

The characters Torvald Arend 'Tor' & Victoria Angela (nee Connell) Svensen, Virginia Elise Connell, John Conrad & Cathryn Annette 'Cathy' (nee Hunter) Svensen, Brett, Dana Lynn (nee Svensen) and Sabrina Angela Kasbnikov, Roger Baine, Gytha Louise (nee Svensen), Roger Baine Jr. & Heather Louise Delancey, Axel Torvald & Madelyn (nee Barrett) Svensen, Bradley Torvald 'Brad' & Janet Lee (nee Mondragon) Svensen, Trenton, Nancy Jeanne (nee Svensen), Trenton Junior 'TJ' and Chelsea Corbin, Ronald Arend 'Ron' & Brenda Mae (nee Cartwright) Svensen, Lawrence James 'LJ' & Alicia Leanna (nee Svensen) Hood, Valerie Connell, Walter Lee Sr. & Harriet (nee Bishop) Connell, Walter Lee Jr., Michelle Annette 'Misba' (nee Kazinski), Walter Lee III, Joseph Franklin 'Joe' and Sarah Noel Connell, Robert James & Elizabeth Ann (nee Caine) Sands, Barbara Caine, Edward and Mary (nee Leese) Caine, Richard Tisdale & Wilhelmine Marie 'Willi Marie' (nee Kurzweil) Delancey, James William & Nancy (nee Roland) Kurzweil, Erich Martin & Ivanova Marie 'Ira Marie' (nee Schmidt & Hill) Kurzweil, Anna Marie (nee Sorenson) Schmidt, Hilda Jean (nee Reed) Sorenson, Canton Rexcall Hill, Troy Long 'Tank' & Amber Lee (nee Cook) Hill, Montgomery Bartell 'Monty' Hill, Maxwell Tinglee 'Max' & Julianna Theresa 'Julie' (nee Hill) Longacre, Rafael Manolito Montoya, Jason & Natasha 'Tasha' (nee Porter) Cummeron, Lieutenant Kenneth Aldrin LaCourt, Robert, Jennifer 'Jenna' (nee Ten Bears) & Amanda Longbow, Gerald 'Jerry' Ten Bears, Duncan & Lorna (nee Gibbs) McNichol, Doctor Bruce Peyton, Tina Wood, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito[®], Leonard's Restaurant[®], Hunter Auto Parts[®], Right Way GroceriesTM and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meigh and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission. Any resemblance to any fur or person, either living or dead is purely coincidental

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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meigh

Chapter 25 – “Intervention, Interference and Bad Choices”

Zagam gritted his teeth and tried once more to pull the chain loose from either the band around his wrist or the vertical steel support column it was welded to. The demon knew that he should be able to free himself but there was something amiss about this. It might have had something to do with the blackened metal bands that were encircling his wrists. They must be the source of his problem, causing his powers to be damped to the point that he couldn't help himself out of this situation. What was really bugging him was the shock he received from them each time he tried to yank the chain free. Not strong enough to kill him but certainly enough to get his attention.

“Just as well give up. That is, unless you *like* to be electrocuted repeatedly.” the petite femme equine offered up as she walked up to the struggling figure.

The demon spun around to face the owner of the voice. “Oh, you just wait until I get free of this . . .” Zagam's rant was cut short by the small female sorceress.

“No, you won't get free of this,” she retorted, motioning to the chain. “Some refer to the metal that the bands and chain are made from as 'Unobtanium' or 'Indestructium'. Its actual name is Adamantium. Canton had a devil of a time welding it to that girder, it's that tough. Just to make sure you wouldn't get loose, we tested it with a twenty-ton winch once my brother finished welding it on so we're very sure that it's not going anywhere. And neither are you. Care for something to eat?” she asked, making a table with some food on it appear before the bovine figure.

“Now that is a hell of a thing to ask!” the demon put forth, surveying the meal suspiciously.

“Now you've hurt my feelings.” Julianna put forth. She pursed her lips and gave the ebony bull a pouting look. “I thought you might like a last meal.”

“You're going to kill me.” the demon put forth. “How can I eat at a time like this?”

