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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meigh

Chapter 24 – “Engagement; Light against Dark”

The comm-set in Monty's paw burst into life just as the alarms outside Zagam's home began blaring and furs started to run around the compound, heavily armed. This was not good; his family was inside that building with just a few safe routes for their escape.

“Shit has hit fan!” the stag blurted out over the radio. “We are coming out side door! Cover us!!” he shouted.

The huge gray stallion shouldered his rifle, cycled the bolt to charge the weapon and aimed at an armored vehicle that was coming into view from the far corner of the building. The vehicle appeared to have a small turret that was rotating to bring a short-barreled cannon to bear on the retinue behind the improvised barrel barricade. Placing the rifle's cross-hair sights on the juncture of the turret and the main hull, Monty held his breath, braced himself and pulled the trigger.

'Betty' roared a deafening sound and the giant rifle's blast deflector kicked up a cloud of dust around the Defenders Of Light, obscuring their view. Furs could be heard screaming in terror and running, most likely to preserve their lives. Or maybe to put out their fur, that might have been on fire by the sounds of it. Once the dust settled enough to see the carnage, it was clear to all that the vehicle in question was no longer a viable mobile weapon. The turret was gone, the barrel for the cannon was on the ground in front of the hull, bent and distorted and the aft section was being consumed by diesel fuel-fed flames.

The tall equine had been knocked to the ground by Betty's tremendous recoil so Rafael and Nick pulled the heavy rifle off of Monty and helped him back to his hooves. He seemed momentarily stunned, but after a quick check once he regained his bearings, the stallion had determined that he had not dislocated his right shoulder again. Looking at his work, he made a quick comment before he hefted his rifle again;

“Looks to me like that APC suffered a very catastrophic disassembly.”

###

Inside the home, things weren't going any better. Armed thugs came at Alexi's squad from several directions, making the only logical route for escape an illogical one; Zagam's study. The room did have French doors to a private garden, one that would get them closer to safety. For the time being, any thought of cornering the demon was forgotten and preservation was now the paramount plan of attack.

One squad was at the top of the stairs in the foyer, firing down at them with light carbine weapons. This wasn't too bad for them to hold off with a shield. It was the second squad that had come from the direction that they had entered the house from. They were packing large-caliber automatic rifles that were 'almost' penetrating their defenses. This was bad.

Willi Marie and Jenna made a concerted effort to hold up a shield to protect their squad while they made their way down the hall to the appropriate door. The five armed canids in tactical gear that had followed their path were using those heavy automatic weapons to concentrate on one point of the shield to weaken it, making Tank have to add his powers to reinforce their protection. Canton opened the door that should have lead them to escape, only to find a very surprised Zagam looking back at him from just a few feet away.

“What in the name of Beelzebub . . . ?!” the bovine demon blurted out, dropping the briefcase that he held in his left paw. “Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my house?!” he questioned as he started to back away from the heavily-armed horde entering his study. Canton answered that question with a right hook to the Dark One's jaw, utilizing a sap glove for added effect, dropping him like a bad habit. The bull began to get back up, clearly stunned, so the Hill family middle male clocked the demon with a police-issue riot baton, finishing the job of subduing his quarry.

“Tank! Max! Grab this ass-wipe and his briefcase! He's coming with us!” Canton shouted while he crossed the room to the exterior doors. Kicking them open, he stepped out and fired some suppression fire before he motioned for his party to exit the room with him. Canton then fell back inside the room, barely avoiding a withering assault of offensive fire from outside, just about chest-high to a standing fur. Hoping this turn of events was only a temporary setback, Canton was preparing to go back outside again, only to be stopped by Alexi.

“We give them party gift!” the stag shouted, readying several paw-grenades. While Willi Marie and Jenna held the hall against their attackers, the two males sent out some 'friendly greeting cards' to their antagonists. The grenades exploded, one after another, then it was quiet outside. The cervine then shouted out more orders over the comm-set.

