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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 12 – “A Search For Answers”

Cathy sat on a log, shaking her head at the thought that she had finally been involved in the trans-world mayhem that her in-laws had been wrapped up in. She looked over at the pile of armor, obviously meant for her, wondering how she was brought here, wherever 'here' was.

The lioness touched the dirk resting by her side, noting it was a robust design, sort of Scottish in nature. It had a deep blood rill down each side of the blade and it was well balanced for a femme to use. The two swords confused her, though.

The katana she understood; a weapon that would work well for a femme while still allowing her to exploit its keen, razor-sharp cutting edge. Cathy knew she could decapitate a fur with it if she needed to. It had appeared with that pile of armor, a while after she arrived. The other sword that was with her in the beginning was more utilitarian but too heavy for her to use effectively. It was more of a two-pawed Claymore type, if she knew her weaponry right. The one piece of weaponry she really felt at home with was a black powder pistol that had been provided to her with the armor. The firearm was a flintlock but it had helped her to provide herself with a meal earlier.

As the evening grew colder, she had slipped on the leather leggings and the padded gambeson over her sweat-clothes, the two items seeming to be made to fit her correctly. What she really lacked was a squire to assist her with her armor. Cathy contemplated not wearing it this evening, since it would be dark soon and she didn't want to attempt wandering about in the dark by herself. She did put on the simple knee boots that had a leather sole and a stacked leather heel to them like a modern shoe. They reminded her of the boots that Victoria had brought back from . . .

“Oh Hell No!!” she said sharply, now fairly sure of where she was. This world had been known as a 'playground' for the Malefic Council, from what she had been told by her in-laws. Making an important decision, she decided that she would do whatever it took but that armor was going on her body tonight.

Cathy had watched her hubby put his armor on twice before and she had even assisted him that last time

he had worn his armor for a New year's Eve costume party. For some reason, she was not having an easy time of it right now. The greaves were easy enough to figure out, but after that, she couldn't remember the order to proceed. Struggling with the torso armor, the lioness had finally gotten the front and back plates on, even if they weren't buckled up correctly. There were buckles under her arms that she couldn't reach so the ones at her waist and shoulders would have to do the job.

She buckled on her spaulders and vambraces, not the tightest that they could be but at least they wouldn't fall off. Cathy finished by putting her gorget around her throat, hopefully to protect her from decapitation. There were other parts to her armor but these were the ones she could get on by herself. She hated to give up the mobility but she had no way of knowing what the dark would bring. She made sure to have her barbute helm close by.

Putting another piece of wood on the fire that she had cooked a horned rabbit of some sort over, she sat down on the ground in front of her source of light and warmth and put a blanket around her shoulders. Not knowing what time of year it was, there was no telling just how cold it would get tonight. Resting her pistol on her lap, she pulled the wrap around herself tighter, warding off the evening chill.

Now Cathy understood what her mother-in-law had been through. One moment, she was in the family room of her home, the next minute stranded on a strange planet. What else could go wrong? The femme catamount didn't even want to think about that. Not now.

###

Quillam hurt all over, something that had never happened to him before. Something that should have been impossible for a golem, a clay construct. The pseudo-tiger was struggling to get his breath, his left arm must have been shattered as evidenced by his inability to move it without hurting and his head was fuzzy, possibly from a concussion. He was also having trouble feeling anything below his waist. The fire-fur assisting the Emergency Medical Technicians in placing Quillam on a stretcher got the stricken fur's attention.

“Can you hear me? If you can, tell me your name.” the fur asked calmly. It was assumed that he wanted an answer sometime soon.

“Quill . . . uh, Svensen.” the tiger corrected. “John Conrad Svensen.” he added.

“Conrad Svensen, the football player?” the lead EMT, a koala asked.

“Yes.”

“Conrad, I know you're married. Is there a way to reach your wife?” the fire-fur asked.

Quillam had to focus just to stay with the conversation. “Her mother's . . . mother's house in Irvine. Cell ph . . . phone 213-555-9714,” he replied as his vision narrowed down from lack of oxygen. If only he could just die. This hurt beyond belief at the moment. The golem had never experienced pain, not until now and it was brutal.

