

Lykos Redemption

Ch. 1: Reunion

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In the countryside surrounding Arcadia existed a legend. They used to say that wolves the size of mountains would attack their herds of sheep. That if one attacked your herd, you shouldn't have expected to survive. These wolves were ruthless and would attack just about anything. It was said that their eyes were burning red with remorse and shame, but their actions were those of wild animals, not thinking, rational creatures.

It was these legends that a twenty-year-old Nyctimus knew to be true. Those wolves of legend, they were his brothers. How was a human related to a pack of Wolves, well, let's just say that Zeus doesn't like surprises. He'd heard that when the wolves were transported away from Lycaon's palace that thirteen of his brothers had had their lives ended right then. Slowly the humans living around the city of Arcadia, were killing off the pack. It was with much sorrow that Nyctimus realized that this was his fault for banishing the wolves. Though, he did it because he cared for the people of Arcadia and he understood that his family was preternaturally cruel.

These recent rumors flowed through Nyctimus' head as he led his sheep across one of the many grazing fields available to shepherds in the selfsame countryside. He kept himself alert preparing one of many concoctions he had created in order to scare off attackers both feral and domestic. He was hyper-vigilant and aware of the openness of the fields. It was part of the reason he chose this area. It'd be extremely difficult for one to sneak up on someone in this place, but wolves are known for their ability to track and sneak up on their victims. He was filled with angst making him jittery and paranoid. Jumping a foot in the air when he stepped on a twig scaring himself nearly to death.

"You are seriously still trying to live this life, Nyctimus?" Hades said with exasperation clearly in his voice.

"I did not scare myself that bad, Lord Hades. Is there another reason you're here?"

"My brother, you know he is the one who—"

"—changed my fifty brothers into wolves. Yes I know, Hades. *Why* do you constantly bring this up?"

"How dare you interrupt me!" the god's temper flared. However Nyctimus could tell where the line was and when to keep pushing and when to let up. This was the latter.

He bowed, "I apologize for my transgression, Lord Hades," he replied hoping to appease the angered deity.

"You are protected by my brother, Lord Zeus. I will not destroy you, yet. You have a role to play according to my nephew, Apollo. When you finally come home to Hades, I will seek you out. I have set up a special area within Hades for the sons of Lycaon." The god chuckled to himself.

"My Lord, if there's nothing more, I must tend to my flock." The once-royal shepherd did just that moving to aid his sheep in finding more food, protecting them from what dangers there may be.

“Uncle stop pestering him. He will be down with you when his time is right.” The disembodied voice of Apollo could be heard, “As for you Nyctimus, I have for you a prophecy:

*Thirteen dead,
Darkened skin bled.
The youngest fled*

*A reunion of brothers
All else this love smothers
Wolves and man in one.*

*Two leaders rise,
To meet in battle
Under dark skies.*

*Wolves who haven't bled,
To ruin or glory are led.”*

It was this prophecy that rang in Nyctimus's head as Hades disappeared with a huff and a plume of black smoke. He chuckled to himself. He'd known that eventually he would meet his brothers again. It was why Zeus had given him the job of shepherd. Though he despised it with a passion. He wanted to help people. Especially those wronged by his family. He thought of his situation as he led his flock to another area on the field.

The sheep appeared not to have noticed anything that had just occurred and kept to their grazing. It was obvious to Nyctimus that the prophecy referred to his family. **Wolves and man in one...** He ruminated over the prophecy with such intent he did not notice the large lupine running toward the flock.

The wolf sniffed around, trying to find any trace of a scent of food. All he could find was week old scent trails in the forest that he knew to some extent wouldn't be worth following. He continued in his search through the fields of the Arcadian Peninsula and was just about to give up, when he smelled sheep...and a man. It wasn't a smell that registered to the wolf, but something inside him stirred awake.

He bounded away following the scent trail that he knew would lead him to some good food. His tail wagging profusely at his discovery. Only to see the sheep in the distance, getting closer. He slowed his pace, stilled his tail, and crouched. Waiting to see where these sheep were going, he stalked the prey for what seemed an insurmountable amount of time.

He finally made his move towards the weakest sheep he saw. A ewe with a significant limp. He jumped toward it with all the speed he could muster hoping to catch the human off guard.

Nyctimus threw the potion even before the wolf had lunged. As soon as the vile broke, there was a large gust of wind thrusting the wolf into the air and onto its flank. Nyctimus walked up to it. He saw the beast and bore his staff. His hands were shaking with the rush of adrenaline and the emotional turmoil storming through his mind. He'd hoped he wouldn't run into one of them. He'd hoped that he would have an uneventful day with his sheep. He'd hoped to never be reminded of his past.

Yet, here it was. A wolf as large as a bear and it looked quite mangy. It was scrawny and had very little fur, what fur there was, was losing its color to age. Nyctimus could only imagine one of his brothers who'd been old enough to be so greyed out. "Mel..."

