

'Lost'
By Kellan Meigh

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Chapter 1

“This Isn't Kansas”

As the sun was setting on the Pacific Ocean, Torvald reached out and hugged his tigress. “It was nice of Valerie and Barbara to keep an eye on Conrad while we are on our trip,” he commented as the sun finally touched the horizon. The two lovers were having a second honeymoon just to go blow off some steam with each other.

Since Victoria had become immortal, her warrior instincts had been extremely heightened. Torvald could no longer best her at the longstaff, finding his mate was more than an equal to him. She had even held off the Shieldmaiden for about 90 minutes before the match was called a draw. Because of this new heightened instinct, she needed to do something to relax and stop her from stalking her clients that were looking at the houses she was trying to sell.

Victoria sipped her soda as they sat on the sand at Pescadero beach, enjoying the last rays of sunlight. “How much farther up the coast to Half Moon Bay is it?” she asked. They had made reservations for the weekend at a nice bed and breakfast that had an ocean view.

“It's a little over 14 miles according to the last sign I saw,” her equine mate replied. He looked at his watch and then took it off and put it in the pocket of his favorite black leather vest. “Let's forget about time for this weekend, OK?” he asked as he gave his loving tigress a peck on the cheek.

“Keep that up and we won't get there at all tonight,” she purred, giving him a long, wet kiss in return. She then reached up and put her arms around him and began to kiss his neck in a provocative way.

“We better go now, it's almost sunset,” the berserker pointed out to her, hoping to stave off a tigress love pounce on him. The state regulations said that the beach was only open from 8:00 am until sunset and he didn't want to start their honeymoon with a citation for being on the beach too late.

“Oh, OK ... if you insist,” she said in a soft purr, giving him that 'you're in trouble now' look through half lidded eyes. “You're mine when we get to our room,” she said in a sultry voice as she raked her claws gently down his bare chest. She smiled when she noticed that he had shuddered from the sensations this caused.

“Just wait until we get to our room and I'm yours,” he retorted to her as he got up and helped her up off the sand. She still managed to give him another kiss before he knew what was happening. 'This is going to be a wild night' he thought to himself as she finished her soda off and put the empty in the nearby trashcan.

Torvald picked up their cooler and they climbed the slight embankment to the parking lot. The huge equine stopped for a moment to wipe off the sand on his lower legs and hooves so he wouldn't track it into his car.

“I hope that B&B is as nice as it looked on-line,” the tigress commented as they stowed their gear in the '49 Ford's trunk. They had decided to use his car because she wanted to get her Dodge minivan serviced while they were gone.

“For the price we're paying, it better be!” the huge equine replied. They got into the car and Torvald made a left out of the parking lot, headed north on Highway 1 towards their destination.

###

As they drove along, Victoria was remembering the last time she had been this way. She had just finished the 8th grade and her family was on an outing to see some of their relatives. That had been a fun summer that she had hated to see end. The tigress was looking out at the trees and the ocean beyond, mesmerized by the beauty of nature. She finally realized that she had been daydreaming as her husband turned towards the ocean and their destination.

“Well, I think that's it,” he commented as he pulled into a parking space and shut the engine off. “Hmm, It's not as big as it looked on the web,” he stated, looking the place over. It was an imposing Victorian style 2 story building that really looked the part. It had all the various gingerbread trims and the 7 color treatment.

“Oh, let's go check it out, party pooper,” Victoria stated, giving him a punch in the shoulder. “This was your idea, anyway,” she reminded him. He got out, walked around the car and opened the passenger door for her like a gentlefur, closing it after her. They walked up the few steps to the front door and went inside.

Once they were inside, the couple knew they were going to enjoy the weekend. The interior was decorated in sumptuous period furnishings. From the furniture to the pictures on the walls, somebody had taken extreme care to please the guest's eyes.

They walked up to the counter only to be greeted by one of the owners. The Border Collie behind the counter introduced himself as Don Hagelheimer as he got the paperwork together for them. After a few minutes spent signing in, Don showed the couple to their room.

Their room was upstairs on the ocean side of the building. Torvald was checking out the oak staircase as they went up to their suite. “This is some nice woodwork,” he

commented as he ran his hand along the banister. It felt like it was glass smooth to the berserker's paw.