“Conrad? Conrad?” the EMT said firmly, getting his attention back while he put an oxygen mask over the injured feline's muzzle.

“I . . . I'm still with you.” the tiger stated through gritted teeth when they jostled him around while

putting him into the back of an ambulance.

“Conrad, you're pretty busted up but we think you're going to make it.” the technician stated while he established an IV drip-line. “Uh, is there anyone else to contact?”

“Call . . . call Jennifer Longbow. Sh . . . she's a . . . a family friend.” he offered up. “580-555-4357. Let her know I've been involved . . . unngh . . . in an accident and that I'm in pain. She will . . . will understand that and contact my . . . my parents f . . . for me.” In reality, that would tip off the sorceress that something had gone wrong.

“Conrad, I'm going to give you a shot of steroids to boost your blood pressure, then we'll give you something to take the edge off of your pain.”

“Thank . . . you,” the striped male replied, glad that they were trying to ease his suffering. He still wondered what had gone sideways. He had rear-ended a rental truck at the intersection down the street from Conrad's home, just as planned but the impact was too light, doing no real damage to either vehicle.

The dump truck that was supposed to hit him from behind changed lanes at the last second and ran the red light, which was not planned. When the counterfeit Conrad had gotten out of his vehicle to inspect the damage to his vehicle, just to make it look legitimate, a taxi cab had come out of nowhere and hit him from behind, sending him flying for sixty feet or so, almost completely across the intersection. He still wasn't sure how he had survived those brutal impacts with the vehicle and pavement.

The counterfeit Conrad was stunned by the intensity of the pain still coursing through his body. He noticed that although he could now feel his legs, that was not a good thing because they hurt worse than his arm, both lower limbs possibly broken by the car hitting him? Some fur, possibly a demon with an axe to grind, had made this situation possible. Jenna had enlisted him just to create a few diversions, not experience pain of an incredibly high level. As far as Quillam was concerned, she owed him big time for this. That was if he survived this as a flesh and blood being, not a clay golem.

Once they had arrived at the hospital emergency room, the level of care ramped up a notch or two. It didn't take long for him to lose his clothing to several sets of bandage shears, right before he was sent through a CT scanner to check his skull for fractures and internal bleeding. Just when things couldn't get any worse, a male beagle wearing an expensive polo shirt and slacks pushed his way into the treatment room Quillam was occupying.

“Conrad! Are you okay? Do you need anything?” the canid asked, seeming to be very concerned at the moment. The imitation Conrad had shared all of the real tiger's memories so this had to be Mr. Albert Rawlings, the General Manager of the Niners.

“I'm pretty r . . . roughed up, Sir,” 'Conrad' replied, right before the attending nurse put an oxygen mask over his muzzle.

“Quiet, Mr. Svensen.” the marmot scolded him. “You can talk later, when you're doing better.” She then turned to Mr. Rawlings. “You, Sir, have to leave. Right now, too. Mr. Svensen needs his rest.”

“I'll say this, then I'll leave.” the beagle stated. “Conrad, I couldn't seem to contact your wife so I called your parents.”

That was the straw that broke the feral camel's back, as far as the golem was concerned. Now Victoria

and Torvald would have to travel to Sacramento and act concerned for him, just as if he were the real John Conrad Svensen. So much for an easy diversion.

###

Victoria ended the second incoming call in just a few minutes, then she sat the phone in her lap. The tigress then sighed loudly as she shook her head, loud enough that her hubby heard her from the kitchen.

“Sweetheart, is there a problem?” he asked as he tried to keep stirring the vegetables in the wok and pay attention to his wife at the same time.

“Yeah, I think there is.” she replied. Victoria rolled her wheelchair into the kitchen area so she could converse with the stallion better. “Conrad called, saying he was okay and that he was going to go to lunch with his sisters and brother, then his boss called from Sacramento General Hospital's emergency room, saying Conrad is all busted up from a car wreck.”

“Oh no . . .” Torvald pulled the vegetables from the wok and shut off the burner. “Okay, I'll see if I can call . . .” Jennifer shimmered into existence at that moment, ending a call on a cellphone.