“Well, if you hadn't messed with my family, this deal might not have went down like it has.” the diminutive mare put forth.

“All I wanted was to have Torvald and Victoria on my side.” the demon retorted. “I wanted change on the Malefic Council, if you can believe that and to do that, I needed some muscle to accomplish that goal. I know there has to be evil just as there has to be good in all of the parallel realities. I just thought that we could make our side a little more palatable, maybe a little less evil. That would never happen as long as one individual was on the board. What I wanted was to boot Lucifer off the Council and allow my boss Sytry to occupy his seat. Sytry and I see eye-to-eye on a number of issues.”

“Not to question your loyalty to this Sytry figure, but just exactly where is your boss right now?” the femme equine asked. “Seems like he forgot to watch your back for you.”

“Um, now that you mention it . . .” The demon seemed a little puzzled by this turn of events.

“You're sure Sytry didn't throw you under the bus? Hmm?” she questioned.

Zagam gulped. “Well, I would hate to think that, but you might be right.” he said in an irritated tone. “If I have to die, I want your family to hunt down that damned Sytry and give him whatever I receive as a punishment. I'll even tell you where to find him.”

Virginia had been standing in the shadows, listening to the conversation between Zagam and Julianna. Not exactly sure that she understood what the demon had put forth, she stepped into the light and confronted the one that was the family nemesis.

“So, you only wanted us on your side? You sure went about asking us the hard way!” the white tigress spat out.

Zagam looked a bit puzzled. “Who are you?” he asked.

“Um, I go by Virginia Elise Connell these days but I used to be known as Victoria Svensen, that was before I managed to make two of me occupy the same reality.”

“Oh Crap . . .” the bull said reverently. “You did that without causing a Temporal Paradox?”

“Yes she did.” Victoria replied, stepping up beside her twin from somewhere in the shadows. “The only thing we have to show for all of that insanity are these scars on our palm pads.” They both held out their paws, displaying the identical star-shaped marks. “Did I hear you right? You only wanted us on your side so you could kick Lucifer off of the Council?”

“That was the plan.” he confirmed. “And I will admit that in hindsight, it was seriously flawed at best. It was Sytry's idea to maroon you on that other planet, knowing your god would unwittingly agree to it, thinking it was his idea and that you would eventually find your way back to face off against me. The plan at that point was to force you to side with me in exchange for allowing your three kits, Torvald, Wilhelmine and her husband Richard to return here with you.”

“So, Sytry was the real force behind all of this?” Virginia asked. “Maybe we have the wrong demon here.” she mused. “And for the record, I deeply miss those three kits. I know they no longer exist, or never

existed in the first place because of my hotheadedness, but I still miss them, irregardless.”

Zagam spoke up. “If it means anything to you, I'm sorry I caused all of this grief. Now that I know that I'm finally going to die, I guess I realized just what a royal fuck-up I have really been.”

“You know, we might be looking at this all wrong.” Victoria put forth. “If Sytry is the asshole behind all of this, he is the one that we should be after, not Zagam.”

The white tigress nodded in agreement. “Well, we have the resources to find him but something tells me, if he really threw our bovine demon friend here under the bus, he will show up to watch the proceeds.”

“You think so?” the ruddy striped femme postulated.

Zagam hesitantly interrupted the two femme felines. “If I know Sytry like I think I do, he will show himself. I've observed him do this before, tossing an unsuspecting Agent under the bus and then openly gloating about it while the Agent gets worked over.”

“I think we should talk with the others.” Virginia suggested. “We might have to change gears here.”

“I agree.” Victoria replied.

Zagam was relieved to see the two tigresses leave him alone and walk off towards the others that were gathering in the center of the pentagram only to be brought back to reality by the small equine femme.

“You might have won yourself a reprieve but I doubt you'll leave here without a serious ass-whipping from my older brother Monty.” Julianna pointed out. “You had better eat while you can. It's kind of difficult to chew your food with your jaws wired shut.”

The ebony demon watched the small femme walk over to the group in the middle of the warehouse, thinking that maybe he should heed her suggestion. His jaw still hurt where Canton had punched him so there was no telling just how much power that huge one named Monty could pack. Sitting down at the small table, he sampled the BLT sandwich in front of him. It was pretty good, all in all so he decided to at least enjoy what might be his last solid meal for a while.

