were successful."

Victoria spoke her mind. "We are but two furs. Why are we so important?"

"You and your husband are very powerful, to the point several minor members of The Malefic Council are afraid of you. If you were on our side, that would represent a huge victory for our cause." Rumjal replied. "I actually came here concerning my situation. My being blackmailed into protecting you and your family is a problem. A very big problem. Eventually, the Council would notice that I'm hanging out here way too much and question it, or worse, send some Agent to investigate. To create a cover story, I propose this; you allow me to tell the Council that you've decided to become Dark Agents . . ."

"Now hold on a minute!" Torvald broke in.

"Now now, I know that idea sounds preposterous but please hear me out." the pachyderm countered. "I will tell them the conditions are as such; Only I can send you two on missions which I will vet very carefully. I expect you will most likely fail at those missions and I will cover for you by pointing out the fact that you were Agents Of Light before you came over to our side. This will give me some time to figure out a resolution to my situation."

"That sounds insane, if you ask me," Torvald put forth. "No fur will believe we're Dark Agents."

“Besides,” Victoria chimed in, “We still need to heal up. Tor certainly isn't in top shape and I'm a long way from being well enough to do much.”

“Again, I apologize for your injuries.” Rumjal offered up. “I assure you, I will not be putting you in danger on any of these so-called 'missions' that I will assign you. Hopefully, you can use them like vacations or such.”

“We need to think about this.” Tor stated. He knew this was dicey at best, to do the bidding of a Fallen Angel.

“Well, take your time.” the pachyderm retorted. “I'll be over at your damaged home, using my cover as a carpenter to keep an eye on you two. I hate to run but the contractor expects me on the jobsite at Seven.”

The Immortal Couple watched the gray fallen one leave their abode, both of them wondering just how much stranger things could possibly get.

Victoria knew they were no longer Agents Of Light but to become pseudo-Dark Agents? If that didn't sound totally ridiculous. Just ludicrous enough that it just might work. If anything, it would allow them to get closer to their direct opposition, the Malefic Council.

There was one other thing that in Victoria's opinion needed attention this morning and the judge just might be the fur that could take care of it for them.

“Judge, can I ask a favor of you?”

“I don't see why not, Victoria.” the canid replied.

“Well, it has to do with Wilhelmine and Maryanne. I'm afraid they're both stuck in this time and place, so they will need some sort of identification and records.” the tigress put forth.

“I see what you mean.” Judge Talmadge agreed. “I'll have my furs put together some background documentation and identity cards for them.” He stopped to think for a moment, then continued. “I do know who did this and I can tell you this; if they keep screwing with the situation, they will regret it.”

####

Jennifer felt odd, holding paws with her hubby while he prayed, asking for direction concerning his wife's quandary. The issue was the latest project that was unceremoniously 'dumped' in her lap, forcing her to do something that would have serious repercussions.

“Dear Lord, our God, we pray to you this day, asking of you to please watch over Jennifer, keeping her safe from harm while she seeks a non-injurious method to complete her appointed tasks. We know you will keep her safe because we believe in you, our Lord.

“We thank you for our continued good health and the prosperity our farm has provided. We ask that you always watch over our family and friends, keeping us well and healthy. We will keep your tenets in our hearts and minds as we go about our daily chores. These things we pray to you, our Lord, Amen.”

Jennifer held her hubby's paws for just a moment longer, making her own silent prayers for a quick end to her Agency. She only hoped she would not die when it was her turn to be decommissioned.

“Robert, I have a bad feeling about this one.” she offered up. “I have to somehow make it look like the Svensen kits were killed.”

“I don't know what to tell you, my love. I wouldn't know where to start if I were given these orders.” the male otter admitted.

“Robert, I really don't know where to start, either.” the femme otter retorted. “None of them live near each other and they all have their own lives. I have to somehow get all of them together, then make it look like they were killed. I feel so lost . . .”

“Um, Jenna, these names,” her hubby started, reading them carefully once more. “John Conrad Svensen, the football player? Don't you mean John Conrad Parks, the assistant coach of the Green Bay Packers?”