“We have a problem,” all three blurted out at once, all of them momentarily taken aback by that simultaneous outburst.

“You first.” the sorceress offered up to Victoria.

“Conrad is in two places at once.” the tigress pointed out. “Is he okay, or is he in the hospital?”

“Both.” the otteress stated. “Your Conrad is with his siblings and my Conrad is in the hospital. That is the small problem.”

“There's another problem?” the stallion asked.

Jenna cringed. “Some fur snatched Cathy right out from under my nose.”

“WHAT?!?” Victoria blurted out. After a moment to think, she continued. “No, you're just joking with us. Good one.”

“I wish I were.” the dark brown femme retorted. “I think it was one of Zagam's furs.”

“Well, if that isn't fucked up!” Torvald spat out, slamming a fist down on the counter in frustration. “Listen, I'll get my firearms, the biggest ones and you're gonna transport me to see that fucking winged asshole.” he stated in a murderous tone. “I intend to destroy him, once and for all.”

“Torvald, you can't go down there!” Jennifer stated loudly to get his attention. “You will only be destroyed yourself! You can't stand up to him.”

“We have stood against him once before and won. I'm sure I can do it alone, since I know his weaknesses now.” Tor replied.

“You don't understand.” Jennifer retorted. “You will be out of your element whereas he will be in his. You know as well as I do, it's always home field advantage.”

“You're right,” the berserker agreed, sounding a bit deflated at the moment. “Well, what do we do now?”

“How about you go see about Quillam, since he's masquerading as your son while I try to find your daughter-in-law?”

“That does sound like a plan,” Tor pondered, thinking it over. “We'll get ready and catch a flight up to see Quillam.”

“Here's your plane tickets and the access card for your motel room,” the femme otter offered up, conjuring up the aforementioned items. “This one is on me, since it was my idea in the first place.”

Jenna vanished, headed out to gather clues as to who or what has nabbed the Svensen's daughter-in-law. She had an idea concerning the witch that might have assisted Zagam's furs in the kit-napping.

Meanwhile, the Immortal Couple began to pack some bags so they could go see about the imitation Conrad. While the tigress packed, she kept having her sixth senses fire off on her, bugging her to no end. She just wished that she knew what it was.

###

Joe Latrans and Constantine were heading over to meet with Victoria and Torvald, just to allow the newest member of their group to get to know the Immortal Couple. The coyote was still not too comfortable with this particular fallen Angel but if Aslaug said he was a decent bloke, then who was he to argue with the Valkyrie? At least he hadn't said a word about Joe's choice of music on the CD player.

“Joe, I could have just transported us . . .” Mr. Latrans made his feelings known by interrupting the avian.

“No, that's okay. I prefer to drive, thank you.”

“But it would be so much quicker . . .”

“Thanks but no thanks.” Joe looked over at Constantine, shaking his head. “I've had my fill of being thrown across the universe by higher powers. I'll drive us, if you don't mind.”

“As you wish,” Constantine allowed, settling into his seat as much as possible, considering his wings took up a bit of space that he really needed for his body. He looked over at his new working partner, feeling his vibes. He knew Joe was the kind of fur you could trust your life to. And he had met Joe's mate Annie, another fur that you could trust explicitly. Constantine only hoped the Svensens were that same kind of fur.

Joe exited the freeway and made a left at the bottom of the ramp. Just up the road a ways, he made a right and then a left at a smaller road. It was clear this was not what it appeared to be; it was not a roadway at all but rather, it was a driveway. A blacktop drive.

Joe pulled up to the fifth wheel trailer placed in the driveway proper at the top of the drive, put his Suburban in park then shut it off. The two beings exited the vehicle and as the avian walked in front of it to head to the front door, he stopped, his beak opening in shock.

“You will excuse me for a moment or two,” Constantine said more as a statement than anything else,

taking a moment to ensure his hoodie was pulled up over his head before he walked quickly over to a pachyderm that was heading toward the Svensen's damaged home. Once behind the huge gray one, he spoke up. "Rumjal?"

The elephant stopped, then turned slowly to look at the newest "Amendment Foundation" member. It only took a moment before he recognized the other fallen Angel.

