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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meigh

Chapter 28 – “Clean-up Operations”

The members of the now-larger Amendment Foundation were all enjoying a barbeque in Canton's back yard and although Willi Marie and Amber had conjured up what appeared to be a feast, Canton had insisted on cooking the steaks, burgers and hot links on a grill, the old-fashioned way.

“Hot links are ready!” he shouted as he pulled them from the grill and placed them on a platter. “Give me a few more minutes and the steaks will be ready!” he added, applying a bit of his Grand-daughter's fiery pepper-based sauce to the burgers for some extra zip. Everyone seemed to like the taste, that is, everyone with the exception of Rumjal. He claimed it was a bit too hot for him, which seemed a bit odd.

While he cooked their meal, Canton looked out over the back yard and all of the furs assembled before him. Never in his wildest dreams did he ever imagine being part of such a powerful association that had such a positive plan of action. They had several Internet furs, a good safe-house and the possibility of using his place too, along with some serious muscle to do the dirtier portions of the work.

Speaking of muscle, Canton smiled when he observed Aslaug passing her smoked salt around. He knew somewhere under that hardened exterior there was a caring femme. It was very clear to him that she was very proud of her handiwork. Valkyrie or not, she had to be caring to both create this delicacy and do her job of collecting souls. Besides, the obvious attention to detail that had been taken in creating that salt meant that she had labored a bit to get the flavors to be so intense. Maybe he could talk her into making some for him at whatever cost she might ask. Whatever the price, it would be worth it.

Zagam, who was sitting next to the Valkyrie, pushed his plate away from him, sated and a bit sleepy, too. “I'm full.” he commented.

“Another piece of musk melon?” Wilhelmine Marie asked, passing the plate toward the ebony bull.

“Please, no.” the former Underworld figure retorted, waving off the offered plate. “Not unless you want to see me explode.”

The twin tiger femmes walked up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder, getting his attention. “Well?” Virginia queried. “Have you given some thought to our offer?”

“I have.” Zagam replied. “You realize that there will be a number of beings that will be more than a bit upset when we implement your plan.”

Victoria nodded. “We know.”

The white tigress chimed in. “Well? Do you have a better plan?” she asked the former demon.

“No, I don't, Virginia. I have to say, this plan of yours is so insane, it just might work after all.”

Torvald had joined them and he added his two cents worth. “You make the perfect candidate for this job. Just look around; who else could do what you can do for us?”

“I agree.” the bovid put forth. “Well, when do we do it?”

“Day after tomorrow.” Canton offered up as he finally sat down with the others to have a bite to eat. “Let's face it; we all need some rest before we take care of this business at paw.”

“I have a little problem.” Zagam put on the table. “Since my place is pretty much destroyed, which I think you all will agree on with me, I am in need of a place to sleep tonight.”

“We have one extra bunk open over at the Svensen's place.” Cami offered.

“I'll take it.” the ebony male shot back in a flash.

###

Everyone had gone home to their respective residences so Virginia had went with her 'sister' back to the ranch. Torvald and Victoria both offered to share their bed with the white tigress but she had declined the offer, stating it just didn't feel right to her. Instead, she pulled out the Davenport, rounded up some blankets, scouted out a pair of spare pillows from Cami and tried to go to sleep.

Virginia had laid in her bed for what seemed like hours, staring at the ceiling, unable to sleep even though Tor was not snoring and the coach was quiet. Her mind was reeling with thoughts about how she would get on with her life. She could get her realtor's license but she would still feel odd about living at the ranch, even if it was for a short time and it was agreed upon by all parties concerned that the situation was only temporary. Needing some fur to bounce some ideas off of, she called her Ex-husband John Parks. He always was a good listener.

“Hello?” the tired-sounding male voice greeted the call, obviously having been almost asleep.

“John? Sorry to call you so late at night but this is . . . your . . . erm, Ex, on the line.” the femme feline put forth, feeling a bit odd by having to be evasive about her identity. “John, is it too late for you to come over here and talk for a while? I need to figure out some things. Things that are very important to me.”