While he consumed his repast, the winged bovine thought about how eager Sytry was to see this 'project' to fruition. When he had pointed out the fact that the Svensens might not side with them, the leopard made assurances that the tigress and her family would throw in with them. Now Zagam could see the situation in a clearer light. The fact dawned on him that it was never about the Svensens, Sytry only wanted **his** seat at the Council's table.

###

Nurse Tina Wood opened the door to Conrad's room and slipped in, followed by another femme, much older than her. Once Tina had closed the door behind them, she quietly walked up to the napping tiger and gently nudged him awake.

“Conrad? Conrad, it's me, Tina Wood.” she said softly.

“Is it dinner time?” the injured feline asked in return. “Wow, seems like I just fell asleep a few minutes ago.”

“You might have.” the femme Castor replied. “Sorry I woke you up but it is important.” she put forth. “I brought a femme that can tell us what's going on with your injuries. If it's not too bad, she might be able to help you start healing up like you should.”

Conrad looked at what appeared to be an aging lioness standing at the end of the bed. “She can do that?” he questioned.

The femme feline spoke up. “John Conrad Svensen, I think you would say that I am older than dirt. I have had the opportunity to observe what must be every combination of spell-slinging ever performed by an Agent of The Underworld. Trust me, Nana Azalea Nya Kayra knows what she is doing.” She then put on a very thick pair of glasses, ones that the tiger was sure no fur could possibly see through.

“Um, what are you going to do?” the male asked.

Azalea looked up at her charge. “Well, I thought I might examine you.” she explained before she went back to rummaging through a rather large market bag that she had brought in with her.

Conrad seemed hesitant about this. “You’re not going to hurt me, are you?”

The elderly femme looked at Conrad and smiled as she replied, “Oh heavens no! I wouldn't hurt my favorite wide receiver!”

“You follow football?”

“Does a Targ crap in the woods?” she retorted.

This confused the tiger. “Um, I wouldn't know.” he replied.

“Never mind,” the aging femme retorted as she pulled a garlic necklace from the bag she had brought in with her and put that woven strand of bulbs around Conrad's neck.

Could you explain this?” he asked, tugging at the string of Allium.

“Oh, that.” the lioness replied. “Just force of habit. Sometimes it helps the subject to relax.”

“It's making me hungry.” the tiger replied.

“Garlic will do that sometimes.” the felinoid agreed. “So, I guess you're a bit miffed about missing the Superbowl this year?” she asked just to make small talk.

“Yeah, I am.” Conrad agreed. “This was going to be my second Bowl game with the Niners. My first was in 2014, Super Bowl Forty-Eight.”

“I know.” the graying femme put forth while she carefully 'scanned' the tiger's body with what appeared to be a small pair of matching carved wooden totems. “Now, if you had not been made immortal when you were, you wouldn't have just missed the last part of that game against the Dolphins, you would have missed the rest of the season.”

“How did you know?” he asked, knowing that nobody had told her that information, as far as he knew.

“It was obvious to the trained eye.” Nana Azalea stated, looking over her thick glasses at her patient. “That collision with Portland's number sixteen Cal Worthington would have hospitalized you or worse.”

“You think so?”

“I know so.” the lioness shot back. “Furthermore, that endzone tackle during the game against the Pittsburgh Steelers must have broken several ribs. I'm sure I observed you wincing when they popped back into position.”

“You got me there.” Conrad replied.

“Now see, Nana Azalea knows a great deal about Pro Football.” She looked over her glasses again and continued her thoughts. “I'm ready to extract the Dark Energy that's blocking your body from healing. This might feel a bit uncomfortable at the beginning of the treatment.”

Conrad nodded so the aging leonid femme began her course of treatment. She draped an amulet on an ornately beaded necklace over his injured right leg and then began to chant quietly to herself. As Nana Azalea continued, she draped another amulet over Conrad's injured left arm, then a third one was put over his left leg. The lioness then draped a heavy beaded necklace over the tiger's lower abdomen and hips, carefully arranging it to her satisfaction. The femme feline then went to the foot of Conrad's bed and brought her incantations to a new level.

