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## “Redemption”

By Kellan Meig'h

### Chapter 18 – “Temporal Paradox”

Joe Latrans was driving south along the 241, keeping an eye out for the Portola Parkway exit. Cami had called him this morning, telling him about her conversation with Aslaug and her need for him to meet them at the Svensen residence. The idea that Torvald and Victoria had been abducted did not set well with him. Not at all . . .

If it had not been for the fact that they were trying to help out other Agents in their position, unwilling Agents, he would just find himself a way to go tell *The Almighty* just what he thought of him and his policies. As it was, they all needed to keep a low profile. Well, as low as possible.

The coyote exited the freeway at the Portola Parkway exit, then he turned left, back under the freeway. At the next signal, he made a right onto Glenn Ranch road, then a left into the Svensen's driveway. At the top of the court, he parked his vehicle and got out, only to hear a somewhat heated argument in progress.

“What in the hell is wrong with you!?” Cami loudly questioned a young femme gray wolf that she was sitting astride, who was face-down on the ground. “When I yell at you to stop, you stop, dammit!”

“I was just going for a short walk!” the young canid shot back. “I'm not stupid! I want out of the business, too!! I'm not cuttin' out on you!!”

“Gimme your paws! Now!” the femme wolverine demanded, preparing a pair of paw-cuffs.

“Aw, come on! Not the cuffs!” Renee begged.

“It's for your own good!” Cami retorted. “Just gimme your left paw, then your right. I'll be gentle.”

“That's what you said last night,” the young femme said in a dejected tone, reluctantly giving her 'guard' her left paw. “You left me tied up all night so I slept like crap.” she added while Cami did up first her left, then her right wrist.

“Cami, what's going on here?” Joe asked, having missed what happened before he drove up.

“Oh, Hi, Mr. Latrans,” the wolverine said jovially, assisting Renee to her feet. “Um, my charge, here was using the latrine, then she decided to go walkabout on me without my knowledge.”

“I did not.” the young gunsmith in training shot back. “I was going to go sit under that cedar tree, on that bench and get some fresh air. I wasn't going to leave.” she stressed.

“Mr. Latrans, this is Renee Thorp.” Cami introduced her charge. “Renee, this is Joe Latrans. He's with The Amendment Foundation.”

“Can you really help me to get out of the business?” the young canid asked the coyote, point blank.

“Aslaug can move you to a reality where your boss doesn't have jurisdiction.” he confirmed.

“Could you persuade Cami to unhook me?” Renee questioned further.

“Sorry, I can only advise and suggest. She is in charge of you right now.” Joe offered up. He then looked at the femme warrior. “Cami, has Aslaug or Constantine arrived?”

“Not yet.” she replied. “Come on, let's go sit down inside, where I can watch our 'guest' here and I can hopefully finish doing the breakfast dishes at some point in time.”

###

The whiteness around the tigress slowly coalesced into a small clearing in a pine forest, obviously early spring by the small amount of snow on the ground near the treeline. It was cool, cold enough that she could see her breath in the air. She looked around, hoping to recognize something but after a short time, the femme warrior realized that she had most likely never been here in her life.

“Ah! There you are!” a male voice spoke behind her, causing her to turn and face a white-haired humanoid male, dressed in casual clothing, wearing round framed glasses and smoking a cigar.

“Who are you and where am I?” the striped femme demanded to know.

“You may call me Geoff.” the man replied with a smile. “Here,” he stated, gesturing widely with his hands, “is my home.”

“Okay, Geoff, how did I get here? The last that I remember, I was in the castle armory, wishing I could confront that blasted dragon.”

“I intercepted you, Victoria.” he stated casually. “I needed to speak with you before you could take your mission to fruition.”

“So you sidetracked me.” the tigress put forth.

“That I did.” he confirmed. “Please, have a seat.”

The tigress took a seat on the sectional couch that had come from . . . somewhere. Victoria had her suspicions about this situation, but she wanted to see where it was headed first.

“Victoria, I intercepted you because I needed to make sure you really wanted to do this. Once I allow you to go back to that point in time to confront Eldon, all bets are off.”

Victoria was puzzled. “All bets?”

“Yes.” the man agreed. “You see, I was instrumental in placing you on that planet, in that reality. You have to know, you were marked for extermination. You and Torvald both. A promise had been made at one point between us, that you and your husband would go to someplace nice together, the two of you, when the time came. That planet and reality was that place. You and your husband were safe from harm there, since none of us have real jurisdiction there. To be honest, that world and reality was not where you were to be moved to but I saw it as a viable alternative.”

