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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meigh

Chapter 15 – “Transparency”

The Immortal Couple had made their way to the appropriate hospital room to find Doctor Peyton busy checking on the counterfeit tiger that was injured. Quillam opened his eyes, looked up, smiled weakly and greeted them.

“Hi Mom, Dad,” he put forth, then shook his head. “Sorry, I'm having a hard time keeping Conrad's and my thoughts separate.”

“That's okay, Quillam.” Victoria countered. “I have to say, you do look and sound just like our son.” she offered up.

“Gah, I really didn't want to end up like this.” the injured fur stated. “I'm also very aware of what you flesh-and-blood beings go through when you're injured, now that I'm in that same boat with you.”

“hold it, I'm confused now. Aren't you a golem?” the tigress commented.

Bruce spoke up. “Quillam, even if he's injured, as a golem he would have no feeling of pain. Some demon most likely has made him a mortal being.”

“Oh no . . .” Victoria said softly. “Quillam, I'm sorry this happened to you,” she said as she put her paw on his one good arm, giving it a gentle squeeze.

“Thank you for your kind words.” he replied. “What I am afraid of is losing my identity to Conrad's. When I shared his thoughts and memories, I shared them all. I know everything he does up until that point in time that we went our separate ways.” He grimaced from the pain, then continued. “His thoughts are becoming stronger, taking over my personality.”

Victoria seemed upset by this turn of events. “Doctor Peyton, is there something you could do for Quillam?” she asked.

“I’m afraid not.” the moose replied. “We can only pray that Quillam can hang onto what makes him Quillam until this ordeal is over with.” He stopped what he was doing, adjusting the pain meds dispenser for the injured tiger-being and gave the tigress a crooked smile. “At least we know where Conrad’s wife is.”

“You do?” That seemed to get Victoria’s attention.

“Jenna just left a few moments ago with Amanda Knox, another sorceress.” Bruce put forth. “Apparently Cathryn is on a planet where you had been at one time with some guards to watch over her.”

“I am so thankful,” the tigress said quietly. She looked up at the doctor and continued. “If she’s where I think she is, she is well-protected. We just need to get her home.”

Dr. Peyton agreed. “I know Jenna will do what’s right, since it all reflects on our ability to get out of the business in one piece.”

####

Aslaug crouched down behind a cooler at the end of a convenience store gondola, giving thought to this situation. The three furs over by the front door were dead, most likely Dark Agents that were trying to interfere with her 'assignment' that had been coordinated by Joe just this afternoon. It was unfortunate that her mark had mistakenly killed them.

The male gray wolf that had taken refuge inside the beer cooler wasn't making it any easier for her or himself, either. He had already put multiple bullet holes in her black Harley-Davidson[®] shirt that Victoria had purchased for her. Was the tigress ever going to be pissed about this.

“Listen to me, Donnie Azevada!” the filly shouted. “I’ve already asked you several times, nicely! Stop shooting at me!! I’m here to help you!!”

“You’re an Agent of Light!” the male shouted back from inside the cold case. “You’re here to kill me!!”

“How many times do you have to shoot me, to convince yourself you can’t harm me?” Aslaug asked as she shook her head at the situation.

“It doesn’t matter!” he shouted, firing a few rounds in her general direction. “I still say you’re here to kill me!!”

“You were the one that contacted us, wanting out!” she countered.

“Yeah, I want out of the business but not dead-out!!” the frightened male offered up.

“Come on, blast it!” Aslaug blurted out. “We don’t have a lot of time, since all of the shooting that’s went on will no doubt draw the attention of the local police!! Put the gun down and come out of that cooler so we can get out of here!!”

“You’re a Valkyrie!!” he suggested loudly.

“No kidding!” she countered. “Look, you contacted Joe Latrans, saying you wanted out.” Aslaug said calmly. “Well, I’m part of the Amendment Foundation, too. I’ve come here to take you to a safe house!” she emphasized. The filly held up a white napkin, waving it. “Truce? Just let me get us out of here before the police arrive!”

“If I come out, promise me that you won’t kill me!” he shouted from behind the cheap malt liquors.

The filly rubbed her forehead. “Okay, I won’t kill you! I promise! Now come out! I hear sirens!!”

“I’m coming out!” he shouted from behind the Sports-Aide section while he made his way to the end of the coolers where the access door was situated. “Keep your paws up where I can see them!”