Jennifer nodded. “On our world, Conrad Parks is the assistant coach of The Packers. On my mark's world, that iteration of him is Conrad Svensen, a wide receiver for the Sacramento 49'ers.”

“Sacramento Niners?”

“No stranger than our Santa Clara Niners.” Jenna pointed out. “If you'll remember, the city of Santa Clara, California sued to keep the Niners after they spent a fortune in taxpayer's money to build the team a stadium. Especially after the amusement park next door lost parking spaces to Niners fans each game day and consequently sued the city for millions in lost revenue.”

“Jen, I don't know how you keep your facts straight.” her hubby observed. “I mean, how do you know to come home to the right Robert Longbow on the correct world?”

“I was born here so I know where 'here' is. Just don't ask me to explain it. I don't know how I know where to go, I just do.”

Robert went off to assist Duncan with repairs to one of the grain silos so Jennifer took the time to start fixing lunch for her family and fore-fursons. While she pulled the ingredients together to make sandwiches and soup, she thought about the situation.

Bruce had been at her home earlier, letting her know that her suspicions were correct. Some fur in her organization had leaked their plans to the council. Names were not given out due to the unfortunate fur's premature demise but they did know a plan was in effect. How this would affect them, she didn't know.

She was also concerned about the offer that she had made, concerning the Amendment Foundation. Jenna had offered her support which the Immortal Couple had not turned down. This meant she would have to assist with whatever needs presented themselves. Jenna knew there would be some point in time that required her to dispose of a Dark Agent or possibly an Agent Of Light. That would be the turning point.

There had been times that she found herself somewhat vulnerable on a mission but those times were nothing compared to disposal of an Agent. In all likelihood, she would face repercussions from that canid she had destroyed earlier. Most likely from Zagam himself. Jenna would then find out just how powerful she really was. Could she defend herself from the Demon's wrath? This was a question that was better left unanswered.

###

The berserker finished moving the selected firearms into the house and that scent that kept touching his olfactory center every time he walked through the front door was making him hungry. Knowing he was for the most part alone due to his wife being over at the bunkhouse trailer, Torvald started searching for that snack, wondering where that intoxicating smell was coming from. It reminded him of chocolate chip cookies, freshly baked, but that was impossible. The oven was stone-cold and his thorough reconnoiter mission throughout the kitchen had not turned up the treats associated with that aroma filling the coach. How could there be such a pleasing odor in the air with no baked goods to be found?

“Mister Svensen, what are you doing?” Cami asked when she came down from her room, straightening her blouse while she watched the huge fur prowling about.

“Looking for the cookies.” he replied. “I don't suppose you would know where they are, would you?”

“The aroma is not from cookies, I'm afraid. For some reason that huge femme named Eyr smells like baked goods.”

“Eyr?”

“She's over at the bunkhouse with Victoria.” Cami offered up. “That spotted mare Valkyrie brought her here to see about Wilhelmine, Maryanne and Frank. When they arrived, that healer femme had this wonderful aroma about her.”

“If Eyr's here, I need to talk with her.” Tor put forth, heading out to meet up with the healer. Once he had made his way next door to the temporary bunkhouse, he was met by that smell again. Hrist and his mate were waiting off to the side while Eyr checked Wilhelmine, Maryanne and Frank over very carefully.

“Eyr, what's going on?” he questioned once the huge femme was done with her examinations.

“I was somehow summoned by Victoria to see about your former wives and Victoria's first love.” the femme healer offered up. “It is just as I thought; they are all bound to this world and this moment. I cannot return them to their original places in spatial time without killing them.”

“So, we're stuck here?” Maryanne questioned.

“The three of you are now part of the twenty-first century of this reality.” the Norse femme confirmed. “I have done what I was called here to do so I must be leaving.” she added.

“Eyr, might I ask for a favor?” Torvald requested.

“Yes you may, Berserker.”

“What can you do for Victoria? She's been injured by a Dark Agent and to tell you the truth, I'm concerned with her slow rate of healing. Her body is taking too long to heal up.”