The femme feline was really puzzled now. “So, you're telling me that you're . . .” The man interrupted her train of thought.

“Yes, I am he. You have prayed to me and you have also swore at me. In some very colorful ways, I might add.”

“Gah!” Victoria spat out, getting to her feet and pacing. “I'm dead, aren't I? I've effed up somehow and I've finally lost my life. That's the only reason that I would be here, standing in the presence of . . .” She was interrupted again.

“You are not dead, not by a long shot. Please sit down.” the male asked. He waited until his guest had taken her seat, then he continued. “Look, it's just this simple. If I allow you to continue, all bets are off. I can neither continue to sanction nor continue to mitigate anything that happens after this point in time.” He thought for a moment, puffed his stogie, then continued on. “No, I can mitigate one thing. If you manage to kill Eldon, I can have a few Angels return his dead carcass to the proper realm. As you can tell, I don't hold much stock in dragons. They're too easily swayed by a small bag of gold.”

The man tapped his ash into an ashtray that wasn't there a few moments ago, looked at his smoke for a moment, then continued.

“I would like to point out, anything that happened after Eldon snatched you and your husband will be null and void. Your service to the Crown, your children, everything. It will have never happened, except you will remember it all, if you survive the paradox. Think carefully about losing those things.

“Speaking of that, by going to that point in time and space, you will be creating a Temporal Paradox. You will exist in that space twice. The younger you and the older you. What will happen, I don't know because we have been very careful not to ever let that happen. Vishnu seems to think the universe will explode. Templar Prime postulates that it will be something like dividing by zero, whatever that is. He attempted to explain it to me once but it seems too technical to me. But I digress.

“I see the real problem as being the fact that there will be two of you in the same reality, if the universe doesn't go 'poof' as Vishnu suspects will happen. I know you well enough to know you will not fight your other self over Torvald and I know you would be miserable with him so close yet unreachable. As you can

see, this will be a mess. As I said before, I will not mitigate anything. Whatever happens, happens. You will be on your own. It's one of those 'It is what it is' situations."

"So, that's the gist of the matter?" she asked. "I'm on my own to either fix things or fail?"

"In a nutshell." he agreed. "So, do you want some time to think this over?"

"No. Send me on to what might be my ultimate demise."

"There is that possibility." Geoff agreed. "You could just disappear, since the past version of you would already be there."

"I'll take that chance." she put forth. "I'll either repair what was screwed up by that dragon or I will screw up and fail. If I eff up, at least I will know that I tried my best to repair what had gone awry for my family and myself."

"Okay, I can live with that." the deity agreed. "In fact, it was exactly what I suspected you would do."

"So, why intercept me?" she asked.

"Because I promised Odin and Vishnu that I would try my best to talk you out of this mission that you've set for yourself. I personally feel a bit differently about it so I won't stop you if this is what you want to do. If any one of my Agents could pull this off, it will be you." he replied. "I wish you success, my child."

Geoff smiled and the world around the tigress, without warning, went white . . .

###

Geoff was still sitting on the couch, enjoying his smoke, when Odin arrived. The old one-eyed wolf sat down and looked at his contemporary with mixed emotions.

"What? Did I do something wrong?" the man asked.

"No, you did not." the canid deity replied. "So, are we going 'paws off' now?"

"No." 'Geoff' replied. "Victoria is special to me. I'll catch flack from the others, but I will not let her die. Not both iterations of her, anyway. That type of female Agent is so rare that I hate to lose her."

"Torvald?" Odin questioned. "What of my stallion? May I protect him? He has much left to do."

"He will be watched over. It would be a shame to lose him, too." the white-haired man stated. "As much as I do not care for these mixed-religion marriages, they seem to make it work. Even if I have to remind them once in a while."

"As I have had to do, too." the wolf pointed out. "What of The Foundation? Will you allow them to decommission your Agents?"

"The truly unwilling ones, yes. They are of very limited use to me." Geoff puffed his cigar, then continued. "And you? Will you allow them to do the same to your Agents?"

“I have a few, one or two that I might allow to be decommissioned.” Odin replied. “What I worry about are the Dark Agents that belong to Lucifer. He will not allow them to take his Agents without a fight.”

“I will not openly interfere with their endeavor.” Geoff offered up. “That is not to say that I will not send covert help when it is needed.”

“My thoughts exactly.” the canid agreed. “As long as The Foundation doesn't interfere with my willing Agents, I have no issues with them.”

“I agree.” the elderly man put forth. “If they start taking my active, willing Agents, that will be a different story. Then I will openly take action against them. It could get ugly, too.”