“Is it really that important to you?” he queried, trying to see the clock. He finally put on his glasses and noted that it was only ten minutes after nine. “Okay, it's not that late. If it's that important to you, I'll be over in a few.”

“Thank you, John, it is that important. I'll fix us a pot of coffee and round up some snacks.”

“Uh, tell me?” he asked as he stood up. “What is it that you can't talk to Tor about?”

“You'll understand when you get here.”

“Okay, putting my pants on now.” he commented around a yawn. “Be there in a few.”

Virginia put down the receiver, hoping in her heart that she had made a smart move. All she knew was, she needed someone, and not her sister or her sister's husband to talk to. Someone to listen to her vent that was neutral in the matter at paw.

###

John Parks was just about to his turn-off from the 241 at Portola Parkway when he felt like he had finally woken up. He was still thinking about the strange call from Victoria, wondering what was on her mind that she couldn't share it with her husband. Was she thinking of leaving him or worse yet, divorcing him? He made his exit off of the freeway, then a left back under the freeway on Portola Parkway. Up the road a ways he made a right onto Glenn Ranch Road then a left onto the paved drive up to the homestead.

Looking over at the Svensen residence once he had parked and got out of the vehicle, it looked like it was ready to occupy, as far as he could see. He would be glad for his Ex, once she could move back into her home. He knew just how important having a home was to her.

The Bengal tiger smiled when he thought about the modest little home in Saugus they had purchased, just weeks after they were married. Victoria had been overjoyed when the agent had called, telling them that the offer on the dwelling had been accepted.

He then frowned, thinking about the separation and subsequent divorce thirteen months later. They were young tigers, wont to be on each other's nerves a bit as they got used to living together but her pregnancy had caused the tigress to become very emotional. Well, between the tigress becoming emotional and their somewhat out-of-control drinking, they had been through some very heated verbal fights that were threatening to become physical. That was when he had decided that he was no good for her and that is was best that he leave before he actually hurt her.

Noticing that he had stopped walking up the drive while he was gathering wool, he approached the door and knocked softly.

“Come in!” the femme tiger bid. John opened the door only to see a white tigress that resembled his former mate, holding a coffee carafe and two cups.

“Victoria?” he queried, somewhat startled by her appearance.

“John, please have a seat.” she offered, indicating the breakfast counter of the center island in the kitchen.

“You look good, Victoria.” he offered up while he made himself comfortable, not just saying so to be polite. She really did look good in that coloration. It really fit her in his opinion.

“First, I need to bring you up to speed about my appearance,” she put forth while she poured the tiger a cup of coffee and pushed a plate of donuts in front of him. “You should be made aware of the fact that I'm an iteration of the femme you know as Victoria Svensen. I came back from an alternate future to right a wrong and I caused two of me to occupy the same reality at the same time by righting said wrong.”

“Okay, I'm lost.” John replied. “There is more than one of you now?”

“Yeah, there is.” she agreed. “For the record, I go by Virginia Elise Connell now so there will be no confusion in any way as to who I am personally.”

“Virginia . . .” John mulled that name over. “Your sister that died when you were little? That would explain the white coloration, which looks good on you, by the way.”

“Thank you, John.” She sipped her coffee, then continued. “I asked you to come over here so I could vent a bit. I realize that I can get a Real Estate license without a hitch but I need to find a place to stay, just for a while until I get back on my feet.” Virginia shrugged her shoulders and gave her former mate a crooked smile. “I can't stay here. It's just too painful to see myself with what was my stallion. I was warned that I would suffer these feelings if I came back and straightened out the problem. You know me, I just couldn't let well enough alone.”

“That's true.” the male agreed. “If you thought something was wrong, you would try your best to fix it.”

“Well, it must be a character flaw.” she suggested. “I fixed this problem, keeping Tor and myself from being abducted back to Halstlund on what would have been a permanent basis but in the process I've screwed up my own life.”

“Besides this issue of seeing the other version of yourself with what was your husband, what else is messed up?” the male asked. “I don't see staying at the ranch on a temporary basis as an issue.”