“We are coming around back!! Keep path clear!!” he ordered, motioning for his squad to follow his egress of the building. Things were not looking good at this point for them in the stag's estimations. He only hoped they didn't lose a member to offensive action.

###

“Dammit!! Shit!! Hell!!!” the white tigress spat out, untangling her boots from a tripwire that had been well-hidden in the brush. “Dammit to Hell!! I just screwed every last one inside!!” she shouted, her eyes beginning to get that familiar glow to them as she tried in vain to calm down. “If I ever get the chance to get my paws on that goddamned bastard Zagam, I will ream him such an effing gigantic new . . .” She suddenly blinked out of sight, much to her sister's amazement.

“Oh . . . Crap!!” Victoria blurted out as she closed her eyes to 'see' where her twin went to. “SHIT!! She's in the house with the others!!” the ruddy femme blurted out, once she observed what her twin sister was looking at.

“Do we go in?” Tor asked.

“Around back! We'll try to meet the entry squad half-way!” Victoria replied, right before she sprinted across no-fur's land between the brush and the house, trying to lay down some suppression fire with her XM177E2 carbine at the same time. Once at the house, she waved for them to follow her. Torvald took off in a run, followed by Rumjal who was using a belt-fed Browning M2 'Ma Deuce' machine gun to keep the aggressors at bay.

“Victoria! A little warning before you do such a stupid stunt like that again!” Rumjal blurted out once he joined the Svensens by the corner of the house. “Don't do that without warning us!!” he added, trying to sense any Agents that might be lurking nearby.

The tigress looked around the corner at what was the back yard of the house. There was a swimming pool set a ways away from the patio with a cabana nearby. That building also seemed to be the source of some offensive fire directed towards the area where their furs might be.

“Tor! Cover us!! Rumjal! Get up here!” the femme feline demanded. “Get that cabana! Neutralize it!” she ordered. “Both of us together on three!!” She counted to three, they both popped out from behind the cover of the house and cut loose on the pool shed. Furs ran from the building in a panic, followed by a huge explosion that momentarily dazed the tigress.

“Wha . . . what the hell was that all about?” she questioned once she got her senses back under control.

“Semtex.” the pachyderm replied, knowing what that unique aroma was. “Quite a bit of it, too.”

The stallion, who was giving them cover, nudged the gray one. “I don't want to spoil the party but we need to move! Now!!” he 'suggested' in a panicked tone. “We have company coming!!”

Victoria turned to see what her hubby was upset about, only to quickly understand the reason for his urgency; there was a small armored track-vehicle headed their way, albeit smoking and with a sizable brand-new dent in the turret, but headed their way nonetheless. The turret was swinging in their direction, making the situation just a little more than urgent.

“Let me take care of this!” the pachyderm shouted. Rumjal picked up a decent-sized granite rock and ran up to the vehicle, avoiding the hail of bullets emanating from the machine gun positioned on the undamaged side of the turret. Somehow he managed to leap up on the hull despite his enormous bulk and in one deft move, jammed that rock deep into the barrel, effectively blocking it. The fallen Angel then hopped off of the hull, crouched down and covered his ears.

Two explosions were heard, one after the other, almost too close together to discern. The concussion almost knocked the Svensens to the ground, temporarily halting their flight for cover. As the dust settled, parts of the vehicle began to rain down around them. It was fortunate that they had found an overhang of the house to hide under, since a number of the parts falling from the sky were quite heavy. They were momentarily joined by Rumjal, who was shaking his head.

“Are you okay?” Tor asked the gray one, concerned that he was hurt, if that was possible.

“Huh? What did you say?” the deity replied, trying to clear his ears with a pair of large fingers. “Can't hear you! Ears ringing!” he shouted while he shook his head.

Victoria had been looking around to determine their next move. The tigress nudged her hubby and Rumjal to get their attention once she was sure of her plan. Pointing to an outbuilding past the remains of the cabana, she made her intentions known. “Unless you have a problem with it, we're going that way!” she shouted, taking off in a sprint again.

