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“Redemption”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 20 – “Marking The Line In The Sand”

Tigermark and four other Celestial beings made minute adjustments to their flight path per the white tiger's calculations and prepared for the signal. At the appropriate moment, the feline nodded and they let the drac fall, in sort of a 'bombing mission' manner, allowing Eldon's dead body to crash through the exterior wall of the canid Dark Agent's third floor office.

“Nice aim.” the bovine being commented while they listened to the 'colorful language' emanating from the general direction of the destroyed office room.

“Did he stop against the desk, as you predicted?” the gray canid asked Tigermark.

“I think so.” the striped one replied. “Now for Part Two.”

####

The canid of indeterminate origin finally extricated himself from behind his desk, the one that was pinned firmly against the wall by the dragon's body. He was pissed off, since his laptop was toast and the office was not in much better shape. He wondered what was up with that idiotic dragon, to make such an entrance. That was when he noticed the possibly-fatal wound in the drac's back.

“Eldon? Are you alive?” the Dark Agent asked while he attempted to turn the dragon over.

“No, he is dead.” Tigermark replied matter-of-factly from the general area of the new opening in the wall.

The canid Agent spun around to face the owner of the voice. “Who the hell are you?” he asked.

“Hell or Hel has nothing to do with this.” the spirit offered up as the five beings floated into the middle of the room. “Victoria Svensen killed Eldon, just like she will kill you, if she is told exactly where to find you, Mr. Theodore Essey. The Immortal Couple are on to you so I suggest you back off before you end up like your employee.”

The Agent seemed nonplussed by Tigermark's dissertation. “What? No, you listen here, stripey . . .” The ascended tiger interrupted the Dark Agent.

“If you're thinking I'm bluffing, don't. It took us what . . . half an hour to get several furs to roll over on you. You're marked, my friend. Tell your boss that you quit. Get a sorceress to move you to some remote reality. Do it before you end up like Eldon.”

“You don't scare me.” the canid Agent put forth as a smug grin crossed his mug.

“I don't?” Tigermark retorted, raising an eyebrow in disbelief.

The striped feline walked up to the Dark Agent and grabbed him around the throat, picked him up off the floor and choked him just slightly. When the canid tried to push him away, his paws just slipped through the feline's body. That's when Tigermark put some more pressure on his quarry's neck, scaring the daylights out of him.

The striped one then spoke in a low, murderous tone. “I won't kill you now because I want you to take a clear message back to your boss; Back Off!! NOW!!” he shouted. The Dark Agent wet his pants in response.

The feline then dropped the canid to the floor and joined ranks with his contemporaries. The five ascended beings then slowly, albeit a bit dramatically, floated out through the hole in the wall, leaving the canid to the difficult task of explaining the issue of the dead drac to his boss, Eldon's friends and his landlord.

###

Once outside the wall, the bovine male stopped his feline compatriot. “Tigermark, I thought we were told to return the dragon to his reality. Well, this isn't his reality and I don't remember being told to use the wyrm as an unguided ballistic wrecking ball.”

“Yeah, I know.” the striped Agent agreed. “This one was for Torvald and Victoria.” He thought for a moment, then added, “And for Aramis, Aslaug and Joe, too. My mortal or earth-bound friends have too much left to do for me to just stand by and allow all of this nonsense to continue. Any little thing I can do to help them, I will do.”

“I guess we will catch some flack over this?” the canid Agent with them asked.

“I think not.” Tigremark replied. “We didn't take a soul so the Celestial Order will have no clue as to what we have done.”

###

The future Victoria stretched out her arms and legs, getting the kinks out of them. She had slept off and on throughout the night and it was now the next morning, if she had her guess right. The femme feline

knew she was on the road to recovery when she finally had to grope around in her darkness to find the controls for the blanket and turn it down to 'Low' earlier.

Since she had been awake this morning, she kept having a feeling that she could 'touch' the mind of the other iteration of herself. It seemed far-fetched, but there had to be some merit to the idea. Concentrating, she sent a non-verbal 'Good Morning' to her other self.

"Huh?" the present iteration replied, caught off guard by the femme voice that seemed to emanate from everywhere. She looked around the bedroom of her temporary residence only to see that her hubby was sound asleep and she could hear Donnie snoring on their couch in the next room. "Who said that?" she asked quietly while she racked the slide on her AMT .45 ACP Long Slide pistol open far enough to confirm that it was loaded and ready to rock and roll.

"I said that, silly!" the older tigress put forth. "Your other half. You might not need to speak for me to hear you."