Aslaug stood up where he could see her, paws up enough that the wolf could see them. She was relieved when he appeared, pistol pointing up, finger out of the trigger guard. She was concerned over the approaching sirens, though.

“What now?” the male asked.

“Out the back way before the police arrive,” the Valkyrie stated, motioning to the back door.

“You first.” Donnie demanded.

The vulpine male followed his rescuer out through the storeroom to the alley beyond. What waited for them outside scared the living daylights out of Mr. Azevada.

“What the . . .!?! Oh No, I am so out of here . . .” he said as he turned to run away from the wolf that was at least the size of a feral horse. Aslaug grabbed his shirt collar and literally dragged her mark over to Varghöss. “Hey! Let go of me!! That thing might bite me!!” he complained loudly while he tried unsuccessfully to break the Valkyrie’s grasp on him.

“Varghöss will not bite unless I tell him to.” she interjected as she expertly vaulted up onto the giant wolf’s back. “Now, come with me or face three counts of murder one,” she offered up, putting out a paw to help her mark aboard.

“I have finally lost my mind.” Donnie muttered as he accepted the paw up.

“Hold on to me tightly or you will fall off and die.” Aslaug stated. She then bent over and said softly to her mount, “Take us to the tall, blond stallion and the striped femme that gives you treats.”

Varghöss took off down the alleyway to build up some speed, only to find the end of the alley blocked by an occupied squad car, emergency lights on. The giant other-worldly wolf leaped and used the roof of the car to finish his vault into the sky, leaving a caved-in vehicle roof and two bewildered police-furs behind. He would get his passengers to their destination in record time, his only thoughts at the moment were that of the nice, striped not-prey femme that smelled like spices and gave him slices of dried salami when he thought his rider was not looking.

###

Amanda and Jenna materialized in Cathryn’s room only to find her on the bed, napping on top of the covers. The otteress swept the room for intruders while the femme feline checked at the door. She then

nodded to Amanda that is was clear.

“Karyn! I need you!” Jenna said softly but firmly, causing a female golem to materialize in their midst.

“I'm at your service,” the gray one said, looking at the situation. “Who is my Origin Template?”

“I'll need to wake her first,” the dark brown sorceress replied. Crossing the room, she gently nudged the sleeping lioness to rouse her.

“Uh, what's . . . what's up?” Cathryn asked as she sat up. “Another golem?” she asked as she spied the clay being in her room.

“Yeah, we need to do it again.” Jenna replied. “Karyn, here will impersonate you on your home world, tending to the injured counterfeit Conrad.”

“What happened to him? I thought Quillam was going to be killed in a car wreck.”

“We're not clear as to who is messing with things.” the otteress offered up. “As you remember, our decoy Conrad was supposed to die in an accident. Well, Quillam is now a flesh and blood being with multiple injuries. Torvald and Victoria are with him right now but you, or more correctly, Karyn will be with him, making it look proper and keep suspicions down. You will go to be with your real husband, but in disguise, too.”

“Take my hand.” the golem offered up to Cathy.

She did as she was asked, momentarily feeling as if she could see herself through the clay one's eyes. Karyn the slowly morphed into a flawless replica of the catamount, wearing her favorite jeans and knit top.

“How do I look and sound?” the fake feline asked as she did a slow, graceful pirouette.

“You do look like me but does my voice really sound like that?” Cathy questioned.

“She sounds just like you.” Amanda put forth.

Jenna walked up to the genuine femme. “Well, you need to thank the guards for their time and then we need to get the two of you to the right places.”

The catamount went out into the hall where Sir Morri stood guard over her room. She could tell that he sensed something had changed.

“Sir Morri, I admit that I'm a little sad over what I must tell you.” Cathy began. “Amanda and I will be leaving your fine company. Is there anything you might want me to pass along to my Mother-in-law?”

The red-headed male called his compatriots into the hall before he replied.

“Please tell our Miss Vicki that we still miss her.” Morri offered up as he wiped a tear from from his cheek. “Let her and your entire family know that all of you will always be welcome in this kingdom.”

“We need to leave.” Jenna offered up.

Cathy hugged the three guards, right before she shimmered out of sight with the otteress. The counterfeit femme cougar left with Amanda, since she knew where Quillam was at the moment.