Eyr frowned. “I had hoped those injuries were new.” she offered up. “In that case, I will make an exception. I was asked by Odin to not get involved in this but I cannot allow your mate to suffer.”

The healer knelt down by the injured tigress and removed her casts and boots. After a close examination,

she held the femme feline's paws in hers. Eyr closed her eyes and concentrated for a bit, bringing a glow around Victoria's injuries. This went on for several minutes before that glow faded.

Eyr frowned again as she examined the results. "I . . . I cannot do much. There is an abundance of Dark energy around her injuries, blocking my efforts. I could probably do more in Asgaard but I do not dare take Victoria there at the moment."

"Why not?"

"I have been ordered not to."

"What!?" the tigress blurted out.

"Something is going on that I am not privy to." Eyr finally admitted. "I have been given strict orders. Those orders didn't instruct me not to send another healer, though." Before anyone could say something further, Eyr vanished.

"What do you suppose she meant by that?" Victoria mused.

"I don't know." Tor replied. "I do hope it means you will be patched up shortly."

Maryanne tapped her former husband on the shoulder to get his attention.

"Tor, Wilhelmine and I need some clothing." she brought up. "Is it possible for your sister-in-law to take us somewhere so we could do some shopping? Maybe a Goodwill store?"

The stallion nodded in agreement. "yeah, I'll arrange it for all of you. Frank, are you up to going shopping with the femmes?"

"I'm up to it." the tiger agreed. "You know, Walt will be here in an hour or so. Maybe he would like to go with us, so we can visit."

"I'm sure he would." the tigress agreed. "Tor and I will foot the bill, too. If it weren't for our involvement with doing the dirty work of the Gods, all of you wouldn't be here. It's the least we can do for the three of you."

###

Jenna looked around at the neighborhood, noting the fact that even though West Covina was an older area of the Los Angeles basin, the street-scape was very well kept. The roadways were in good repair, the gutters clean and the sidewalks in top condition.

Standing across from Svensen's Music, she mused as to whether this would work out or not. She had used this particular ruse a few times but never in such a public way. Grimacing, she walked down to the corner and waited for the traffic lights to change, allowing her to cross the street safely.

Just up the street a ways, she observed the fact that Axel's Holden Maloo was parked in the side parking lot shared with the neighboring building. Beside it sat Madelyn's vehicle, her 1957 Ford Station Wagon. Jenna hoped they didn't just try to throw her out of the shop. She knew Axel didn't much care for her because she was a Dark Agent.

Taking a deep breath to get her nerve up, she went inside.

Axel was behind the counter, straightening things in the display case while Madelyn wiped down the guitars on display. The male stood up and gave the otteress his attention.

“Jennifer, what brings you here?” he asked, knowing she wouldn't cross time and realities just to shop in their establishment.

“Axel, Madelyn, I have a big problem.” she replied. “Um, I've been ordered to do something I do not wish to do. What I'm hoping for is a bit of assistance to make it appear as if I have carried out my orders.”

“And what are those orders?” Axel asked.

“I've been ordered to kill you and your siblings.” That revelation made the tall equine drop the case of guitar picks he held on the floor, scattering them thoroughly.

“No. You are not going to kill any of us,” he stated, pulling out his Colt® Officer's Model in .45 ACP from his waistband holster and leveling it at her head. “Get out of here NOW! Do it before I shoot you right here and now!!” he demanded tersely.

“No, no, no, Axel! I don't mean you no harm!” the Dark Agent tried to explain. “I will not harm any of you! I need you all alive so I can get out of the business!” she added in a somewhat panicked tone.

“How are you going to kill us without killing us?” Axel asked. This made no sense at all to him.

“Put the gun down, please? I can't heal myself, in case you didn't know.” Jenna put forth. Once Axel had complied, she continued. “I plan to use golems to pull this off.”

“Golems?”

“Yeah. Here, let me show you.” she suggested. “Quillam?” she summoned rather loudly. Within a few seconds, a gray being of indeterminate origin appeared next to the sorceress.