"Good grief! You gave me a start!" the femme in Portola Hills commented as she safetied her weapon. "I was sure that we had a prowler in the house."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you." the elder femme put forth. "I just thought I could 'touch' your mind so I had to try."

"You shocked me because you woke me up from a fitful sleep. It's early here because the sky is barely light." the younger one offered up.

"Gah, I can't reply to that, since I can't see to tell you what time it is where I am." The elder commented. "Earlier, I was getting too warm so I had to turn down the electric blanket over me by feel alone. I'm still blinded by my concussion."

"Not to change the subject, but is that Aslaug I hear snoring?"

"Yeah, she woke me a bit ago when she must have rolled over. Near as I can tell, she's in the same room with me."

"This is too easy." the younger tigress put forth. "Um, how do you feel? You looked pretty bad when you left here with the filly."

"I actually feel pretty good, all things considered." was the reply. "My right wrist and forearm hurts a bit, I still have a slight headache and my chest still hurts from that blasted drac falling on me."

"Uh, you know what? Turn your head to the right." the younger femme asked. When the elder femme complied, the first made a discovery. "I swear, if I close my eyes, I can see through yours! Not perfectly but I can see what you should be seeing!"

"No kidding?"

"I'm serious! Aslaug is on a cot right next to you!" She knew this had to be true. "Reach out, slowly . . . no, up toward your head a bit . . . down toward the floor, slowly . . . There! Aslaug's wrist!"

"Oh . . . Shit . . .!" the elder one blurted out. "I can feel her wrist!"

“Huh?!? Wha???” the Valkyrie said as she tried to wake up. “What is it, Victoria? Do you need something?” she asked as she woke up further.

“I can communicate telepathically with my other self!” the elder femme blurted out.

“Oh . . . Kaaaay . . .” the femme equine commented, rubbing her muzzle to wake up further. “What does your 'other half' have to say this morning?”

“Tell her we're home.” the younger tigress replied.

“She can hear you and see you through my eyes.” the elder tigress put forth. “She says they're home.”

“So, if you can hear me,” Aslaug started, “Are we to meet you there, at your trailer home?”

“Tell her 'yes’”

“She says that's okay.” The elder one gave the matter some thought, then continued a silent conversation with her other iteration. “Um, you and I have a problem. A very big problem.”

“I know.” the younger one agreed. “How do we deal with there being two of us now?”

“Well, there were two of us, in the beginning, until we were three years old.”

“You're right.”

“Do we dare to go there?” the elder asked.

“Do we have a choice?” the younger retorted.

“Let's talk to Mom first. I've . . . no, *we* have always trusted her judgment.”

“I agree.”

“How do you think she will take this?” the elder one asked.

“Well, you and I both know she will probably freak out, then cry tears of joy that we're alive, followed by reading both of us the Riot Act, long version, for ever getting involved with work for The Celestial Order.”

“So, do we go talk to her?”

“We do. We have to. We need her blessing to do this.”

The elder hesitated, then continued. “I also want to say, I want you to stay with Tor.”

“Are you sure?” the younger tigress asked. “That's a pretty big thing to put on the table.”

“I'm sure.” the elder tigress replied. “It was my decision to stop the madness so it's my decision to back off of Torvald. Besides, you're 'in sync' with him, whereas I have another roughly seventeen years of living separating us. You would be the best fit in any case.”

“Only if you're sure you want to do this.”

“I'm very sure.” The elder femme then added, “Listen, I'm getting tired so I'm going to break off our conversation. Hopefully, I will be home soon.”

“I'll see you soon.”

“And maybe I'll see you soon, too.”

The elder tigress fluffed the pillow under her head and listened to the femme equine in the cot beside her go back to sleep. While Aslaug snored softly, she thought about what had transpired. This had been a tough road to travel, and it seemed to only get worse as they approached the destination. Now, just to complicate matters, there were now two Victoria Svensens.

The femme feline turned her head to the left, towards the outer wall of the room. She knew there was a window there because the filly had opened the portal earlier in the morning, complaining of a stuffy room. By covering her eyes, comparing the view to uncovered, Victoria was sure that she could make out a square of light that must be the window. Maybe she would get her sight back soon. She really hoped so.

###

Constantine stopped short of knocking on the door to the Svensen's temporary residence, trying to keep his frustration under control. The being that Joe Latrans had sent him to collect was still in a serious state of denial, making things difficult. He was not in denial over leaving the service of Lucifer, mind you, he was in denial that furs actually existed in any way, shape or form.