“John, I just don't know.” she responded. “Maybe it was the whole '*crossing time and space*' thing that's causing me to be irrational. I tried to go to sleep earlier only to just lay there, eyes wide open with my mind going a hundred miles an hour.” She then began to sob quietly, trying to maintain her composure. “John, I really fracked up this time. It wasn't a bad life, all in all, that place where we were marooned. I just couldn't leave well enough . . .” The dam finally broke and the white tigress was now crying openly.

John went around the kitchen island and helped the tigress over to the Davenport. He used one foot to close it back up to a seating arrangement before he sat the pale femme down and covered her with a blanket. He then sat down next to her and pulled her to him to console her aching heart.

“Listen to me, Virginia.” he said softly. “I’ll always be here for you. To be truthful, I never stopped loving you, ever. If I can help you out in any way, just let me know.”

“Thank you.” the white one squeezed out between her sobs.

“Listen, if you want to stay at my place, I have a spare bedroom. No strings attached.”

“What about your femme-friend, erm, Roxie?” Virginia queried while she struggled to get her composure back under control.

“Oh, you mean Rhonda. She was just a friend, nothing more. I couldn't figure her out so I didn't argue when she left my place and moved in with Ricky, that raccoon that drives the Hemet delivery route.”

“Ricky Hemholtz?” the tigress queried. “Mister Rainbow Warrior? That Ricky?” She knew who he was, since she had sold him a home practically right before she had been made immortal.

“Yeah, him.” John confirmed. “You know, he's a really nice male and he never argues when I add drops on him at the last minute. Just because he bats from the other side of the plate, who am I to judge him?”

“I appreciate that attitude.” the femme commented. “Um, do you know where I might borrow a car for a few months? Just until I can afford to buy one of my own?”

“You're welcome to my Jensen Interceptor.” John put forth.

“Oh no, I couldn't accept . . .” Her Ex-husband interrupted her.

“Virginia, I've only drove that Jensen about fifteen hundred miles since I did that full restoration. It's going bad from just sitting in the garage, unused. Just recently, I had to go out and buy a battery for it.”

The white femme yawned widely before she spoke again. “I don't know, John. I still think I would feel odd about the whole thing.”

John took note of her yawn and it was contagious. “Well, it looks like you might be able to get to sleep now, so I'll just be . . .” This time it was the femme that derailed the male's thoughts.

“No, stay here, hold me and keep me company.” she suggested. “It's late and I don't want you out driving when you're tired.” She obviously had noted his yawn, too.

Virginia sat up, put the blanket over her Ex and proceeded to shut down the house. Returning to the living room after that chore was done, she had him assist her in folding the Davenport back out. She put the pillows back on it, grabbed a blanket and laid down in bed, motioning for him to join her.

John took off his shirt but left his undershirt on. Kicking off his shoes, he no more than had his blanket over him when the white tigress snuggled up against him while she tucked her blanket around herself.

“Goodnight, John.” the tigress bid. “And thanks for coming over and listening to me rattle on.” she added, right before she yawned widely yet again.

“Goodnight, Virginia. And you're welcome, by the way.” Out of reflex, he gave her a kiss on the cheek. Once he was settled in bed, he heard his Ex begin to purr quietly. Hoping that this was not a huge mistake, to stay with Virginia for the night, he was finally able to drift off to sleep.

###

Morning had not-quite arrived and Victoria was tired of laying in bed, waiting for the house to wake up. She didn't want to disturb everyfur by stirring around in the kitchen just yet so she had found a paperback to read, just to occupy her time. After a while, even that didn't hold her attention so she decided to get up and use the facilities. Once those issues were taken care of, she began to make her way back to bed.

On her way, she heard some snoring that was familiar to her in some way. The tigress' curiosity piqued, she slowly opened the door between the bedroom and the living room to investigate. What she saw was surprising, to say the least.

Although she could not see the head of the Davenport bed from her vantage point, what she could see raised an eyebrow. There were four feet poking out from under the covers, one pair white, one pair ruddy. The ruddy pair were male, to be sure by the size, but they were not unfamiliar to the femme feline. Smiling, she closed the door quietly and slipped back into bed.

“Care to tell me what you discovered?” Tor asked in a whisper, startling her momentarily.