“You called, Jenna?” the odd creature asked, turning to look at the otteress with his steely gray eyes.

“I need your services.” she replied.

Quillam nodded in agreement. “who is my Origin Template this time?”

“The male, here. His name is Axel.”

The golem walked up to the equine and put forth a very featureless right hand. “Go ahead, it will not hurt.” the gray one offered up.

Axel took the hand offered, feeling a funny tingling sensation run through his body for just a few seconds. For just a fleeting moment, he thought he could see himself, as if through the golem's eyes. He then watched on as Quillam took on his exact appearance, dyed coloration, clothes and all.

“There, that's it.” the counterfeit Axel stated, looking himself over. “Pretty good for a first time as an

equine.” he mused. He even sounded like the original Axel.

“You look just like my husband.” the shocked zebra femme stated after examining the golem carefully. “I still don't understand how this will work, though.”

“I'll have a very nasty accident.” Quillam put forth. “Um, I'll be too badly injured to be identified but the clothing and identification that will be damaged points to Axel as the victim. Naturally, your husband will turn up in a few days, unscathed.” he explained.

“Gah, this sounds crazy, if you ask me,” the real stallion put forth.

“Trust me, this will work, I hope. I need to do one more thing, though.” Jenna put forth. “The real Axel has to go undercover, just long enough to convince Zagam that I have carried out my orders.” With a wave of her paw, the real Svensen male's appearance changed. He was now slightly shorter than his wife at five-foot eight, weighing in at one hundred-forty pounds with a dapple gray coloring. Axel was now a Shetland stallion.

“Oh My!” the zebra femme exclaimed, giving her hubby a hug and kiss.

“Just don't get used to this.” Jenna brought forth. “This will fade in five days, while he sleeps. For now, here's a key to a motel down the street. You can hole up there until you're back to normal. I've taken the liberty to stock it with food and drink for you so go, before we finish this. I don't want you around when it happens.”

###

Axel begrudgingly left the shop on hoof, headed down the street to his destination. While he walked, he thought about just how insane all of this had become. His parents injured, Aslaug out of pocket, unreachable and now this. All Axel hoped for was an ending to this insanity.

Looking at himself in the window of a shop, the equine male didn't feel different, yet the face that he touched didn't look right. The face looking back at him was a slender, shorter face. He did look good, though. Most Shetlands were not this tall. He was slender, too but not dainty. His physique was more of a dancer's build; muscular yet lean.

A few more blocks down the street, he found the Motel 5 so he headed on up to his room on the second floor. It was a nice room, a queen-sized bed to sleep on and a big bathroom complete with a full-body drying booth. He could get used to that. A check of the closet turned up clothing in his new diminutive size along with a set meant for his going home; they were in his original size.

The refrigerator had food and drink for him and there was cereal for his breakfast. Most of it seemed to be what his parents would have purchased. Axel discovered a pre-paid cell phone on the dresser with instructions to call his parents and warn them. That he would do in a few minutes, just as soon as he put on some comfortable sweats to lounge in.

While he changed his clothes, Axel heard the distinct sound of sirens out front. Looking out the window, he observed a police car, followed shortly by an ambulance, headed in the general direction of Svensen's Music. The deed must have been done. He prayed to his Gods that this would work.

###

Madelyn had gone against Jenna's direction, actually looking out the front window of her shop when it happened. It still disturbed her to see the counterfeit Axel meet his demise between a stopped box-van he stepped off the curb behind and the front end of an out-of-service transit bus bearing down on said van.

The speed limit in front of their shop was forty m.p.h. but most furs went far faster than that. She could only surmise the transit bus was going at least that fast at the point of impact. The collision destroyed the van's box and the front one-quarter of the bus. All that was truly recognizable as belonging to the fake stallion was the guitar case he was carrying. It seemed rather unscathed by the event.

Looking up, Madelyn observed a police-fur headed her way. Even though this was not her hubby, she needed to make the law-fur believe he was. In a way, this was not going to be too hard.