“Listen, dude! I was winning that round of Call To Arms! You had no right to come into my hotel room at the Fur-Con and just drag me off like that, breaking up the game!” the young human teenager shouted loudly. “I don't care if you do have a killer fursuit costume, that doesn't give you the right to . . .” The avian interrupted him.

“This, young Bartholomew Jackson, is not a costume.” he retorted flatly. “Not a costume. Repeat after me. Not. A. Costume.”

The young freckle-faced male shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah, right. Not a costume. I must be under the influence of some killer drugs then, because I see a talking bird standing in front of me.”

“Look, Just wait a minute and you'll see.” Constantine put forth, shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head. That was one weird convention where he had finally located young Bart. Humans dressed up as fake furs? Who knew . . .

“Just put me back where you found me, okay? This is getting too weird for my tastes.” the young man suggested.

“You wanted out of the business, right?” the fallen Angel asked, waiting for an answer.

“I did.” Bartholomew agreed. “I knew the Feds were on to my hacking into their military servers. It was just a matter of time.” He looked around at his surroundings, then asked, “Where are we, anyway? I thought getting out would be different from this. Kinda looks like my Grandma's neighborhood in the

Portola Hills, if you ask me.”

“You are currently at the temporary residence of Torvald and Victoria Svensen, the couple in charge of the safe-house which is being rebuilt right over there.” the avian explained, indicating the residence across from them under reconstruction. “You'll remain here until we find a reality that you can blend into, unnoticed and most importantly, not governed by your boss.”

“Reality?” Bart questioned. “There is more than one?” he asked.

“I'm sure Torvald will explain it to you. This place is in a different reality from where I found you.”

“I'm losing my mind. I just know it.” Mr. Jackson muttered. “I am having a conversation with a talking eagle about multiple realities.”

While his charge blathered on, Constantine knocked on the front door to the coach, which was answered shortly by Victoria.

“Good morning!” she offered up warmly.

“I do hope we're not interrupting,” the Angel replied as he led his charge inside and closed the door behind them. “I retrieved this young man per Joe's direction. He seems to think furs do not exist.”

“Hmm,” the tigress mused. “Well, I guess I should introduce myself. I'm Victoria Svensen, and your name is . . .?”

“Ububuuu guughh.” was the incoherent reply. Bart was thoroughly stunned by the femme feline's appearance. He swallowed hard then croaked out, “You . . . you're a female tiger.”

Victoria made a show of checking herself over very dramatically before she replied. “You're very perceptive, for a hyoo-man. Been a tigress all my life too, Mister, uh . . . I'm sorry, but I didn't catch your name the first time around.”

Constantine rolled his eyes in disdain. “Victoria Svensen, you're not being very sporting at the moment. Our young charge seems to be in a bit of shock.” he pointed out.

“I think you're right.” she agreed. “Can't fault me for wanting to have a bit of fun, though. Here, let me get him to sit down at the table.” while she guided the young man to a chair, she asked an important question. “So Constantine, what is his name?”

“Bartholomew Jackson.”

“Thank you, that will be better than 'Hey You'.” Victoria turned to the new arrival and smiled warmly. “Can I offer you something to eat, Bartholomew?”

“Y . . . Yes, please.” Bart replied hesitantly. “Uh, it must be dinner time, since I started that game around lunch, before I was so rudely interrupted by the eagle, there.”

“It was four in the morning when I 'interrupted' you, to be quite accurate.” the avian noted. “I had been watching you from the settee for several hours before I just decided it was 'Grab and Go' to get you out of there.”

“So, it's morning?” the young man asked, looking out the nearby window to confirm that information. “I didn't think we had played that game for that long.”

“They were playing a military shoot-em-up game of some sort.” the fallen Angel added for clarification.

Victoria nodded. “My son Conrad would play video games for hours, completely losing track of time.”

“You have a son?” Bart blurted out.

“Well, yes.” the tigress replied. “Would you like some waffles? I have fresh strawberries to go on top of them.”

“That would be great.” the young man agreed. “Uh, not to seem nosy or rude, but could I touch your fur? I need to know that you're not just a girl in a very convincing fursuit.”

“I understand.” the femme feline replied. “Here, touch my arm.”

Bart stroked the fur on her left arm, noting how it felt smooth and silky, not like fake fur. He parted the hair to see that there was real skin beneath it. Bart gave a small clump of fur on his host's arm a gentle tug, just to confirm it was attached and went on to examine her paw. He touched the pads, noting they were warm and smooth like the palm of his hand. Young Mr. Jackson even winced when he observed the star-shaped burn on her palm pad.