“Thanks for the compliment,” the owner replied to the huge equine. “My brother and I did most of the restoration ourselves.” As he opened their door he told Torvald and Victoria, “There's a photo album downstairs that shows all the ugliness we dealt with in the beginning. We had to finance it ourselves because the banks wouldn't touch it.”

“This is nice,” Victoria purred as she stepped into their room. It was large by B&B standards with a huge Jacuzzi tub in a nook under the bay window. “I think you will fit in here,” she said to her mate as she sized the tub up. The bed was a California Super King, being 6” longer than a regular California King. There were two cozy looking recliners by a reading lamp and a large vanity for her.

“Look at this!” Torvald said as he discovered a full body fur dryer in the bathroom. “I've never used one of these.” He was looking it over carefully with some thoughts of putting one in their home.

“Uh ... enjoy your stay,” the owner said as he pulled the door shut. Right before he closed it, he reminded them, “The times for breakfast are on the back of the door.” He was sure that they hadn't heard him as he observed the tigress wrapping her arms around the stallion.

###

“Mmmm,” the tigress purred as her mate washed her back for her. She was sitting between his legs with her back facing him. “Just a little more to the right ... Mmmm, right there ...,” she purred as he found that spot that needed extra attention. She was washing his legs and hooves for him as they enjoyed the oversized Jacuzzi to its fullest. “I told you we would fit in here just fine,” she commented as he scrubbed her shoulders.

“Yeah, we should get one of these for ourselves,” the stallion replied as he got out the sprayer to rinse off her fur. “We just need to take over Conrad's room to make it our master bath,” he joked as his loving tigress rinsed the shampoo out of his mane.

Torvald turned the bubbles up to the highest position and slid down into the tub further, putting his arms around his mate. He could hear her purring with content as the bubbles worked their tensions away.

“I'm glad we did this,” she purred as she put her arms over his. “We *really* need one of these at home,” she added as they enjoyed the moment. The tigress reached over and picked up a chocolate covered strawberry and put it in her mate's mouth. She could see him smiling as he enjoyed the flavors of this little treat.

“You are spoiling me,” Torvald stated as he sipped some sparkling apple juice. “I would have to have this every time we used a tub like this,” he added, giving her a kiss on the cheek. He then gave her a strawberry, which she took gently from his fingers, letting her fangs gently brush against his paw.

“Now to use that fur dryer,” she said as she begrudgingly got out of the Jacuzzi and wrung the water out of her tail. She walked over to it and turned the dryer on, adjusting the temperature according to the fur chart provided. After a few minutes, she stepped out, looking radiant albeit just a little bit fluffy. “I knew that would happen,” she said, smiling at her mate. “I’ll have to use some conditioner to tame this unruly fur.”

“My turn to dry off,” the berserker stated and he adjusted the temperature setting for his coat. Within a few minutes, he looked like a rock star, his mane and tail dry but with a definite wild, unkempt look to it.

“Oohhh, the 'Hollywood' look ... I like that!” she said as she put her arms around his waist. “Time to turn the lights out,” she purred as she walked him over to the bed, hitting the light switch on the way. “Don't be setting any alarms, either,” she scolded him as she slipped under the covers. “I’ll wake up when the room gets light in the morning.”

“OK, no alarms as you wish,” the berserker replied to her request with a smile. “Just don't go stealing the covers tonight.”

###

It was morning out but something seemed amiss to the berserker. He was cold and the bed was as hard as the ground. He could feel Victoria snuggled up against his back, snoring away. He reached back to feel that she undoubtedly had all of the covers. That still didn't explain why the bed was so hard. He opened his eyes to see the reason for the things he was experiencing. They were on the side of a wooded mountain from what he could observe.

“Victoria, if you're awake don't open your eyes right now.” he said as he sat up and looked around at their surroundings. They were still lying on the bottom sheet but the bed was gone. His mate had the covers wrapped up around her to stay warm as the air temperature was probably no more than 45° currently. “This is really weird.” he said to himself as he stood up and took stock of where they were.