“I call upon the origins of my power to assist me!” she growled, raising her muzzle high as she began to spin the totems on cords, her paws held high above her head. “Come, an imbalance in the flow is present! Assist me as you have promised me!!”

the room began to darken and grow warmer, causing Conrad to become apprehensive of the situation. The air was growing heavier and there was a new smell in the air, that of a forest right after a rain. As the lioness chanted on in a language that sounded very ancient, ghostly outlines of figures began to appear in a semi-circle behind Nana Azalea. When they became solid enough to be recognizable, the tiger could make out what species that they were.

There was a male polar ursine, dressed in a style that reminded him of the Inuits that lived up North in the Arctic. There was a wolf and a femme avian, maybe an Eagle, both clad in Native American garments. Standing next to them was a hawk, wearing colonial era clothing and a heavy equine wrapped in a great kilt. The last figure to come into full view was the biggest femme white buffalo that the tiger had ever observed, dressed in a style that would have been at home in the Middle Ages.

“Nana Azalea, we have come.” the white femme said in a voice that seemed to encompass the room. As each figure began to spin totems in unison with the aging leonid, the buffalo continued. “We feel this imbalance, Nana Azalea, current of our kind. You have been wise to summon our assistance.” She then looked straight at the tiger. “We will rid your body of that Dark infestation, John Conrad Svensen. You must be told, this will be very uncomfortable. I may become extremely painful. We are sorry, but that is the way it has always been.”

The beings then began to chant in unison with the lioness, who was being wrapped in a column of light so bright, Conrad had to squint his eyes. After a moment or two, he could feel his body begin to tingle as the figures spun their totems faster. The tingling gave way to discomfort when the equine spoke up.

“John Conrad Svensen, let go o' the Dark spirits thot poison yer body!” he demanded. “I ken you can do this. Jist let go, allow th' demonic spirit tae go!”

It was now very uncomfortable and the double hip spica cast he was bound in was not helping matters at the moment. The amulets were glowing brightly and the pain was coming on fast. It felt as if he were being pulled apart from the inside out and it was worsening with time.

“Let go!” the ursine demanded. “I feel your apprehension, John Conrad Svensen. Let go and the pain will subside!” his voice implored, filling the tiger's head with sound.

The injured feline was being assaulted on all planes by pain, fear, anger and raw emotion. He wanted the pain gone but his mind couldn't come up with answer. Let go? How? The femme avian began to speak to him, almost directly into his mind. Her soft, gentle voice seemed to fill his entire head.

“See the pain in your mind, John Conrad. See it, then let it go. Let it leave your body. Let it go away.” she suggested.

“Yeah, okay,” Conrad replied, closing his eyes as he nodded his head in agreement. “The pain, gone, leaving my body . . .” he whispered. For a split-second, Conrad felt as if he were falling, then he opened his eyes to see the room back to normal and the lioness packing her things away in her market bag.

“How do you feel?” Nana Azalea asked.

“Um . . .” the tiger had to stop and take stock of his condition. “I feel . . . warm and fuzzy all over and my lower back doesn't hurt.” he told his healer. “What about the others . . .” he started to ask, only to be stopped by the lioness.

“What others?” she questioned.

“The ursine, the hawk . . .” Azalea Nya Kayra interrupted him again.

“You know, when I heal furs, it seems like they all see the same thing.” she offered up. “It always seems to be a polar ursine, an eagle, a wolf, a hawk, an equine and a buffalo. I don't really understand why this happens, since I go into a trance of sorts during the healing.”

“I know what I saw, Nana Azalea.”

The lioness shrugged her shoulders. “Like I have told you, John Conrad, I go into a trance so I never see these things. All I know is that I summon the bearers of energy and ask for assistance. I always seem to be granted the help that I need.”

“Thank you for healing me.” the tiger put forth.

“Oh, it was nothing.” Nana Azalea retorted. “You can pay me back by helping to take your team to the Super Bowl next year.”

Conrad nodded. “I'll do that.”