“I wish she wouldn't do that!” Rumjal muttered as he joined the stallion in following the femme warrior to their next staging point.

###

Monty had hit another one of those tracked vehicles in the turret but it was his misfortune to strike where the turret hull must have been reinforced. The stallion had done this very same thing earlier but he was sure that he had aimed his rifle at this turret in a different location from the earlier attempt. The round that he fired had left a nasty dent but it only seemed to slow down the vehicle for a brief moment. It then turned away from them, revealing another one right behind it, sighted in on Monty and his crew.

Rafael pulled Nick with him when the trio vacated their barricade, right before it was blown to pieces by a round from one of those small tracked vehicles. The small group carefully made their way around to the opposite end of the garage, only to see why the terrier had deemed it a 'pinch-point' to them. There was another building set at an angle to the garage, making the opening to the courtyard very narrow.

“Lets open this up.” Rafael suggested. He materialized a satchel charge, pulled the activation cord and sent it down towards the opening in a high arc. An unlucky squad of lapins came at them, through the opening, only to be startled by the charge falling at their feet. Moments later, the squad had been reduced to very small pieces, scattered widely by that explosive charge.

“Okay, cover me while I try to stop that armored vehicle!” Monty shouted, laying down prone on the ground at the opened gap to the buildings to better aim his rifle. While Rafael and Nick put down suppression fire, the gray stallion placed the crosshair sights on the aft portion of the machine, guesstimating the location of the powerplant. Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, he gently pulled the trigger.

'Betty' roared again, blocking their line of sight momentarily. The dust settled to reveal the rear hatch opening slowly with smoke billowing out of the compartment beyond. At least it was no longer moving. Two furs fell out, obviously injured and unarmed, waving a piece of white cloth as they got to their feet and ran across the compound for cover. That was even better in the stallion's estimations. While the elder Hill brother cycled the bolt to charge his rifle again, Nick made an important comment;

“Monty, you had better do something quick, because that turret is swinging our way!”

While the two canids held off the approaching attackers, the dapple gray male began sighting in on the vehicle once more. He waited until the turret had turned in his direction and the barrel had dropped to aim directly at him before he fired again. This was a lucky shot, putting a round down the spout of the turret's cannon barrel.

The explosion shook the ground and stirred up the dust, forcing Monty to have to wait an interminable amount of time for the obscuration to settle. Once the view was clear, he nodded, pleased with his work. The explosion had cleaved the turret of the vehicle in two.

“Behind you!” Nick blurted out, getting Rafael's attention. He then fired upon the furs that were approaching, giving them cover while they moved back into the alleyway beside the garage.

Monty gave thought to this situation they were in. It was clear that their presence in this location was known by the other side. There was only one logical thing to do and that was to get to higher ground. “Tell you what; let's go overhead.”

“Gotcha.” Rafe agreed, making a rope ladder appear on the side of the building. They climbed up on top of the garage and by using a parapet that the canid mage had reinforced with his magic for cover, the trio set about decimating the attacking horde and their vehicles, shifting the odds in their favor.

###

Aslaug grimaced, shook her head in disgust and prepared her Francescas for use. This little foray had turned into a war, one that she didn't look forward to and yet again, one that she had somewhat expected. Just as she turned to give some direction to Constantine, a projectile whistled past their heads, making them drop to the ground behind a large rock for cover.

“What was that?” the avian blurted out. He looked to the filly for direction, only to observe her face-pawing herself.

“No, not again . . .” Aslaug muttered as she sat up behind the boulder they were using for cover. She took a quick look and then ducked back behind their stone rampart, shaking her head. “Golems! I hate golems!! Especially those kind!!” she spat out, pointing over her shoulder in the general direction that the projectile had come from.