"Se . . ." Rumjal began, only to be shushed by his brother.

"It's Constantine now." he corrected. "Fancy meeting you here, of all places. Last time we were face to face, that was before we left the Celestial Home."

"I will admit it's been a while. Before you ask, what I'm doing here is a long story." the pachyderm admitted. "So, I heard what happened to you. How's that whole 'soul' thing working out for you?"

"I'm learning to adapt although it's difficult at times." Constantine countered. Looking his fallen brother over, he felt he had to say something about his odd attire. "Dressed a bit strangely, aren't we?" he commented, thinking that day-glo orange shirt kind of hurt the eyes, it was so bright.

"Well, yeah. I'm watching over the Svensens at the moment." That statement seemed to upset the feathered one.

"I dearly hope you're not planning anything malicious." Constantine put forth. "I wouldn't want to hurt you, my brother."

"No, nothing like that." the elephant admitted. "I was blackmailed by a Witches' Coven into providing protection for the whole extended Svensen family." He put forth. As Rumjal continued to explain the situation, his fallen brother found it harder and harder to keep a straight face. Eventually, he was begging the gray one to cease his narration of the events.

"Rumjal! You want me to believe this really happened to you?!?" the avian asked between laughing fits.

"Yes, I do."

"I . . . I find this quite amusing!" Constantine blurted out, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Well, I for one do not find this amusing," Rumjal countered, seeming to be upset by this. "Oh, and by the way, I'm using the name 'Ron Patel' at the moment."

"Okay, Ron it is." Constantine agreed. "I would think you could take on a Witches' Coven . . ."

"It's not just the Coven. They have four Master Mages, a mind-destroyer, an elemental controller and that blasted blond equine Valkyrie to back them up."

"Oh . . ." Now the feathered one grasped the severity of the issue. "Wendi?"

"Yes, Wendi." 'Ron' confirmed. "You do know she has a very big axe to grind with me. Just because I banished her mate . . ."

". . . And the Valkyrie?"

“Aslaug. You know, the one who destroyed Anane.” Rumjal put forth.

“Oh, I dare say you do have a problem.” Constantine retorted, still trying to keep from laughing. The fallen avian thought about the situation for a moment, then continued. “So, you don't mean any harm to the Svensens?”

“No, I do not.”

“And these witches; they will leave you alone, as long as you do as they say?”

“Yes, you are correct.”

“Well, I suppose that I'll leave you to your work, then.” Constantine wanted to add more, until they were interrupted by a black canid.

“Hey! Mister Coffee Break! Lunch break is over!! Get to work already!!” he shouted at the gray one.

“It's been nice chatting with you, my brother. I do hope you will excuse me,” Rumjal requested, nodding to his erstwhile employer. “I must be off to my job so I can keep an eye on my charges.” He then got up quickly and headed off toward the Svensen's damaged home.

###

Constantine was still snickering when he caught back up with the coyote, who seemed to be confused by the situation. Joe motioned towards the temporary residence, then headed to the front porch. Once they were on the porch, the canid knocked on the front door. After a brief moment, they were greeted by Torvald.

“Come in, Joe.” the equine bid, not noticing the other being with his friend. Once the fallen one stepped into the coach behind the canid and lowered his hoodie, Victoria began to have her sixth sense run wild. For some reason, she knew this one.

“You're Se . . .” She was interrupted by the new fur in the leather jacket and sweatshirt.

“I sense that you somehow know my original name.” he retorted, going over to the tigress and kneeling by her. “Please call me Constantine, if you would.”

“Constantine?” That name didn't ring a bell with the tigress.

“It's a long story.” he replied, seeing the confusion in her eyes. “Joe Latrans brought me over so I might meet you and your husband. It seems we will all be working together closely for some time.”

“Um, Constantine . . . there is something very different about you. Something very out of place.” Victoria observed. After a moment of mulling it over, she continued. “For some odd reason, I think you have a soul.”

“You are quite correct in your observation but how you knew, I don't know.” the fallen one admitted.

“Well, I could see that you have a personality whereas the other angels don't. I think you would need a

soul for that. You know, I might like working with you.” Victoria stated.