###

Cami looked around at her surroundings, wondering what was going on. Something felt very out of place at the moment, something she couldn't put a finger on. Her confusion was not lost on Joe.

“Cami, is something wrong?” he asked, noticing her obvious confusion.

“I don't know.” the femme wolverine replied. “Something is not right.”

“I agree.” Renee chimed in. “My skin is crawling. That is not normal.”

“Okay, something is up.” the male canid put forth. “I'm going to call Aslaug and see if it has something to do with them.”

Joe pulled out his cellphone and speed dialed the Valkyrie just to make sure it was not something associated with her or her charge.

###

Victoria had made it to her destination, weapons system in paw but not like she expected to arrive. The femme feline was face up from the floor but floating about three feet above the level of the bed. She barely had time to brace herself before she fell and impacted the floor, knocking the wind out of her self.

“Huh?” the sleeping femme feline said as the noise of her future self hitting the floor woke her. Leaning up on one elbow, she looked around the room to see what was going on. That was about the time her other self sat up, coughing and gasping for air.

“Valerie?” the tigress in pajamas questioned, since the femme on the floor looked to be family. That was until she noticed the Captain's emblems on the other femme's cape closures. “Oh . . . Shit . . .!” she blurted out when she finally recognized just who the other tigress was.

“We're in a shit-load of trouble!!” the femme on the floor wheezed out, waving a paw to get her other self's attention. “A dragon is coming! If we don't . . .” The future femme worked through a coughing fit, then continued. “If we don't stop him, we're going back to Halstlund for good!”

“What? What happened?” the present femme asked, helping her other self to her feet.

“I don't have time to explain! Eldon will be here any second! The room is cooling off already!” the elder femme pointed out. “Get Tor's revolver ready! Wake him, if you can while I wake up Aslaug!”

The younger tigress began to shake her hubby, attempting to wake him up while the tigress from the future stirred the filly.

“Aslaug! Wake up!!” she shouted, shaking the filly's shoulder to get her up. When that failed, she slapped the equine femme firmly. “Wake the hell up!!” she shouted.

“What the . . .?!” Aslaug blurted out, trying to get her bearings. She looked up at the femme feline that was dressed in fourteenth century clothing and holding a compound bow, confused by the garb Victoria was wearing. That was until she observed another Victoria wearing pajamas, shaking Torvald, trying to wake him up. “Wha . . . Oh Hell!! What's happened now?!?” she demanded.

“No time!!” the oddly clothed femme blurted out. “A dragon is coming!! We need to stop him from abducting my other self and Tor!!”

Aslaug swept off the blanket covering her and simultaneously sat the recliner up while grabbing a pawful of franciscas from beside her makeshift bed. The two paw weapons were almost too cold to touch and the room was becoming covered in frost. “Gah! I don't like this one damned bit!!” she growled while she got up and moved some furniture to make some fighting room.

“Victoria?” the stallion mumbled, trying his best to wake up. “Sweetheart, what's going on?” he asked as he sat up in bed.

“She wants you to wake up, lunkhead!!” the other tigress spat out. That got the stallion's attention.

“Uh, why are there two of you?” he asked as he got up out of bed and the idea finally dawned on him.

“I'll explain later!!” the frustrated future femme shouted. “Just get your revolver or whatever and get ready to do battle!! We have a dragon to kill!!”

“Geez, testy aren't we?” he mumbled as he checked his weapon for readiness.

“I heard that!” the oddly-attired femme stated. “Listen, when this is over with an if I'm still here, I'm gonna . . .” Her rant was cut off by the dragon's appearance in the room. He looked around, noted that there were two femme felines and an angry Valkyrie staring at him so he stepped back a step.

“Oh . . . Shit . . .!!” the drac spat out. “I've been had!!”

Aslaug ran at the dragon, striking him with a francisca, only to have it slide off his tough scales that were just like ceramic armor, doing no harm to him. He back-pawed the Valkyrie hard in return, sending her through the closet door as if it had been made of rice paper. He then turned his attention on the future femme feline, who was drawing her bow.

“What do you think you're doing, bitch!?!?” he shouted, running at her, then taking a flying leap at the tigress in an attempt to take her weapon from her. She loosed a shaft just as the drac landed on her with a sickening 'crunch', both of them going to the floor in the hallway to the bathroom. Eldon didn't move after that, most likely due to the dragon-slayer arrow that protruded from his back.