Constantine peered around the rock only to observe more than two dozen obsidian black golems, headed their way. They were unusual in appearance, resembling ice hockey players. The heads of the stone beasts had beaks like feral waterfowl and they appeared to be wearing helmets. The avian watched them begin to drop flattened circular objects on the ground that they struck with their sticks, sending them hurtling at his head.

The fallen one dropped behind the rock for cover just as several of those objects whizzed past his head, exploding as they impacted trees in the forest. Constantine wanted to get a better look, only to have to avoid another barrage that was sent in their general direction.

“You go left, I'll go right.” Aslaug instructed. “If they hit a puck at you, drop to the ground. They seem to aim for the body or the head.”

“Okay, you seem to be the expert,” the feathered one replied as he pulled his unearthly revolver of unknown caliber, appropriately named Abyssus, right out of thin air. “So, can I defeat one with this?” he asked, hoping to hear a positive answer.

“You can try but Joe and I had to use explosives the last time we confronted golems like this.” the filly explained.

“Not good. Not good at all.” Constantine muttered. Making sure his battle partner was ready, he bolted from behind the stone refuge and immediately began to have to dodge the pucks with his hyperfast agility. It wasn't easy, but the golems were remaining relentless in their assault upon the Warriors Of Light. The fallen one was getting the hang of this game, finally switching to his sword and finding the knack of sending their projectiles back at them. A quick glance let him observe Aslaug doing pretty much the same with one of her paw-axes.

Constantine finally placed a puck back into the area where a face should have been on one of the golems, making it drop its stick and shake its head. The golem then turned to its partner and pushed it, thinking the puck came from his compatriot. That golem then turned and pushed the first one back. After a few more shoves from each obsidian beast, they threw down their sticks and gloves, tossed away their helmets and began to brawl with one another. Within moments, the remaining golems had joined the fray, completely ignoring Aslaug and Constantine for the moment. The one smaller golem that seemed to be in charge was making a sound similar to a whistle while it tried unsuccessfully to break up the fight.

Constantine just stood there, amazed at the sight of this obsidian rumble. The filly joined him, chuckled and nudged her partner, getting his attention before she commented on the situation.

“So, we went to a fight and a hockey game broke out.”

The feathered one was still somewhat gob-smacked by this. “Um, yeah . . .” He then pointed to the general direction that the Svensens had proceeded. “I think we need to go that way.”

“I agree.” the filly retorted.

They headed off in that direction in a fast jog, keeping an alert eye out for trouble.

###

The white tigress looked around herself, just to get her bearings. One moment she had been in the forest, cursing herself for tripping the alarm, the next moment she was in Zagam's home, watching the entry team exiting the room through some shot-up French doors. Hearing the melee in the hall, she decided it was best to leave with her compatriots.

Willi Marie was holding the doorway to the hall so she had noticed Virginia materialize. This seemed very odd so the femme equine mix had to ask, “How in blazes did you get here?”

“Like an idiot, I did it again,” the tigress replied, assisting with laying down a withering suppression fire down the hall. “I got pissed off at myself for setting off the alarm and my mind was on reaming Zagam a new one. So, in a nutshell, that's how I found myself in this situation. Lucky me.”

Willi finally dropped the rear shielding that she had been holding so they could concentrate on leaving the building and running for cover. They quickly headed for a small outbuilding that appeared unoccupied at the moment only to observe the Svensens and Rumjal heading in that very same direction. Her adoptive family ran into the building, followed by the gray deity. Willi stopped to lay down some more suppression fire for their entry party, then she stepped into the building behind the white tigress. Jenna and Tank then put up a shield to protect them.

“Where's Monty and Rafael?” Canton asked, counting heads to see just who was missing. The North wall of the building was suddenly penetrated at that moment by the missing Hill brother, using his shoulder as a

battering ram. Rafael and Nick stepped inside after the huge equine, then the canid sorcerer turned and put the wall back together with his powers.

Victoria looked for herself, then she brought up an important fact; “Aslaug and Constantine are missing!”