The lioness smiled back, then continued. “And I expect a pair of tickets at the fifty yard line, too.”

Conrad nodded again. "Sure, anything for my healer."

The tiger watched the lioness exit his room, leaving the feline to his thoughts. Flexing his left wrist inside the cast, it didn't hurt to do so. Flexing his legs, however did seem a bit painful. At least his lower back didn't hurt.

Conrad pondered his situation; it seemed that he would have to pretend to be injured for a while longer, just to keep up appearances. That would not be easy to do, since he would have to be in some casts and maybe a back brace while he 'healed' from his injuries. There was the hope that Doctor Peyton would assist in this charade, helping to cover for the tiger.

Feeling a bit exhausted over this ordeal, he decided to continue his nap. Reaching behind his head with his right paw, he repositioned his pillow and in the process, managed to dislodge the oximeter probe that was encircling his index finger. As the alarm on his monitor began to sound, he just shook his head and shrugged. At least a nurse would now arrive and maybe he could get them to reposition his pillow for him.

###

Sytry and his 'newly recruited' minion walked into a nondescript warehouse in North Hollywood, mentally prepared to see Zagam become a former demon. The leopard was feeling elated inside, knowing he would now possess the bovine's seat on the Malefic Council and the power that the position would carry. He could then ask for the favors needed to carry out the mayhem he looked forward to. It was a shame to lose such a malleable mind like Zagam's, but it was necessary.

While they made their way to the main part of the building, Sytry heard a soft 'thump', followed by the timber wolf falling past him and landing on the concrete floor. Looking down at his new assistant, he felt a sharp, painful blow to the back of his head, followed by darkness.

###

"Wake up! Wake up!" the winged leopard heard a voice demanding while a being slapped him rather roughly in the muzzle to bring him back to the land of consciousness. "Wake up, shithead!" the rough alto femme voice commanded. The demon opened his eyes to observe a very pissed-off Valkyrie staring back at him.

"Shut up, you smart-mouthed pony!" the demon hissed as he attempted to sit up, right before this blond-furred fist came from out of nowhere and nearly broke his jaw. The blow was hard enough to knock him back down to the floor.

"Don't you ever call me a pony!" the filly hissed back as she hauled the feline demon to his feet, just to knock him back to the ground again with another round-house punch.

"You're toast now!" the spotted cat declared, trying to use his powers on Aslaug. The demon stood up shakily, leveled his paws at her and fired off a spell, only to discover to his dismay, some weak sparks fell from his fingertips and not the energy orb that should have appeared. It was at that point that Sytry realized they were not alone.

"You're at a big disadvantage right now," a male voice put forth as the lights in the room came up to reveal the fact that the demon and the Valkyrie were standing in the center of a pentagram, surrounded by the Hill clan and a few associates.

“I, Canton Rexall Hill, convene a Coven of Thirteen.” the owner of the voice stated. The dapple gray male then turned to the small femme figure next to him and nodded.

“I, Julianna Theresa Longacre do hereby join this Coven and give my power freely.” She then turned to the canid male next to her and bowed.

“I, Maxwell Tinglee Longacre do hereby join this Coven and give my powers to the cause.” Max then winked at the filly next to him.

“I, Amber Lee Hill, join this Coven of my own free will and contribute my powers freely.” She then nodded to her hubby.

“I, Troy Long Hill, join this Coven and give my power to the collective.” He then nodded to his sister-in-law.

“I, Anna Marie Hill, do hereby join this Coven and give my powers freely.” She then motioned to the maned wolf next to her.

“I, Rafael Manolito Montoya, do hereby join this Coven and give my powers to it freely.” He then smiled at the femme next to him.

“I, Wilhelmine Marie Delancey, do hereby join this Coven and give my powers freely.” She then nodded to her hubby.

“I, Richard Tisdale Delancey, do hereby join this Coven and give my meager powers freely.” He then bowed to his wife's Great-grandmother.

“I, Hilda Jean Sorenson, do hereby join this Coven of Thirteen and provide my powers freely.” She then tapped the shoulder of the femme next to her.

“I, Jennifer Catherine Longbow, do hereby join this Coven and give of my powers freely.” she then smiled at the femme next to her.