“You were spying on me!” Victoria whispered back, giving him a playful smack on the shoulder.

“Yes, I was listening to you trying to be quiet. Been awake for about an hour or so.” her hubby offered up. “So, what is so interesting in the living room?”

“John Parks is on the Davenport with Virginia.”

“No kidding?”

“I kid you not.” the tigress retorted.

Tor nodded. “I was sure that I heard him talking with Virginia about eleven o'clock last night, then I heard her crying and after that, I heard the house being shut down. I did not hear him leave, though.”

“Well, she's a big femme.” Victoria mused. “And John has changed dramatically, especially since that time we were all thrust into an alternate reality. He actually stopped drinking altogether.”

Torvald scratched at his cheek. “So, would you go back to John Parks? Just puttin' that out there, for argument's sake.”

The tigress nodded. “My sister could make worse mistakes. He's very stable right now as a dispatcher for Ahern's and I heard he paid off his home in North Tustin last year.”

The stallion knew this was a fact but he wanted to press further. “So, why did you leave John in the first place? Help me to understand this, just in case I need to give advice to your twin.”

“Tor, we split up because he was drinking and I'm ashamed to admit that I was, too. Even when I became pregnant with Conrad.” The tigress looked away from her hubby and continued. “We would drink, then we would start fighting. I didn't really leave him as much as it was John that left me before he hurt me. He loved me enough that it would have killed him to have physically injured me or caused me to lose Conrad. It broke his heart to leave me but it was more his choice than anything else. I didn't really ask him to leave and I didn't want him to go, either.”

“I see.”

“I just wanted to set that straight, since we have never discussed it before. You know, when that unknown fur had made us think we had injured each other during our trial, I was giving thought to leaving you, just so I wouldn't actually kill you.” After a moment to let that sink in, she added this snippet. “I was afraid that I was going into that '*Tiger Rage*' where a mature tiger kind of blacks out and tries to kill the first thing they see.”

“But you told me that your family doesn't suffer from that.” the stallion interjected.

“We don't, as far as I know, but it is always a possibility with a tiger.”

“I'll take that on advisement.”

Victoria looked her hubby right in the eyes. “I love you with all my heart but I will be truthful in the matter. I still love John Parks, but it's not like the way that I love you. I love you unconditionally. I'm not sure it would be the same with John but like I said earlier, it wouldn't be the worst mistake that I could make, given the task of starting my life all over from scratch.”

###

Virginia started waking up, roused by a not-unfamiliar-to-her arm slowly wrapping around her waist. She noted the feeling of some fur sleeping behind her and the warm breath on her right ear. The male tiger in the bed with her stretched just a bit, making her notice that his left arm was under her pillow, just like it had always been when they were together.

The white tigress thought this over; was this a mistake to be with her Ex-husband? He had changed for the better, that was for sure. He had done well for himself, since their divorce. She knew he wasn't hurting for cash and his home was paid off, according to Conrad. For some reason, she felt safe in his arms. Was it because she had never really stopped loving him? She knew her love for Torvald was different from the way she had loved John Parks. It was that fact that bothered her. Was she deserting Tor? No, she wasn't because she offered to let Victoria stay with him. It was her choice to do so.

Could she ever let another male into her heart? She didn't know if she could. John, even though they had some bad history together, wouldn't be the worst mistake she could make. For some reason, Virginia knew in her heart that he would let her back into his life in a heartbeat. The real question was, could she reciprocate?

“Are you awake?” her bed-mate whispered.

“Yeah, I woke up a few minutes ago when you stirred.”

“Sorry if I woke you up.” he offered up, hugging her around the waist while he gave her a kiss on the neck.

“No need to apologize.” she replied, right before she stretched out herself.

“You always said that.”

“I did, didn't I?”

“Listen, Virginia. I still love you with all of my heart.” John put forth, kissing her ear which made it twitch.

The white tigress rolled over to face her former mate. “John, last night I was concerned that it was a mistake to ask you here. Right now, after what you just said, I'm not so sure it was a mistake.”