####

Aslaug put out a paw to help Constantine back to his feet while she kept an eye on the giant golem blocking their escape route. This was a huge obsidian beast that stood more than ten feet tall and it was built like a linebacker, which certainly meant trouble for them. The thing sort of 'smiled' at them in a malicious way, waiting patiently while playing with a puck in its paw until the warriors made another move.

The feathered one pushed his lower jaw back into place, then moved it a bit to see that things were back where they should be. “Blast, that thing packs a punch!” he commented as he rubbed the side of his beak where the golem had punched him.

“Look, I think we should get out of here!” the filly blurted out when she observed the ebony construct drop a puck on the ground and ready his stick.

“Hold on!” Constantine instructed his comrade in arms, just as he grabbed the equine femme in a bear-hug and used his abilities to move them to safety.

“I wish you would give me some warning!” Aslaug stated as she shook her head to clear the cobwebs created by Constantine's teleport.

“No time for such civilities, my dear friend.” he replied. He then gasped as they turned to run, only to be confronted by that same golem once more. Before the stone creature could begin its assault anew, the two warriors were grabbed from behind by a huge set of gray equine arms while a deep baritone voice made only one demand of them;

“Hold On!!”

Once the spots before her eyes faded, Aslaug was relieved to find they had been transported by Monty to the shed, where the others plus one awaited. Jenna and Willi wasted no time in quickly teleporting the group to the relative safety of the warehouse where the rest of their party awaited them.

Constantine walked over to the huge gray stallion, meaning to offer thanks for the assist in the Underworld. He found the equine sitting on a crate, cleaning his huge rifle of the accumulated grime and filth.

“Thank you for moving us out of harm's way, Montgomery.” the avian put forth.

The gray stallion looked up and smiled. “Don't mention it. Anything for a friend of Wilhelmine's family.” He smiled again and added, “And I prefer to go by Monty. Montgomery is the city in Ohio where I was born.”

“I see. Monty it is, then.” Constantine stated with a smile. “Once again, thank you.”

“You're very welcome.”

###

The canid stepped out of his car, still feeling the effects of being frozen, looking around himself to get his bearings. Mark was just one of a few survivors of the attack that saw his boss abducted and he felt it was his job to report this to the demon that was Zagam's supposed close 'friend'.

Making his way to the front door of the appropriate building, he paused momentarily to get his breath. He knew if he ever had a chance, he would kill that bitch otter for this. The male wolf stepped inside and made his way to the correct office. Taking a deep breath, he stepped inside and bowed to Prince Sytry.

“What do you want?” the winged leopard asked, clearly annoyed by this unannounced intrusion of his space.

“Zagam has been abducted, Your Highness.” the grey male put forth.

“I know.” the demon said nonchalantly as he slid his glasses down his muzzle so he could peer over them. “Did they kill him or did they just take his sorry hide with them?”

“He's missing, your Lordship. That's all I know.” Mark replied.

“I think we can find him.” the demon Prince offered up. “It would be a complete waste of bovine hide to not watch his imminent demise.”

“Lord Sytry! I thought you were good friends!”

“No, I just wanted his seat on the Malefic Council, you imbecile.”

“Your Lordship?”

“Mark, you of all furs should realize that Zagam was just a moron that was given the powers of a demon. The fool had no style, no panache. He bounded headlong into things where it would have behooved him to have stepped back and taken a breath to gather what little wits he had. He was truly the fool, my friend. He believed if he had those precious Svensen furs on his side, it would give him immeasurable power at the table. He was sadly mistaken and now he will pay the price for his stupidity.”

“My Lordship! I thought the Svensens were a prize worth fighting for.”

“No, they aren't that priceless in my eyes.” the felid demon explained. “Wilhelmine Delancey is the prize worth acquiring. She is a potential Arcanist, my striped friend. Her lineage is studded with them and she shows all the signs of being a true controller of the Arcane.”

The timberwolf nodded as it became clear to him. “I see, Your Highness. Should I put together a raiding party to grab her for you?”