“Do you have claws?” he asked out of curiosity.

“Yes, I do.” She smiled as she added, “Don't tigers on your planet have claws?”

Bart nodded in agreement as she slowly expressed her claws, painted a glossy bright red and honed to a razor-sharpness. He touched the points of several of them, noting they would just effortlessly rip him apart, if she so felt like it.

“Thank you.” the young man said after letting go of her paw. “Wow. That' a mind-blower.”

“What's a mind-blower?” the tigress asked.

“I never thought there could really be true anthropomorphic beings.” the young man allowed.

Victoria sat down across from her new guest. “Well, you're descended from primates so what would be so hard about other species becoming sentient?”

“You have a point.” he agreed. “Um, did primates evolve in this reality?” he asked for his own edification.

“No humans here.” she replied. “We have orangutans and gorillas on this planet but that's the extent of primate evolution.”

“Wow.”

“When my husband and I would do missions on a human only or mixed human and furs planet, I would

sometimes need to look like a human of middle-Eastern origin.”

“Are you married to a tiger?” Bart asked.

“No, I'm married to a very kind and strong stallion.” she answered. “He's probably done showering by now so you'll get to meet him shortly. In the meantime, I should start your breakfast.”

The tigress went back to the kitchen and continued her task of fixing a morning meal. She then stopped and looked at the newest Amendment Foundation member questioningly.

“Constantine, would you like something to eat?” she put forth.

“Why not? I always enjoy a good waffle,” he replied with a cheeky grin. “I was tempted to snack in young Bartholomew's room, but thought better of it when I observed the food. Something called 'Chex Mix'. Putting cereal and savory items together in a crisp packet? Interesting concept . . .”

Bart and Victoria both frowned in confusion. “Crisp packet?” the young human queried.

Constantine paused before he groaned in resigned frustration and closed his eyes. Then he replied, with pure Anglophilic bitterness. “*Potato chip packet*, then.”

The femme feline spoke up to clarify things. “I believe we would say, *Potato chip bag*,” the tigress translated.

“Oh,” Bart said, nodding in understanding.

Victoria steered the conversation back on topic. “Point made. And how about some tea, Constantine? I have some English Breakfast tea, if that would be okay with you?”

The avian smiled. “Ah, now you've peaked my interest. That would make breakfast better.”

“Tea it is.” the tigress replied.

The fallen Angel watched on as the femme feline busied herself with her task of fixing sustenance for them. It made him smile to think that she would offer food and drink to him. He now knew for sure that he had fell in with the right furs. The right furs and the right cause.

###

The future Victoria had finished her breakfast, happy that her sight was returning to her. She could see well enough that she had minimal problems with her morning meal, which pleased her immensely. The tigress was currently being checked over by the doctor while she waited for Aslaug to return. The filly had told her it was just going to be a quick trip up to Milwaukee for something and that she would be right back.

“How is your forearm?” the pink femme asked after listening to Victoria's lungs.

“It's still a bit sore, Andrea.”

“You know, you really should get with a sorceress and learn to control that power you have.”

The tigress nodded. "Yeah, I should," she replied, putting her robe back around herself.

"You should do it before you hurt yourself, or worse." the healer interjected.

"Gah, I know I shouldn't have gotten that upset." the femme feline put forth. "It wasn't a bad life, all in all. The hard part was not impacting an evolving society. As much as we would have liked to have had electric lights, natural gas heating and such as that, we made do with what we had."

"I can't imagine living like that." Andrea commented. "My heat here is a combination of geothermal and solar but sometimes the house gets a little cool in the winter."

"Are you too far out for natural gas?"

"Yeah, I am."

"How about propane?" the tigress asked as she tied her robe.

"Well, I can't afford it." the lapin femme replied. "I just don't have many patients these days. The buzz down in the town of McLouth is that I'm a witch."

"That's not right." Victoria offered up. "You know, if my adopted niece could set you up, would you be interested in working on another planet where you would be accepted for who you were?"

Andrea pursed her lips while she thought about this offer. "Would this be with The Consortium?"

"Willi Marie sits on a review board."

"You know, that might be a decent offer." The femme lapin looked up at the tigress and nodded. "Yeah, I would leave here. No family left to keep me here, anyway."

"I'll talk to her for you."

There was some noise outside, followed by the front door opening. "I'm back!" Aslaug announced loudly as she came through the main portal.