They were on a mountainside in what was obviously fall by the colors in the valley below. The forest was a pine and redwood mix but the trees didn't seem completely familiar to him. The biggest problem right now was the fact that he didn't have any

clothes on. "Loke!" he yelled, looking around for that sorry weasel. "If this is your idea of a funny trick, you're wrong!" he bellowed, still scanning for the Trickster.

As he scanned the surroundings, this was starting to look worse by the minute. The sky was a beautiful mix of blues, reds and oranges from the morning sunlight. What was missing was the contrails from jet aircraft. The air also seemed too clean to him as he breathed in a huge lungful. "We are not on our home world." he said out loud as he looked around some more.

"What's that, Sweetheart?" Victoria said sleepily as she sat up. It only took a moment more before she screamed as she opened her eyes. "Where in the hell are we!?" she shouted as she leaped to her feet and took up a fighting stance. Her tail was poofed out like a khat would if they were frightened and her eyes were wide with confusion and fear. "Torvald, is this one of Loke's tricks?" she asked as she observed where they were.

"It is *not* one of his tricks because I don't see him standing nearby, laughing at us." the huge equine replied. He looked at her and stated the obvious. "You need to cover up." he said, pointing at her naked body.

"Err ... yeah." was her short reply as she took the quilt and put it around her shoulders for warmth. The tigress stood there for a moment before looking at her husband. "Where do you think we are?" she asked, still looking quite confused. "If this isn't home, where is it?" It was clear that she wanted answers and she really wanted them sooner rather than later.

"I really don't know what to tell you," the stallion said as he was still looking around at their surroundings. "I really ... don't know."

###

"They seem to *be* confused," the larger entity commented as he viewed the goings on remotely. "I didn't expect that at all."

"**I still say you cannot turn them to your will.**" the smaller, older entity replied. He rubbed his 'chin' as he took in the sight. "**Surt could not turn them so what makes you think you can?**" he asked the younger entity.

"I have recruited since *before* time," the larger entity replied to that. "This pair would make a fine addition to my forces."

"**I'll remind you that Surt couldn't turn them.**" the older entity stated again.

"Suit yourself," he said as he watched the events unfold. "I will have them and the Shieldmaiden before this is over."

###

"Well, what are we going to do now?" the tigress asked her husband. The stallion was sitting on a fallen tree, pondering what move to take next.

Torvald was thinking that this wasn't of Loke's doing and it wasn't a mission that they were on. He thought back over some previous missions to see if something would leap out at him as being out of the ordinary. As far as he could remember, there was nothing to indicate who or what would have done this to them. The only thing that kept coming to him was that nobody knew just what powers had pulled them from Surt's realm.

As he sat there, he noticed something in the distance. "Victoria, what is that over there?" he asked, indicating which way to look. "Your eyes are sharper than mine. What is that?"

The tigress looked over to see what he was looking at. "It's a plume of smoke coming up that's just started in the last 10 minutes or so." She squinted to sharpen her vision a little to see a reflection off of something in the valley. "There's something or someone down there."

"OK, I think we had better go that way, then." he stated as he got up and picked up his pillow and the bottom sheet. He looked down at himself and made a realization. "I will probably need some clothes before long." he said as he looked at the sheet. He folded it up and made himself a makeshift toga to cover up with. "Now that's taken care of, let's go." he suggested, leading the way down the mountain side.

Chapter 2

“Discoveries and Memories”

The pair had been moving for some time over what was proving to be rough terrain. Several times they had to backtrack because the slope was too rugged for the equine to traverse. As they came into a clearing, the tigress stopped for a moment.

“Torvald, what is that over there?” she asked, starting to walk in that direction. As she drew nearer, it was obvious that somebody had hung three pouches on a low tree branch. Leaning against the trunk of the tree was her longstaff, broadsword and spear along with Torvald's Dane axe, a dagger and his Franciscas in their holster.

“What's going on here?” she queried as she approached the tree. Her fur was starting to crawl as she got close enough to positively identify their belongings by the markings on them. This whole thing was beginning to creep her out to no end. She reached out and touched her longstaff to make sure it was real and not just some mirage. She was rewarded by the smooth, familiar feel of the fire tempered ash shaft under her fingers. “This is really strange.” she said as she then felt the surface of her spear.