Torvald could see that the femme under the huge lizard was still moving, grasping at thin air with a paw, so he quickly went to her aid. Because of the dragon's enormous weight for his size, it was a struggle to move him off of what appeared to be another version of his wife. She wasn't moving much, mostly gasping for breath. Both eyes were open but not focused and one pupil was larger than the other, indicating a serious head injury.

“Victoria?” he questioned, pulling her up into his lap. “Victoria, Sweetheart! Can you hear me?”

“I . . . I'm in a world of hurt . . . from that . . . drac crushing me.” she finally explained. She was blinking her eyes to clear her sight but seemed plausible that she might have been blinded by her head injury. “Get . . . get me up from here. I feel . . . I feel cold all over.” she begged in a ragged voice.

“Um, Victoria? Why are you here? Can you tell me?” the present day tigress asked, reaching out to take the paw of the one that must be another iteration of herself.

When their paws touched, a huge flash of light went off between them, caused by an unexpected electrical discharge of some kind. The resulting discharge sent the pajama-clad tigress flying across the room to land hard against the wall. She fell to the floor, twitched a few times, then shakily attempted to get back up. It seemed like the present-day Victoria was going to get back to her feet from her incident but she failed, slumping against the wall, then sliding down to the floor in a sitting position, not breathing. Torvald watched on helplessly as the life drained out of his tigress' eyes.

###

Wilhelmine had gotten out of bed because of a need to relieve herself for the second time in just a few hours. It was early, not quite sunup, the sky just light enough to blot out the stars. She was thinking that she would be overjoyed to give birth to her kits and get the excess pressure off of her lower abdomen. While washing her paws after taking care of her needs, she looked at herself in the mirror.

The image that looked back at her was very reminiscent of her mother, when she and her brother had been born. Those photos showed a very tired femme, just like the one in the mirror. She smiled at herself, just as a wave of . . . something . . . washed over her. For just a moment, she thought the mirror showed a trim, older femme that could have been her, in a room that had stone walls.

Willi Marie dried her paws and went back into the bedroom, only to find Richard sitting up in bed, looking at the room in general. He seemed to be a bit upset, too.

“Willi, we're at your grandfather's home, right?” he asked, just to clarify things.

“Yeah, we are.” she replied. The femme equine sat back down on the bed and at that moment, experienced another wave of what was now nausea wash over her. “Richard, there is something wrong with me. I felt this feeling of dread in the bathroom and I was sure I was somewhere else for a moment or two. Now it's happened again, a nausea-like feeling making me sick to my stomach.”

“I experienced it too.” her hubby retorted. “I was somewhere else, maybe in a castle. I was teaching math to a small group of kits.”

“Oh, something's up. Something real bad.” the sorceress put forth in a cautious tone. “Listen, I'll call Aunt Victoria and see if it was something on their end.”

She picked up her cellphone that Richard had brought with him and quickly hit the speed-dial for her adoptive aunt. It rang several times, then a very distraught stallion answered the phone.

“Torvald,” he said as he took the call, seeing that it was the sorceress on the caller ID.

“Uncle Torvald, you sound upset. Is there a problem?” she asked out of concern.

“Well, we have a mess.” he related between sobs. “I have a very ill tigress here in the hotel room. She is seriously injured and I fear she might not survive for long. That's not the worst of it, though. I also have a very dead tigress on my paws. They're both your Aunt Victoria.”

The feral scream of anguish that Willi let forth was most likely heard on the Consortium home world.

###

Joe closed the door on his Suburban, still somewhat in shock. Wilhelmine had called him, just to tell him the bad news. To say the least, it was a shock and a revelation. One tigress was gone, a victim of a dimension-traveling dragon and the other one was dying and not long for this world. He shook his head as he started his vehicle, the earth-bound version of the Bowtie Beast and headed for home.

Torvald and Victoria had put up the good fight for The Celestial Order and this is how they were rewarded? It wasn't what he had expected. Especially due to the fact that the stallion would have to explain to the authorities how he had two dead tigresses on his paws that were identical, right down to the fingerprints. How would one explain two femmes, that were identical in every respect?

The coyote put a toothpick in his mouth, helping him to think about this. What if this were his mate? He didn't know how he would handle it all. What angered him was the fact that they received no assistance from *On High*. That was not right on any level. They had been shafted, as far as the canid was concerned. What he didn't want to do was to tell Annie what had transpired. He knew how she would take it. He could already see it in his mind's eye. She would fly off the handle and then at some point, when she realized the same thing could happen to her husband, she would break down in tears.

So much for a quiet afternoon.

###

Vishnu and Templar Prime looked down at what had just happened, somewhat puzzled by the outcome. The armored deity shifted his helm from one arm to the other and straightened his tabbard before he spoke.