It was obvious to Nyctimus that this was what the prophecy had meant. His eldest brother had returned. Yes he was growling at him, giving him a murderous glare, but here was his brother. "Melaeneus it is your brother, Nyctimus. Remember?" he questioned the large beast who eyed his staff.

The wolf looked at the human, he could smell the fear. He'd smelled it on every shepherd he'd attacked. However, unlike the other shepherds, this one wasn't running. No it was ridiculously trying to converse with him.

The wolf growled, about to get up, but something stopped him. He sniffed around again. There wasn't anything paralytic in that potion, it was just a concussive mixture. It was then that he heard something, like a disembodied human voice. It said **No. You will not harm my brother!**

The beast sniffed again, he saw no other person. It wasn't godly, that much the wolf was able to gather. The wolf was confused.

I am you, dumbass! Melaeneus is we. That is our name.

The wolf whined, he did not fully understand what was going on. It looked at Nyctimus. Then a memory flashed in front of its eyes.

He was human sitting at a table with his father. Across the table from him was Demeas. Across the table from his father was Zeus. They were waiting on the food. He heard Zeus ask about Nyctimus and so he looked at the last of the five tables. Nyctimus was gone.

He'd heard that his father was planning on doing something ghastly but this? Killing his younger brother was too much. However, if he voiced as much, he would have died along side of Nyctimus. So he glanced at Demeas hoping for a similar look of sorrow. There was none. Only a devilish smile. He felt like an idiot, but he smiled alongside of his other forty-nine brothers.

Zeus reacted as Mel had feared. He grew angry. Mel's father was in Zeus' hands before Mel could beg forgiveness for his father's idiocy and cruelty. He watched in shock and horror as Zeus' Master Bolt pierced his father's heart. He watched as Hades came and went with his father. He watched as his brother's corpse was reassembled by Zeus in morbid amazement. Finally he watched idly as his brothers

were turned into horridly nightmarish, wolf-like creatures. He cried in utter shame, before he himself was turned into a wolf.

It was as if a look of recognition had crossed the lupine features. The next growl was not a warning but a friendly sound. "Thank Olympus!" Nyctimus cried in relief. "Zeus knows how long I have waited to see you, Mel. I knew you were not ever as cruel as our brothers. That does not mean you haven't wronged the people of Arcadia. You just did so by going along with the others as they tortured, raped, and took what they wanted of the people of the city. Your inaction, your willingness to follow your brother's cruelty is why Zeus changed you. You did the things they did, even though you hated doing them. You let them get away with things for which they should have been punished by the laws of the land. You did nothing to stop Father when he took my life. You may have actually had morals, unlike our gods-forsaken brothers. However, you are still at fault for the wrongs of our family."

A whine escaped the jaws of the beast. Nyctimus scratched the fur between the ears of the wolf with love. He still only saw his eldest brother. The brother with whom he got along so well. He ruffled the fur. It was nice to not fear one of his brothers. Which was why he and Melaeneus were so close growing up. It was now that Nyctimus understood another line of the prophecy. **All else this love will smother...** He knew the love to which Apollo was referring. And it was his goal to make sure that each and every one of his brothers felt that love.

"Do not you worry, Mel. We have a chance now to redeem our family. To redeem the children of Lycaon. The...the lycans? Yes I like the sound of that: the lycans."

The wolf murred contentedly, though he probably did not understand what was being said. Nyctimus looked at what had once been his brother. He looked at him and knew that this was his path. A shepherd? That's what he'd be. To sheep? No to his family. To the wolves that were once his brothers. He'd protect them from those who wished them harm.

He then intoned after invoking the name of Hecate, the god of Magic:

"And with solemn Heart
I swear to protect and keep
My family no longer apart
In human form again shall weep.

"Love of a brother, love of family
To those in wolf's clothing shall I give,
With honor and truth I take this duty
And I will die that they may live."

He then pricked Mel's paw pad and drew an inane symbol on his forehead. It was a filled in circle with a wavy line underneath it. He told Mel, "This symbol shall represent the redeemer. A new moon over the restless ocean. Showing that any may redeem themselves of their past transgressions. That they may rise above a tumultuous past."

The wolf looked at the human and made a choking sound that may have been a laugh. Then without preamble, the wolf got up and nuzzled Nyctimus's face with the tip of his snout. As he did the wolf seemed to shrink and became less hairy than before. It was facing the transgressions of his past and being accused of them that had slowly started to eat away at the guilt and the sorrow that Melaeneus was feeling. To come to the realization that he had done wrong that he was at fault, it made him realize that he could heal. The shrinking continued and slowly, but surely the Melaeneus that Nyctimus remembered slowly returned before his eyes, mostly. The guilt he held on to seemed to hold on to him. His fingers were tipped with claws, his teeth still sharp and deadly and patches of what meagre fur he had clung to his chest and his cheeks. Still, it was a face that Nyctimus had not seen in years.