“I don't care right now,” the berserker stated as he picked up his axe. “We can hunt!” he said excitedly. “I don't know about you but I need food inside me, even if it is meat.” Normally, the equine preferred fruits, vegetables and grains but some meat from time to time was actually good for him. There were certain essential compounds in meat that he could not get otherwise. He picked up his holster for his throwing axes and made another discovery. “Look! My Buck knife!” he said, taking his knife out of the small holster it resided in and opening it up.

“No, look here!” Victoria said, holding the pouches out. “It looks like some clothes for us.” She pulled out some neutral colored heavy cloth tunics of undetermined origin to see that one would fit her mate and the other would fit her. There were some tan colored hide leggings and some belts in the other pouches. They both dressed and put the pouches over their shoulders before they continued carefully down the mountain side.

As they continued along their way, the equine spotted something out of the corner of his eye. He detoured out of his way to stop and pick up what Victoria thought was just a rock. The equine rubbed the dirt off of it and struck it with a Francisca. To his satisfaction, a spark flew off of it. “Just what I thought it was, a piece of flint!” he commented as he put it in the pouch he carried.

After a while, the pair came across a strange animal they had never seen before. It was about the size of a very big khat but it was striped like a skunk. Because it walked on all fours and didn't try to communicate with them, they suspected that it wasn't sentient.

Before Torvald could prepare himself, a spear went flying over his shoulder and pinned the creature to the ground.

“Dinner is caught!” Victoria exclaimed as she ran over to dispatch the animal. She looked up at her husband, who had joined her at the kill site. “I caught it, you clean it?” she suggested, pulling her spear from the game.

Torvald nodded as he got down to the job at paw. He looked it over and made an observation. “This is a mustelid because it has scent glands.” He carefully cut the hide from the body, being careful not to cut into it too deeply. He then removed the guts, being careful not to cut open the glands.

“I’ll start a fire.” he said as he rounded up the needed items. He took some dry grass and scraped it with his dagger to make some tinder. Using the flint and his dagger to make sparks, the tinder lit right off. By using twigs and then small branches, he finally had a fire big enough to cook over. Victoria had put the carcass on a stick and began roasting it.

“The smells remind me of my first home.” he commented as he watched her roast the animal over an open fire. The aroma was getting richer as the fat was being rendered out and dripped into the fire.

“I’m sorry I don’t have some seasonings.” she said as the meat cooked. After turning it several times to ensure it was roasted evenly, she made her announcement. “I think it’s ready.” she stated as she tried a small piece. The look on her face said it all; this was delicious. The two of them ate the entire thing, even breaking the bigger bones for the marrow.

“Let’s sit here while our food settles.” the equine suggested, leaning back against a small log. He didn’t have to ask twice as his mate joined him, leaning over against his chest.

###

“Someone has interfered with my plans!” the larger entity stated, looking at the pair resting against a log. “They would not have done well without weapons and clothes.”

“**You will not turn them. I know this.**” the smaller, older entity replied. “**Do not waste your time. Let them return to their realm.**” the entity suggested, moving closer to see the younger entity’s reaction.

“I can turn them.” the younger one stated as he plotted his next move. “I have the knowledge and desire to do it.”

“I was ancient long before you were conceived by hate,” the older one said. **“I have knowledge beyond your imagination. You will only fail.”**

“We will see.” the younger entity said as he went back to his planning.

###

Judging by the angle of the sun, it was apparent to the couple that they would not make it off the mountainside by the time darkness fell. As they walked, the two of them kept an eye out for a possible place to hole up in for the night. They had checked out a few overhangs and caves only to find them not suitable for their needs. They had observed other 'skunks' in the area and spotted a few birds flying in the air. There seemed to be a lack of big game to hunt, however.

“There must be somebody living down there.” the berserker commented. “There is a great lack of game up here. That only would be the result of somebody hunting on the mountain.”

His mate was listening to the winds as they walked across another clearing. “I hear something,” she whispered, turning towards her mate. “Do you hear that?” she said softly, pointing in one direction. Her hearing was much sharper than his so he just shook his head 'no'. “One fur, I think.” she whispered, indicating towards an outcropping of bushes. Torvald readied himself with his Dane axe as the source for the noise stepped into the clearing. It was a scruffy-looking bipedal weasel.