Cathryn and Jennifer reappeared on the second floor walkway of a motel in a neighborhood that seemed familiar. Her benefactor knocked on the door in front of them, where her hubby the honey badger answered.

“Conrad, I brought you a present.” Jenna offered up. “May we step inside?” she asked. Cathy did not wait to be asked inside, pouncing on her hubby with kisses, right in the doorway.

Once the catamount disentangled herself from her mate and followed him back into the room, the otteress went inside after them and closed the door behind her.

“Is this safe to do?” Conrad asked. “You did make it sound as if we were in mortal danger.”

“Not if your wife is in disguise, too.” Jennifer replied, as the femme feline became a femme honey badger like her hubby. “Quillam and Karyn have shared your thoughts, so they should be able to masquerade as the Svensens with no problems. If they have an issue, Karyn has your phone number.”

“What about our disguises? How long will they last?” Conrad asked.

“They will last until you come face to face with your doppelgängers. When you touch paws with them, the two of you will turn back to your old selves. I must be going, before Zagam notices I am here.”

###

Jenna had left Conrad and Cathy to themselves, so they decided to watch some television and unwind. Conrad did the bulk of the watching, partly the screen but mostly his wife.

“Sweetheart, are you staring at me?” Cathryn asked with a smile, snuggling into the pillow under her head.

“I am.” he admitted. “I dunno, Hon. I feel like I'm cheating on you with some lovely femme honey badger.”

Cathy smiled. “I feel the same way.”

“You're not bothered by that?”

“Not really,” the femme replied, pulling Conrad's paw up to her lips and kissing it. “I know who you are, even if you don't look like my hubby.” She thought for a moment, then continued. “Um, so what do we do now?”

“I'm not sure about you, but I have to be at work for Axel at ten in the morning.” Conrad kissed his wife on the lips and added, “I'm Axel's new keyboard sales-fur, John C. Parks.”

“John C. Parks, is it now?” the femme said with a mischievous smile. “I'm not sure where I've heard that name before.”

“The same place I heard his mates' name; Annette Cathryn Parks.” the male retorted.

“Well, listen here, Mr. Parks,” 'Annette' began, “I'm tired, so I'm going to get some rest.” she offered up.

“Huh? You just got here!” 'John' shot back, clearly confused.

“Sorry,” 'Annette' stated, kissing him. “It was nighttime on that planet where I was.”

“Ah, I see.” The male badger mused. “I guess we'll have plenty of time to get reacquainted, anyway. Quillam will be in a world of hurt for a few months.”

“Go to sleep.” Annette suggested through a yawn as she adjusted the position of her pillow.

“Okay.”

John laid in bed, not exactly sleepy but he would respect his mate's wishes. Turning the volume off on the television, the 'Close Caption' setting allowed him to watch the news for a while before he joined his mate in sleep. He only hoped things would be back to normal in a few months.

####

Zagam sat down at a table in an Underworld cafe, facing a winged leopard. The feline looked up only briefly to acknowledge the ebony Minotaur's presence before turning his attention back to the menu.

“We think it's gone on long enough. It is time to go to 'Plan B', my brother.” Zagam stated softly.

“Are you sure?” the feline asked, not bothering to look up.

“Yes, Sytry.” the bovine replied. “The Valkyrie just collected another one of ours, killing three more of ours that were sent after her in the process. It seems the Amendment Foundation is not getting the message we are sending them.”

Sytry looked up. “The femme equine sorceress, Wilhelmine. Is she out of the picture?”

“I had her nabbed, just as you ordered.” Zagam replied.

“What of Rumjal? What's he up to?” the feline asked.

“We're not sure.” the bovine fallen one replied. “I sent an Agent to spy on him but he hasn't reported back yet.”

“Hmm, I sense you are right.” Sytry agreed. “Time for 'Plan B', then. Just remember, this might start the war in earnest. Be prepared for the backlash that will no doubt occur.”

“We are well aware of the ramifications, my brother. I said I would help you to obtain Lucifer's seat at the table and I will not stop until we have done so.” the ebony one stated as he got up and left the cafe.

Watching until the Minotaur was out of sight, the feline made a quiet observation; “Fool. The Light Bringer will have your collective asses for lunch and then I will have your seat.”