"That didn't take long." the tigress commented. After a moment's examination, she made an observation. "You know, something isn't right." After a quick close-up examination, needed due to her impaired sight, she made her decision. "That's not the blouse that I bought for you." she stated.

"Are you sure?" the Valkyrie asked.

"Yeah, I'm sure, Aslaug." she said with a smile. "The one I bought you had the Harley emblems in orange on the collar tips, not in white on the pocket." After a short pause, she added, "And I'm pretty sure that I took the price tag off of it," removing the tag from the sleeve for her equine friend.

"They don't make the other one on this planet." the filly offered up, obviously embarrassed by being caught red-pawed by the tigress. "In fact, the sales-fur wanted to know where I had gotten it at, since it had a little orange tag on it, identifying it as being a genuine Harley blouse."

“Well, I guess that one will be okay.” Victoria then noticed the bag in Aslaug's possession. “So, what's in the bag?”

“You needed clothes to travel in.” the filly stated, giving the tigress the parcel to examine. “If they don't fit you right, I'll go exchange them.”

Victoria discovered that the filly had purchased a pair of Wrangler® Classic Fit jeans and a white Ariat® Western-styled short sleeve blouse to go with them. In the bottom of the bag was a Western style belt with 'Victoria' on the back in sterling silver letters.

“There was a Williams Western Wear™ store right next door to the motorcycle shop.” Aslaug explained. “If you don't like them . . .” The tigress stopped her train of thought.

“No, I like them.” she replied. “It's just as a real estate sales fur, I don't wear this style of clothing much. As a young kit, growing up in the Central Valley, we all dressed just like this.” she added. She then opened a smaller bag that was in with her clothing, finding a sports bra and some panties inside.

Victoria took the clothing and went to the first floor bathroom to change her clothes. She put them on and from what she could feel and see, the fit was perfect. About the only thing out of place were her boots, straight from the middle ages. The tigress then went out to the main area and turned slowly for the filly and her healer to show off her attire.

“You look very Mid-West.” Andrea commented.

“I think you look very good.” Aslaug chimed in.

“The boots don't go with my outfit, though.” the tigress offered up. “I'll get myself a proper pair once I get back home.” She thought about what she had just said and looked slightly saddened by it.

“Is there a problem?” Andrea asked.

“Yeah, there is.” Victoria offered up. “I'm from the future, so there are now two of me in my reality, at the same instance, I might add. I can't ask Torvald to provide support to me and my other iteration at the same time. It wouldn't be fair to him or my other self to impose on them like that.”

“We'll figure out something to make it work.” Aslaug suggested.

“Well, my other self and I have a plan of sorts, but I'm not sure it will work out.” the tigress stated.

“Maybe I can be of help.” the pink femme offered up.

“There might be something you can do for me.” Victoria put forth. “Here's what we had in mind . . .”

Victoria went on to tell the femme lapin what the two iterations of the tigress had planned in detail.

###

Nancy was literally bouncing off the walls of her bedroom, excited to finally go meet her Great-Grandmother Maryanne. She had been at a construction estimating conference when the femme equine had been forcibly placed in this time frame so she was anxious to get going.

“Sweetheart! Have you seen my small case that I keep my makeup in?” she asked her husband, still trying to get dressed in the meantime.

“Um, I might have left it in my car.” Trenton replied while he tucked his shirt in. “I’ll go look because I don’t remember bringing it upstairs.”

“Hurry up, Trent.” she directed. “We should have been gone an hour ago.”

“So your plane was late.” he commented. “Your Grandma will still be there when we get there.”

The male Belgian/Mammoth Jack cross went downstairs in search of the case in question so the femme equine decided to brush her teeth in the meantime. Nancy was on edge and it was making her hurry more than normal.

Her teeth cleaned, she reached for her water glass to rinse out her mouth. The tumbler slipped from her grasp, shattering in the sink just as she reached for it. She pulled her paw back only to see that it was bleeding from a cut.

Upset that she had done such a stupid thing, she wiped the injury with a tissue. To better see the extent of the damage to her paw, she put it under the faucet to wash away the blood. Once washed and dried, she continued to look for the injury site, only to observe the fact that there was no cut to be found.

“What the . . .?!” the femme equine blurted out, throwing the towel across the room in frustration as she prepared to blow off some rising steam.

###

Outside, in the driveway, Trenton heard his wife screaming at the top of her lungs, cursing the various deities in abject defiance. For some reason, he thought he knew why his mate was so upset. It suddenly became clear to him that today was going to be a very long day.