“I do hope we will all get along,” Constantine countered. “I will openly state that I disagree with this whole 'Unwilling Agent' thing. I will assist with the nasty parts of this endeavor and just as Aslaug has requested, I will do my best to keep all of you mortals and immortals out of the line of fire.”

“I think my wife has had just about enough of being “in the line of fire”, if you know what I mean.” Torvald brought up once they had all sat down at the dining table. “To tell you the truth, so have I. We'll do our part to provide a safe haven for those wanting out, at least until Aslaug can find them a planet that's safe for them.”

“I have spoke with the filly about this, too.” the avian stated. “I have expressed my wishes that she do whatever it takes to allow the former Agents to live out the rest of their lives in peace. I think she will try her best to do that much.”

Joe spoke up with his thoughts. “Constantine, we're worried about what will happen when we start decommissioning Agents. We have no idea how each side will react to the loss of their operatives.”

“That's where Aslaug and myself might have to intervene.” the feathered on pointed out. “I will agree that there is no telling what may occur once the Celestial Order and the Malefic Council start losing their Agents.”

“The Consortium as offered their support in whatever way they can,” Tor brought up. “Willi Marie has obtained sanction for our project. They have some heavy hitters that would be more than willing to assist us.”

The group sat and discussed plans, including how and where the Agents would be housed while Aslaug prepared to relocate them. Looking at his watch, the stallion brought up something.

“Joe, we hate to chat and run, but we need to catch a flight to Sacramento.”

The coyote looked at his friend strangely. “Is something up?” he queried.

“It's a long story but maybe we could tell you what's going on while you drive us to the airport.” Victoria suggested.

“Yeah, I can do that.” Joe agreed. “Anything for you two, my friends.”

“Anything?” Tor asked.

“Um, yeah . . .” the canid replied hesitantly.

“Well,” Tor began, “Could you push Victoria out to the car so I could carry the bags?”

“Sure thing,” Joe shot back as a smile spread across his muzzle. “Anything for my amigo mios.”

Constantine beat Joe to the punch, wheeling Victoria out of her temporary home and down the wheelchair ramp to Joe's Suburban. He had done this so he could be close to the tigress and feel her life forces. The avian smiled, content in the knowledge that he could trust the femme feline explicitly. Constantine still had no clue as to how she knew his original name.

###

Amanda, the calico-colored sorceress watched closely as Jenna strode off in search of another fur to interrogate, glad that she had held her emotions in check to prevent being discovered. The otteress had asked her point-blank if she had been involved in the Svensen fur's kit-napping. It was her good luck that she had done an exemplar acting job, not letting on that it was indeed her that had done the dirty work for Zagam.

Sitting down on a park bench, she weighed her options. Hiding wouldn't do much good if Jenna found out the truth, and returning the femme catamount to her world early would only anger her immediate boss to no end. There seemed to be only one answer to her dilemma; go watch over Cathy personally.

Getting up from the bench, she moved across the plaza and ducked into an alleyway for cover. Concentrating on her mark, she snapped her fingers, sending herself to a position near the femme on that planet.

Feeling a serious amount of disorientation from that planetary leap, Amanda sat down on a log and composed herself. Wanting to recover her strength quickly, she did something that would have repercussions if she were ever found out. Removing a small pouch from her purse, she methodically unfolded it to reveal twelve small vials of a gold-colored liquid; liquid mana that had been tailored for her physiology. Taking one from its holder, she removed the cork and quickly swallowed the vile-tasting contents.

The electrical surge that shot through her body had almost knocked her to the ground, it was that strong. There would be a price to pay later, when her energy reserves ran out. Hopefully, she would get Conrad's wife to a safe place before then. Conjuring up two horses with tack, she mounted the black gelding and led the chestnut dun mare behind her.

Amanda pondered what to tell the lioness, since "I kit-napped you to this God-forsaken place" wouldn't do. She shook her head, upset at herself for even getting herself involved in this. The more she thought about it, being out of the business would be a preferable thing. Unfortunately, Amanda knew she would most likely end up dead before that could happen.