Sytry was sure this plan would work; he had wanted a seat on The Malefic Council for eons, ever since

the great falling. Somehow Zagam had managed to get a seat, one that the fallen felid Angel felt was his. Once 'Plan B' was put in motion, he was sure Lucifer would go ballistic when the plan was brought to fruition. That would lead to Zagam's demise.

He smiled as he thought about the grand show that would unfold. That and the long-awaited destruction of the Immortal Couple, their family and that blasted meddling Valkyrie.

###

Torvald and Victoria had visited with the stand-in tiger and his femme cougar counterpart, just to make things seem normal to the other furs around them. The tigress knew things were nowhere near normal at the moment, but the illusion helped to settle her mind. They would stay the night in Sacramento, then Joe would pick them up at the airport tomorrow when the Immortal Couple flew back down to Orange County. They had just walked out of the front door of the hospital when Aslaug and a male gray wolf wearing a convenience store work-shirt walked up to them. The filly took but a brief moment to access the situation.

“Victoria? What on earth happened to you? Is this from that explosion Joe told me about?” she asked in a very concerned tone. “And you, Berserker, you look like you had a run-in with Varghöss!”

“It's good to see you, too.” Torvald replied, trying to suppress a smile. “So, who's your friend?” he asked, motioning to Mr. Azevada.

“Oh, I'm sorry.” the Valkyrie commented. “This is Donnie Azevada, one of Lucifer's unwilling Agents. I brought him here because he contacted us, looking for a way out. Donnie, this is Torvald and Victoria Svensen, part of The Amendment Foundation. They run the safe house.”

“Nice to meet you, I think,” the canid offered up, shaking Torvald's paw.

Torvald noticed the wolf's concern for their appearance. “Listen, this is why we want to decommission as many of the unwilling agents that we can, before something like what happened to us, happens to them. We're immortal, so you could probably guess what would have happened to a mortal.”

“Wow . . . just . . . wow . . .” Mr. Azevada looked like he might collapse so the stallion guided him over to a bench, sat him down then joined him.

“Listen,” Torvald started, getting the canid's attention. “You come with us to the motel, then fly back to Orange County with us tomorrow. We'll put you up at our place somehow, even if it's a couch at first. Aslaug will scout out a safe world where Lucifer has no jurisdiction over that reality. You will be safe there.”

“I'm going to stay with all of you until we're back at Rancho Svensen.” the Valkyrie stated. “Our exit wasn't the most elegant one I've ever performed.”

Victoria seemed bothered by that. “So, how was it 'not so elegant', as you put it?”

“Um, I wasn't very tactful when I approached Donnie.” Aslaug admitted. “He was spooked already so when three more Dark Agents showed up to spoil the show, he killed them.”

Tor nodded. “I expected this to happen. We won't be able to grab Agents without resistance every time.”

###

Wilhelmine had finished her lunch and she was now being introduced properly to her relatives by Amber. It kind of surprised her that her kit-napping had been a family affair of sorts.

“Wilhelmine, this is your Great-aunt Julie Hill-Longacre and her husband Max,” the honey-colored mare stated, indicating the two sitting on the loveseat in the family room.

The small dapple gray femme equine stood and went to Willi Marie, giving her a warm hug. “I'm sorry we kit-napped you like that.” she offered up. “I was told you were a Class Six so I wasn't taking any chances with any of us getting hurt, you included. That's why we were a bit aggressive at your home and now I regret that action. My hubby Max feels the same way about it. We're both sorry.”

“Apology accepted,” the taller femme replied, hugging the smaller femme back.

“This is your Great-uncle Troy Long Hill, my husband.” Amber indicated the gray stallion that was slightly shorter than Canton, leaning casually against the wall.

“Yeah, uh, sorry I grabbed you like that.” he offered up, sounding almost like his older brother. He walked up Wilhelmine and hugged her. “No hard feelings?”

“You were just following orders.” the palomino femme retorted. “You didn't know who I was.”

Amber motioned to the wolf standing in the corner. “This is Rafael Montoya. The hill family has known him ever since he was a pup. He's our technician.”

“I am so sorry we mistakenly grabbed you. It was a very unfortunate incident.” the canid offered up.

“Um, you're a technician . . .” Willi mused. She looked at her relatives, then asked a question that was burning in her mind. “Tell me; why do some of you seem so familiar to me? Not just from our brief encounter in my kitchen, but from somewhere else altogether?”