“I, Amanda Kay Knox, do hereby join this Coven and give my powers freely.” That was the moment when the huge male stepped into the circle within the pentagram.

“I, Montgomery Bartell Hill, do hereby join the Coven of Thirteen and give my powers freely. The Coven of Thirteen is now complete. Sytry, the demon charged with crimes against beings related to this Coven, I am the conduit for this Coven. I am your judge, jury and executioner. I am your worst nightmare come to life. While you are within this circle, you are in a null zone and you will have no powers. If you prevail in our battle, you may walk away. I must point out, I know of no demon that has prevailed in over a thousand years. Sucks to be you.”

Victoria and Virginia walked into the circle and approached the winged demon with fire in their eyes. Neither one said a word, they walked up to the feline demon purposefully and Virginia punched the demon in the nose, causing it to bleed profusely. Victoria then kicked the feline in the crown jewels, getting his attention.

“That is just the beginning of the end for you, asshole!” the white tigress spat out at the spotted demon

who was laying on the ground, holding his crotch. "Once Aslaug is through with you, Monty will finish you off."

"Hold it!" a voice called out. For whatever reason it seemed like it propagated from all corners of the room at once. A smallish raccoon, dressed in slacks, sport-coat and tie, walked into the circle and held up his paws, as if to stop everyone.

"Who are you?" Monty asked.

"I am Judge Thornton Woodward. I have been appointed by the Celestial Courts to act as a referee in this matter." the small one replied. "You are dealing with entities not of your own ilk so I must preside, just to ensure fairness."

Canton seemed very confused. "Wait, run this by me again. Not of our ilk?" he questioned.

"Self-explanatory." the small masked one stated smugly.

Monty shook his head. "Sorry, not self-explanatory, as you would say. Speak English."

Thornton sighed theatrically and motioned to the doomed feline. "Sytry is a demon, an Underworld figure. You are all mages. See the difference?"

Canton nodded hesitantly. "Okay, I see that. Now, what's this fairness deal?"

The referee rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. "The combatants must be equal, or as equal as possible. Either Sytry gets to use his full powers or your Conduit must forgo his."

"I'll take my powers, thank you." the leopard put forth.

"No, bare-knuckle fisticuffs." Monty retorted while an evil grin crossed his muzzle. "you know, like a good old-fashioned bar-brawl." The huge one was flexing his paws, getting himself ready. This would be satisfying.

"One-on-one bare-knuckle fighting is acceptable to the courts." Mister Woodward stated firmly. "Each contestant may tape their paws with white cloth tape only. The match will be contested using Marquess of Queensberry rules."

"Okay, I'll agree." Sytry put forth. "If I'm going out, I'll go out with a bang."

"Agreeable." the huge equine stated.

Sytry tapped the judge on the shoulder while he pointed at the huge stallion. "Um, Monty is quite a bit bigger than I am. That's not very fair, if you ask me."

"You are right to lodge a complaint." Thornton agreed. "Who would you like as your challenger?"

The feline walked the circle, sizing up each male carefully. He was rather cautious to stay out of paw-reach of any of them while he did this. After a few laps of the Coven, he stopped and pointed at Richard.

"This male will do." the feline put forth.

“No you don't want me.” the dapple gray male retorted. “You have no idea what you would be getting yourself into. Choose someone else.”

“No, you are roughly my size.” the leopard brought up. “I would have the best chance against you.”

The Delancey male gave the demon a knowing nod of the head. “Listen, I don't want to pummel you to death. I'm not into that. Don't force the issue. Choose another, just not me.”

“No, I want you, Richard Tisdale Delancey, to be the champion for this Coven.” Sytry was very sure of his decision.

“Okay,” Richard agreed, “Just don't say I didn't warn you.” The demon suddenly realized that he had been had when the stallion started to expertly wrap his paws in tape, being very careful to get each wind and strip in the right place. “You should have asked, Sytry. I boxed in high school, college and my two year stint in the Marines. All eleven of my career losses were very closely called Technical Knock-Outs. No fur has ever put me on my butt with the exception of my brother.”