The sorceress turned off the road and into the clearing where she found the femme catamount trying to re-stoke her camp fire that had almost gone out on her. It pained Amanda to see her in such a position; her hair a mess, armor not worn correctly and tears streaming down her muzzle.

The calico femme dismounted and it sort of shocked her that lioness didn't seem to notice her at the moment.

"Cathy?" the tri-color femme said softly, getting the femme mountain lion's attention.

"Who are you?" the hijacked femme blurted out, bringing her pistol to bear as she stood up in a combat stance.

"Whoa, Cathy, easy now," Amanda offered up, putting her paws up where they could be seen clearly when Cathy pulled the hammer to full-cock. "I'm Amanda, a sorceress and I've come to look out for your well-being." She took a deep breath to steady her nerves. "Could you put that pistol down? Please?"

“How do I know your intentions are honest?” the buff-colored femme put forth.

“Listen, I know how you got here.” Amanda replied, knowing she should just come clean in the matter. “It was I that brought you here at Zagam's request. I didn't want to do it but I was blackmailed into it. What I'm trying to do right now is redeem myself with you. If you'll let me, I can keep you safe for a few days, then I can take you home.” She swallowed hard, then continued. “I never wanted to be in league with the Malefic Council and to tell you the truth, I want out, whether through the Amendment Foundation or at your paws.”

Cathy pondered this for a moment, then spoke up. “You brought me here?”

“Yeah, I'm the responsible party.”

“And you say you can protect me?”

“I'll do my best.” Amanda replied. She was more than relieved when Cathy lowered her firearm.

“Well . . . you can do three things for me right now.” the lioness stated. “I need breakfast, a brush to fix my hair with and some help with this blasted armor!”

Amanda walked up to Cathy and held her tightly while the lioness began to sob openly on her shoulder.

“Please get me home soon.” the catamount said in a small voice between sobs.

“I will get you home safe and sound.” the sorceress replied, beginning to cry herself. “I will do my best to keep you safe from harm.”

Amanda knew that she had most likely signed her own death warrant by helping out but if she could do this one thing, return Cathy to her family, maybe she could redeem herself from total damnation.

###

Joe and Constantine had dropped off Torvald and Victoria and they were now several miles from John Wayne airport, headed back to Casa Latrans. Tor had told them what was going on and the more the story went on, the quieter Joe became. The silence, even with a local rock station playing on the radio, was deafening.

“Joe?” the fallen one said, trying to get his attention. “Not to be rude, but is there a reason you're so quiet all of the sudden?”

“Yeah.” the coyote responded. After a few moments, the canid opened up with a tirade that the avian was not expecting. “Constantine, I promised that I would just do the internet stuff from the safety of my own house but as I heard that story, every twist and turn, each fur being screwed with, it fired me up.” he growled out.

“What really pissed me off was hearing Cathy was involved in this insanity. She is the nicest fur you could ever know besides my wife Annie and Victoria. She did not deserve to be treated like this! Dammit, none of us deserved to be treated like we were!” Spewing forth a string of Spanish obscenities, he continued his tirade. “This whole thing makes me want to go home, arm up and find a way to the underworld where I can go on a demon killing spree!” Joe spat out in a malicious tone of voice.

The coyote took a deep breath to calm himself before continuing. "I've got to convince myself not to go demon-hunting, Constantine. We were told we were out of the business, done for good. We were given an out, dammit but they knew we couldn't stay away!! Those *dirty Sons Of Bitches* . . ."

Constantine could feel the heartache and despair in the coyote's voice. He also knew they would never really be retired, just inactive. They all would most likely need help to 'fall off the radar', as he was told once upon a time by Aslaug.

"Joe, I think you need to spend some time with your wife. The two of you just go somewhere off by yourselves and relax." the avian fallen angel suggested.

"You're probably right," the canid agreed, sounding sad for some reason. "You know we've done some pretty crazy things, like steal a manuscript from the Vatican with the help of an undead priest. Yeah, I need a rest."

"Somehow, Joe, I don't think you're really going to rest until the Svensen family has been brought back together." Constantine suggested.

Joe neither confirmed nor denied that fact.