“I was in the last season of Stargate SG-1, playing a minor recurring role. That was my most recent work. Julianna and Maxwell were in the final episode with me.” Rafe offered up. “We have all been in the movie industry for years, both in front of and behind the camera. We mostly do stunt work, since magic and stunts kind of go together.”

Anna hugged her Grand-daughter around the shoulders. “Canton tried to get me to do stunt work but I just didn't have the timing. I did 'Paint Your Wagon' with Canton, Julie and Tank.”

“Your Grandmother was good, Wilhelmine. Don't let her fool you.” The elder male equine put forth. “Well, you just as well see where you are. I'm sure you'll be surprised.”

Canton touched the collars on Anna and Willi Marie, causing them to unlock. Once the bands were removed, he led his Grand-daughter out the front door of the house and to the street. Willi could see that this was a community situated in a wide canyon with a large city off to the west. The vehicles had California plates of the current year, making her suspect that she might not be too far from home.

“Look over there,” Canton requested, turning the young sorceress to look at a landmark across the way

that she recognized immediately. It was the 'Hollywood' sign. He then turned Willi to face him. "Had I known that I had a Grand-kit living so close, I would have come to visit you and your family."

Willi was wondering about something. "Grandpa, would it be okay if I were to go home? I'm sure my hubby misses me."

"Not right now," the elder equine replied. "Our contact will be returning in a few days to pay us and I'm sure he will want to see that you're actually here. You could have your mate come and visit you here, though." Canton thought for a moment, then continued as he gave his relative his cellphone. "Here, call him on my phone, then bring him here. I'm sure he would enjoy meeting your extended family."

"Well, okay." Willi took the phone offered and dialed her home phone, waiting patiently for Richard to answer.

###

Richard was fixing a snack for the furs in his kitchen, since it had been a while since Anna had left in search of his wife. It bothered him that there was something afoot and there were relatives involved. He just hoped that it was an honest mistake or oversight, nothing more.

He was putting the snacks on the table when his mate's phone began to ring. The number belonged to Hill Associates, a group whose name he didn't recognize off-paw.

"Delancey residence," her husband answered, since he didn't know the number displayed.

"Richard, its me. I'm with family and I'm fine." Willi almost blurted out.

"Are you with Canton?"

"This is his phone." Willi replied. "Listen, it's a long story but I need to hang out here for a few days. Stand clear and I will bring you here to the Hollywood hills."

"You're where?"

"I'm at Grandpa Hill's house in the Hollywood hills."

"Um, on what world?" Richard asked for clarification.

"Our world!" the femme equine said in an exasperated tone.

"I know exactly where she's at." Bethany stated. "Tell your mate we're on our way."

"Tell Bethany I heard that." Wilhelmine told her hubby.

Before Richard could tell the kurani that bit of information, he found himself looking across a neatly trimmed front yard at his wife. Bethany had transported Iva, Erich and Hilda to her location. It only took a few moments before Willi Marie pounced on her hubby, hugging and kissing him.

"Are you okay?" Richard asked of his bride, once he had peeled her off of himself.

"I'm fine." she replied. "Um, maybe I should introduce all of you around?"

"That might be nice." her hubby replied.

Willi turned to introduce them to her Grandfather but she stopped when she observed him walking up to Iva Marie. There seemed to be some tension in the air between them and he stopped a few steps short of his daughter, looking very pained.

"Hello, Daughter." the tall one offered up hesitantly, holding out a paw to her.

"Father," Iva replied, giving her dad's paw a squeeze before she let go of it.

"Listen, I'm sorry . . ." Canton began, only to be interrupted.

"No, that's all right. You did what you thought . . ." Iva gulped, then continued. ". . . what you thought you needed to do." It was clear she was upset by the situation.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." the elder Hill offered up. "I wasn't mad when you took your step-father's last name. I know it was to help you to blend in at school."

Iva turned away from her elder. "No, Kurtis and I changed our last names to Schmidt just to hurt you. We were mad that you left us like you did. It's I that should be sorry and ask for your forgiveness."

"No, I was to blame. I left and I now look back, knowing I had made a mistake in leaving your mother."

"We made mistakes, too. I knew where you were for decades and I never made an effort to come see you. We really should just forget about it. More so now that Wilhelmine is pregnant. I'm sure you'll want to see your Great-grandkits."

Canton stepped close to his daughter and took her in his arms, sobbing softly.