“Well, that was not a 'Divide By Zero' event.” he offered up. “It did not go well for the tigress, though.”

The other deity nodded. “The universe didn't go poof, like I thought.” he posed. “Hmm, now what?” he asked, “Do we do something or just stand idle and watch?”

“Uh, you know, the tigress did seem to be the controller in their marriage, despite what Odin has said.” Templar put forth while he thought about the situation.

“If we step in, Odin and The Almighty will be pissed.” Vishnu put on the table.

“She deserved better.” the armored one stated. “I would have treated them better if they were my Agents. There were too many times that they were left hanging out in the breeze.”

“Look. A celestial being has shown up for her soul. I can't watch anymore.” Vishnu informed his contemporary as he turned away from the scene before him.

“This isn't right.” the steel-clad deity replied. “I agree; I can't stand by and watch this. I don't care what Geoff and Odin think, I'm gonna try to fix this.”

####

The ghostly Victoria stood by while she watched her hubby and the filly place her lifeless body on the couch, once they had made Donnie Azevada vacate it. How the wolf had managed to sleep through the melee, she didn't know. The spirit tigress looked over at her other iteration on the bed, feeling genuine sorrow for her. The future tigress was struggling to get her breath and Torvald had confirmed that she was now blind. It was obvious that their immortality would not save her future self now, just like it had not saved the present-day tigress from death.

“Not what you had expected, huh?” a familiar voice asked. Victoria turned to the voice to recognize its owner; Tigermark M'rega.

“No Tigermark, it was not what I had expected.” she replied. “Didn't hurt a bit.”

“Never does, according to those I have asked.” the white tiger put forth. “I came for you, Victoria. Time to go home.”

“I never really got to enjoy our home on Glenn Ranch Road.” she explained wistfully.

“You'll be going to a very nice home.” the male spirit offered up. “It can look just like your last home, in every detail, if you want it to.”

The tigress looked over at her contemporary. “Would it be alright if we stayed for a little longer?” she asked. “I won't be seeing my husband again for a very long time.”

“Yeah, we can do that.” Tigermark put his arm around her shoulder and comforted her, knowing exactly what she was going through. This was a very traumatic time for the tigress and he was not going to let her out of his sight until he was sure things had worked themselves out.

Victoria watched her husband weep for her, obviously distraught over his loss. With the second tigress dying, he would be hit with a double whammy when she passed over. This was not the deal that she had originally signed on for and it angered her to think that it was going to end this way.

Her conversation with *The Almighty* kept running through her mind. He had openly admitted to having a paw in putting them on that other planet. What would stop him from taking Torvald and moving him to another world, away from their kits, family and friends, now that she was gone? In truth, nothing could stop him, if he had a mind to. At that moment in time, she was distracted by Tigermark, who turned her to look at him, just so he could confirm his suspicions.

“Victoria, you need to calm down.” he suggested, noting her powers were surging and building from her rising anger.

“What?!? What did you just say?!?” she shot back at the tiger, pulling away from his grasp. “You of all furs should understand exactly how I feel!! I feel like I just got the royal shaft from *His Assholyness!!*” she shouted, her eyes glowing brightly, her hair blowing about in a room with calm air. “I shouldn't have died, dammit!! I should still be there in my body, enjoying life to its fullest!! I did not need to die, nor does my future self!! \$@%&#\*\$\*!!!” she shouted in frustration.

“Victoria? Please listen to me.” the male spirit offered up. “You don't need to get all worked up right now.” he added. “Things will be okay. Just listen to me!”

“\$@%&#\*\$\*!!! \$@%&#\*\$\*!!! \$@%&#\*\$\*!!!” she continued in a rage, not listening to the tiger mix, pointing to the ceiling to direct her rage to the appropriate entity.

“Victoria . . . Victoria, please, you need to listen to me.” Tigermark said cautiously, backing away from her for safety while he made a last-ditch effort to get her attention. The boss had warned him that she might do this and the deity had informed him just to stand back for safety if it happened.

“I have **SO** had it up to \$@%&#\*\$\* here with all of this . . . this bull\$h\*t!!” she screamed to no fur in particular, her fists clenched tightly in anger, her body shaking from her rage. “If I ever get the chance to stand face to face with *His High And Mighty*, I will put my foot so far up his . . .”

The spirit tigress stopped ranting and got a funny look on her face, as if she were hit by a major revelation. Victoria's spirit then disappeared in a blinding flash of light just as the dead tigress on the couch gasped loudly and sat up.