"Brother, I am so relieved... to see you again." Melaneus began, though his voice was rough from lack of use. "It has been forever. I cannot believe that this is happening. That I have become... human again." Melaeneus began. Nyctimus was surprised, but relieved at the same time.

"This is only the first step to healing these wounds. I will consult with Zeus to fully understand what must happen, but I believe that you are now on the correct path, brother." Nyctimus said.

Mel surprised him by giving him a hug. In an instant Nyctimus felt the body shudder and he heard Mel start to cry. "I have wronged so many people, Nyctimus. How can I ever fully be healed? Fully redeemed? I will never be human, not fully anymore. I have committed too many wrongs. I will never be able to regain my humanity. Not after what I have done...Nyctimus, I am sorry! I wish I knew what Father was planning. I wish I had stopped him. I wish I was strong in my beliefs as you were. I did nothing, Nyctimus. I might as well have held the dagger myself."

"It is alright, Mel. I have forgiven you long ago. You are my brother, I will always love you." Nyctimus reassured.

The wolf looked around. He did not fully understand what had happened but somehow he'd slowly lost control over his body and now he was in this dark place. He sniffed around trying to figure out where he was. All he smelled was himself. Nothing else.

Then he heard it, "*I have wronged so many people, Nyctimus. How can I ever fully be healed?...*"

It was the voice that had stopped him from killing that shepherd. It wasn't inside his head anymore. In fact it reverberated throughout the space which he occupied. It was almost as if he was inside him. It was then that he heard a muffled response from what sounded like the selfsame shepherd, "*It is alright, Mel. I have forgiven you long ago. You are my brother, I will always love you.*"

It was a salve to a wound the wolf did not even know he had. The fear and anger that was always boiling beneath the surface of the wolf's psyche cooled just a little. And then He heard Mel's voice again, this time in front of him, "So this is the monstrosity I became."

The wolf looked at the human. It said merely with his eyes, **I'm only a manifestation of the monster you already were, you fucking coward.**

"Is this what this is about? My cowardice? Well, my lupine friend, I am afraid you have gotten the wrong impression of me. That was why I was turned into a wolf, sure. I have learned something, though: It is never too late to change."

You will never change. It will always be the same with you, you will not ever stand up for what is right and it is only now with the threat of my monstrosity that you are even considering changing.

"I'm not going to fight with you, wolf. I'm going to show you. I hope that will tame you to some extent. I know that we are a part of the same whole, beast and I'd rather show you love and compassion than fear and hatred."

Start by showing the people of Arcadia love and compassion. Then I will listen to you. the wolf said before stalking away into the darkness.

Nyctimus watched his brother meditate and ate in the meantime. It was interesting that his eldest brother was the first with which he'd come in contact. It almost seemed like fate. **The Fates have interesting ideas for this family.** Nyctimus mused to himself.

It was during these ponderings that Melaeneus woke from his meditation. He looked at his brother with a half-hearted smile. "What is it, Mel?"

"My wolf says if I truly want to show him love and compassion my first order of business is to do so with the people of Arcadia." He scratched the back of his neck. "Were we not banished from there by Zeus?"

"Yes, yes we were. That is something I will commune with Zeus about."

"Zeus, King of Olympus, Master of the Skies, I beg of you to come and speak with me. My brother and I are about to start on a Journey, and we need your blessing." Nyctimus shouted at the sky. It was dangerous invoking the name of a god of Olympus but he needed his advice, permission, and his support, if he were going to accomplish the task which was set before them.

"Yes, Nyctimus. What may I do for you?"

Nyctimus bowed, He would not meet the eyes of the god, "Lord Zeus, My brother seeks forgiveness. He seeks it from those families he has wronged. He wishes to go into Arcadia to do so. I know you have forbidden our entrance to the city, but he truly seems repentant."

"I grant you entrance into the city, but approach the palace with intent, I will send the both of you to Hades so quickly you will not know what hit you. Be forewarned: The palace is off limits, sons of Lycaon." Zeus replied earnestly. Despite his sternness, He looked like he was happy. He looked toward

Mel and smiled at him, "I am glad to see you've regained human form, Melaeneus. I knew you were never earnestly as immoral as your brothers. I just knew you did not have the backbone to stand up to them. I sincerely hope that changes."

Zeus disappeared in a flash of light, which forced the two mortals to look away for fear of burning into ash. Nyctimus smiled at Melaeneus and he smiled back, "Let's rest. We'll head out tomorrow morning to reach the city by midday."

"Let's. I love you, little brother."

"I love you, too, Melaeneus. Good night."

"Good night."