“I feel the same way. I was apprehensive about coming over here, but after thinking it over, this is our second chance if we choose to take it.” the male tiger responded.

“So, where does that put us?”

“I don't know.” he admitted. “If you're willing to try again, I'll give it my best effort.”

“Hmm . . .” The tigress pondered this offer. “If we do this, I want you to just be yourself. I want to know exactly what I'm getting myself into.”

“Okay, I'm in agreement with that.” he replied.

“And you do understand that I'm still immortal, for the time being?”

“We will deal with whatever comes up when the time comes.” John put on the table.

Virginia kissed her former husband deeply, right before she hugged him tightly. She held him like that for a while, until she heard Tor and Victoria talking quietly.

“My sister and brother-in-law are awake.” she said softly.

“It sounds odd to hear you say that.” John put forth.

“I agree.” she retorted. “Let me see if they want some breakfast.” Virginia suggested. “I'm sorry but you know me; I like an early meal to start my day properly.”

####

Two days had passed since the barbeque and The Amendment Foundation members that were going on this particular mission were in Troy and Amber's back yard, preparing to go take care of a loose end that needed to be tied up. They had stashed the firearms from the last mission in Troy's fallout shelter, a relic from the previous owner of the property. It didn't hurt that The youngest Hill sibling's dwelling was

shielded from prying eyes on all sides due to its strategic location just off of Mulholland Drive.

The Hill brothers, the twin femme tigers, Torvald, Wilhelmine, Anna, Rafe, Max, Eddie and most importantly, Zagam, were preparing to go do this deed and it appeared that they were expecting just a bit of resistance once to their destination. They were all decked out in full military battle dress, each fur packing a rifle, a sidearm of some sort, grenades and of course, Monty was packing that seriously oversized rifle.

Canton adjusted the chinstrap on his helmet one last time before he checked each fur's gear over. This was most likely to get messy and he was not too keen on the idea of Willi Marie going with them. He would have rather that she had sat this one out but it was her insistence that forced him to give in to her 'request' to go.

“Everyone ready?” he asked, making sure they were truly ready for this. Noting that they had all responded in the affirmative, They stood still while Willi and her Grandmother sent them to their destination.

No sooner than they had materialized, it rapidly degraded into a firefight of the Nth order. They had arrived in the main Rotunda, right off the room that was their goal. The issue was that a number of guards were keeping that room safe from intruders. So much for an easy mission.

They had taken cover behind any object that could potentially protect them while the males began to lob grenades at the antagonists, decimating their numbers slowly. Things evened up a bit more when Zagam stood from behind the boulder that protected him and let loose with a *Suchka* previously used by Mister Alexi Saiga. It was almost mind-boggling to watch the former demon leading a decimating frontal assault on what were at one time his contemporaries.

They inched their way across the Rotunda, making small gains, but gains nonetheless. Willi Marie was trying to aid them by holding a shield and it seemed to be working, for the most part. With the retinue armored, any round that slipped by her shield generally struck body armor, not flesh. They finally made it to within one hundred yards of their objective so it was time for final plans.

Canton and Torvald waved Zagam over and asked a very important question of him.

“How sturdy are those doors?” the gray one asked.

“Not very.” the ebony bull replied. “One solid kick by Montgomery and we're in.”

“Okay, that's good.” Tor mused. They then turned to Willi and Anna. “Can you shield us for a sprint to that door?” he asked, indicating the portal in question with his paw.

“No problem.” the two femmes said at almost the same time.

“Okay, we go for it, then.” the pale blond stallion put forth. “Let's go Rock and Roll the place!” he shouted, right before they all ran headlong into success or oblivion, firearms blazing away. They sprinted across the remaining Rotunda, pausing only for a moment while Monty rendered the doors a non-issue. A short dash down the proper hallway brought them to another set of doors, more ornate than the last. Tor did the honors, using a well-placed hoof to take both doors off the hinges. They fired a few thousand

'warning' rounds through the portal, braced themselves and stepped into the room.

At first the room seemed deserted, that is until the occupants crawled out from underneath the huge wooden conference table in the middle of the room. There were humans, furs, a few reptile types and The Light Bringer. He was the first to make a comment as he stood and brushed off his clothes.