“Torvald and Victoria! My two favorite immortals!” Loke stated as he brushed some of the dirt off of his clothing. “I don't want to seem dense but where exactly *are* we?” He looked up to see that the pair was stunned by his statement.

“You mean to tell me that you don't know where we are?” the tigress asked as she kneeled down on one knee.

“I was hoping you could tell me.” the weasel replied. He was starting to look just a little worried to the couple. “I thought you had brought me here as a joke.” he stated as he sat down beside the tigress. He was looking down at the ground and shaking his head as he said, “I fear then we are lost in an unknown realm, my dear friends.”

“I have heard that there were realms that existed outside the normal ones.” the stallion said as he sat down on the ground. “If that is so, why were we brought here?” He was thinking about all of the possibilities that could exist while he rested. As they sat there, Loke began to shimmer just a bit.

“Somebody is trying to pull me back from another realm.” he stated, getting up and taking a few steps away from them. “I will tell Odin where you are, if I can.” the Trickster shouted just as he slowly vanished from sight. The couple sat there for a moment more before they quietly got up and continued their quest for a place to hole up.

###

The fur was sitting on the porch of his crude cabin, looking out over the mountainside to his left. Earlier in the day, he thought that a fire had gotten started on the mountain but it went out about an hour later. The fur was always afraid of fire near him, having lost his first cabin to a flash fire. “I wonder,” he thought, “Could there be life on the mountain?”

He had been here for too long in his estimation. He had managed to survive 22 seasons in the valley, starting with not much more than his bare hands. This was the second cabin that he had built and he thought it was amazing, considering what tools he had to work with. His military survival training had paid off for him, giving him some essential skill sets to use in such times.

He thought that if there was life on the mountain, he hoped that they were friendly. More importantly, maybe, just maybe, they knew the way home. That was all he had wanted to do for some years now. Just go home. He had a wife and a family waiting for him, he hoped. Maybe he could go home now.

The fur got up and went inside to stoke the fire again. It was that time of year and he knew that it would be a cold one tonight.

###

The immortal couple had descended down the mountain some more when they happened across a lean-to that some sentient being had built. The huge equine had stopped on his tracks when he saw this, hoping it wasn't just an illusion.

“Shelter.” was all he could say as he checked out the condition of the lean-to. It had been made with small logs, hand chopped by the marks on them. A small fire pit had been made of stone in front of it so the heat would be trapped by the shelter.

He quickly gathered up some firewood before the light was gone. He knew that as soon as it was dark, hunting for firewood would be next to impossible. He used a Francisca to cut a few pieces down to size and then split a larger log to use as a back log for his fire. Within a few minutes, he had a warm fire burning.

The tigress had made good use of her time by clearing out the debris from the area near the fire pit. Victoria spread out the sheet and then shook out the covers before she spread them out too. The equine let his mate lie in front of him, nearer the fire as they prepared to get some much needed sleep for the night. He knew that tomorrow could bring good or bad so he just needed to settle his mind for now. The two of them finally drifted off to sleep.

###

“You are already losing the game.” the older entity stated as he watched the fire burning. Its hypnotic effect was even getting to him, causing him to feel 'sleepy'.

“I will turn them.” the younger entity replied. *“I will take away their...”* He was cut off by a third entity speaking out.

“You know the rules,” the new entity stated. **“Once the game has started, you cannot take anything from the playing field. You may only add things.”**

“Yes, I remember the rules.” the younger entity stated irritably. *“I have been playing this game since before furkind.”*

“I wager you will not turn them.” the older entity proposed. **“I give you a few days at the most to succeed or fail.”**

“I can turn them!” he retorted, sounding a little upset by that last statement. *“I will do it, you just watch me.”*

“Very well, waste your time.” the older entity said. **“I won't say I told you so.”**

###

The fur was sitting in front of the fireplace, warming his body by the fire he had built. It was cold outside but his fire was giving the cabin warmth to keep him comfortable. He thought about the possibility of sentient beings up on the mountain. He hoped that they could speak his language. If not, how would he communicate with them? He was an old ex-military fur so maybe he could figure out some way of talking to them. He needed to find out if they knew the way home.