“Only if you wish to die.” the demon replied. “No, we need her to come to us. That is the safest way to procure her services.” Sytry gave thought to the situation, then he put down his paperwork and stood. “Enough of those matters for the moment. Come, we have a party to attend. Specifically, an ending of a demon's existence.”

###

Doctor Peyton looked at the x-rays that he had taken of the injured tiger, examining each break carefully to make sure the plates had not been displaced by Conrad taking Quillam's place. As far as the moose could determine, the situation appeared to look just like it was when the surgery had been done on the golem-cum-feline.

The cervine had seen this situation before; it was something that while not right, it was standard operating procedures for the Underworld.

“How does it look?” Conrad asked from his propped-up position on the x-ray table, unable to see the film for himself.

Bruce shrugged his shoulders. “Well, nothing has changed.” He turned to look at his charge and frowned. “I was in hopes that your immortality would kick in and heal you up.”

“Am I no longer immortal?” the tiger queried.

“I'm not sure.” the doctor replied. “We could test, if you would agree to it.”

“Sure.” Conrad replied. “Do what you need to do.”

“Once I get you back to your room, I'll do so.”

Doc Peyton assisted an orderly in moving the tiger from the x-ray table back onto the gurney used to move him around. Conrad was wheeled over to the elevator, then back up to his room where two orderlies moved him back onto his bed before they left.

The doctor gathered up his supplies and set up a sterile zone around Conrad's right paw then proceeded to make a small cut in the palm pad. He swabbed the incision and waited for it to heal. Within a few moments, the cut healed itself. A second cut that healed just like the first one proved the tiger was still immortal but the injuries to his skeleton were being dampened by what might be an Underworld incantation.

“Sorry, Conrad. Seems some Dark forces are at work here.” the moose mused.

“Oh well,” the tiger retorted, “I guess I'm taking an unplanned vacation, huh?”

Cathy, who had been with them for the x-rays, asked her question; “When can Conrad come home?”

Once again, Bruce shrugged his shoulders. “I can see if Tina Wood is available. She's a RN that works in my office complex. You will need someone to assist you with your husband's needs.”

“Okay then, I'll see if some of the family can help out in the meantime.” the lioness replied.

“I'll see what I can do.” Bruce stated. “I'll write a request for a hospital bed to be delivered to your home and I will ask Tina if she would assist you. This isn't going to be easy at all. It will be a full time job to care for your husband, Mrs. Svensen.”

Cathy just nodded, knowing the moose was correct in his assumptions. With Conrad virtually unable to care for himself, she would have to do everything for him. It might be time to ask Wilhelmine Marie to

cover for her, at least until Conrad could get around by himself to some degree.

Conrad finally asked an important question; “So, what's my prognosis?”

“You will recover.” Doctor Peyton replied. “How quickly, I can't say. I suppose it's all a matter of how your broken bones knit back together. It could be six to twelve weeks, give or take.”

“That's not reassuring.” the lioness put forth.

“Well, these are some serious injuries.” their physician retorted. “By all rights, Quillam should have died at the scene of the accident!” Bruce waited for that information to sink in, then he continued. “It's just a shame that Conrad has to endure this. I would have preferred to see him on the field at the Superbowl.”

“You and me both.” the tiger interjected. “How will the injuries to my spine affect my ability to play ball?”

“I think, given the fact that you're immortal, along with the great strides we have made in medicine, you will not be hampered by your injuries with the exception of some possible lingering skeletal pain in your lower back.”

“Better than being a paraplegic in my eyes.” Conrad commented.

“That very well could have happened.” Bruce put forth. The cervine then looked at his phone that was buzzing. “Hmm, seems I'm invited to a party. Well, I guess I need to see what your family needs of me.”

Doctor Peyton left the room, leaving Cathy and her hubby alone. Now that they had time, they agreed to discuss in depth just how they would care for the injured tiger, once he was brought home.