“What in bloody blue blazes was that all about?!” the Prince of Lies blurted out, somewhat startled by their unannounced appearance.

“We came to claim what rightfully belongs to The Amendment Foundation.” the ruddy tigress replied loudly and firmly. “We defeated Zagam and Caassimolar. We now claim their seats on The Malefic Council by rightful conquest.” This caused the chambers to erupt in murmurs, followed by loud talking and eventually shouting as each member objected until the Evil One shushed them.

“Hold it! Everyone pipe down!” The Stealer of Souls shouted. Once they had calmed down, he looked at Victoria and shrugged his shoulders. “You win this round, tigress. You have two seats that are rightfully yours. So, who's going to fill them, you and your twin?”

“No, we have two furs for those jobs.” she replied. Motioning to some beings that had not entered the room in the first place, in strode Zagam and Eddie. “Two of our Foundation members will fill the seats and they have full powers to make any vote or deal that is needed.” She waited a moment for dramatic effect, then added, “As long as it will benefit The Amendment Foundation.”

A lizard of some sort stood up and pounded the table with his fist. “I have an objection to this! This is totally absurd! She just said that they had defeated Zagam! He can't hold a seat now!!” His objection was met with a number of rifle barrels pointed at his head. “Well, you know, maybe I don't have an objection. Zagam can have his seat back, if you want him to,” he said hesitantly, slowly sitting back down with a nervous look on his muzzle.

“I think things will be just fine.” Victoria said as she paced around the room. “We may not have won the big battle but we have won this one. Zagam and Eddie will be our eyes and ears while we decommission unwilling Agents. That means, any Agent from either side that comes to us, asking for a way out.

“Okay, you can all piss and moan about this for however long you might want to but the fact is, The Amendment Foundation is in this for the long haul. However long it takes us, we will be plugging away at it until we have made a difference. We may not be as powerful as The Council but with our 'early warning' system in place, I think we will do just fine.”

“But you're only sssso many fursss.” a serpent pointed out. “We are ssstrong, Victoria. Your group lacksss skill and knowledge.”

“Don't forget that we have a number of Consortium members backing us up. Want to see what happens when a Consortium wrecking crew comes down here?” Canton offered up.

Victoria cleared her throat. “Zagam? Eddie?”

“We have it.” the bull replied for the two of them.

“We're out of here, for now.” the white tigress stated for the record. “Don't make us have to come back and finish what we have started.”

With a wave of Rafael's paws and a flash of white light, the small wrecking crew disappeared from sight.

###

Later that afternoon, Montgomery had drove over to the Svensen residence to deliver the *Libro Tenebris Discipuli* for Aslaug. He had promised her the book, so they could be very careful of running afoul of a Dark Agent that was bent on derailing the Amendment Foundation. That tome would let them know who to steer clear of or if it really became necessary, who to go after.

He turned up the driveway and found a place to park among the construction vehicles. Getting the book in his paw, he walked up to the first coach he came to and knocked on the door. The door opened and a femme bay-colored equine came into view.

“May I help you?” she asked, giving Monty an odd look. For some reason, he looked very familiar to her.

“I'm Montgomery Hill and I'm looking for Torvald or Victoria. Do you know where I can find them?” he replied.

“Next coach over, Mister Hill,” Maryanne replied, pointing towards the fifth wheel further up the driveway. She then spoke up again before Monty could walk away. “Excuse me, do you have any relatives in Ohio?”

“I was born in Ohio.” the huge gray one offered up. “Why do you ask?”

“You seemed familiar to me in some way.”

“Well, I am an actor. I've been on television and the big screen.”

“Oh.” the femme said softly. “I was sure that you were related to some fur that came into the diner where I worked a long time ago. He was a regular at Newberry's Diner.”

“I know about Newberry's. I used to eat there on Saturdays.” the stallion offered up. After he thought for a moment, he took a closer look at the femme in front of him. “No, it's not possible, is it?”

“What's not possible?” she wanted to know.

“Gah, this is a huge stretch, but are you Maryanne Jensen?”