He was missing his family very badly this evening because of the circumstances. The prospects of possibly going home were almost too much for him. As he sat there in front of his fire, he hoped they would come to his cabin by tomorrow because he really wanted just to be around other furs right now. 22 years was a long time not to see another sentient soul. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

###

Torvald had gotten up to add some wood to the fire when he noticed a glow off in the valley below. It had to mean that somebody lived here. He hoped that they were friendly because he hated the thought that they would have to kill the first sentient fur that they would see. He said a prayer to his gods for a good day tomorrow and lay back down by his tigress to drift back to sleep.

Chapter 3

“Nasty Surprise”

It was a nice afternoon in Asgaard and Loke was relating his experience to Odin. “I was trying to hide Thor's hammer from him when I was pulled from here to a realm that I was not aware of.” the weasel looked like he was still uneasy about even being there. “I was there for a long time, maybe hours before I happened across Torvald and Victoria.”

“And what were they doing there?” the one-eyed wolf asked as he crossed his arms. “Were they having a vacation that you were barging in on?” Odin was giving the weasel a very hard stare as he waited for an answer. Something like this wasn't beyond the Trickster to try.

“I *wasn't* barging in. You know that Torvald sometimes 'summons' me when he says my name!” the weasel stated in his defense. He sipped some wine before he continued. “They had no idea where they were or how they got there. I saw the confusion in their eyes.” Loke swallowed hard before he said the next part. “It ... it scared me...”

“We must try to find them, in any case.” Odin commented. “I will let Christopher know what's happening.” He looked at the Trickster with a hard stare as he said “Thank you for telling us but please do me a favor and leave Thor's hammer alone.” The weasel nodded his head as he shimmered and left.

###

Torvald roused from his sleep when the sun began to strike him in the face. Sitting up, he realized that he had all of the sheets, blankets and quilt to himself. He quickly scanned around to see that his tigress was nowhere to be seen. He got up, quickly dressed and put his weapons on. As he picked up his Dane axe, the tigress walked into the clearing carrying two small animals by their hind legs.

“Breakfast.” she said as she dropped them at his hooves. “Same deal as before?” Before he could answer, she opened her pouch and pulled out some rootstocks that looked like carrots. “I saw the animals digging these up so I brought them for you.” she said, giving him a kiss.

“Thank you.” he said as he began to prepare their morning meal. As he cleaned the catch, Victoria found a pair of small branches to use as roasting sticks. She stirred the fire and added some wood while her mate finished with his part. While Victoria cooked the game, Torvald tried one of the roots to find that it was sort of a cross between a carrot and a radish. He smiled as he nodded his approval of the unique taste. Within a few minutes, the game was roasting on the fire for their consumption.

###

The fur had awakened from his slumber to see that he had slept in his chair once again. He had done that a lot since he had been brought here. The fire in the fireplace was just barely burning now, mostly embers from the big back log that he had put in the hearth. He stirred the coals and added two pieces of wood to get it going again. He went over to his water bucket and got a drink of water from it to quench his morning thirst.

The thought that he might have visitors was getting him excited. It had crossed his mind that they might possibly be hostile. This was OK with him too. If he was killed by the visitors, he wouldn't be stuck here anymore. It was a morbid thought but he couldn't bring himself to commit suicide. That was completely against his religion and his personal beliefs. It would be OK if he were to die in combat, though. The loneliness of being here without others around him was hard on him.

He poured some water into a wooden basin he had made and began to wash himself as best as possible. He used a piece of soft, absorbent hide to dry off with and he ran his fingers through his mane to straighten it out. One should try to look their best to greet visitors. Especially if they could get him home. He put some water on to make some pine needle tea while he waited for his possible visitors.

###

*"I may add *anything* to the playing field?"* the younger entity asked, giving the new entity his full attention.

"Yes, you may add but you cannot take away from the field." the new entity stated in a formal tone.

"Thank you." the younger entity said cheerily and added 'something' to the playing field. *"You will become my warriors yet!"*

###

Torvald was almost falling asleep again, feeling very full from his breakfast. His mate was leaning against him, purring as she let her food settle some. The two game animals proved to be even more delicious than the mustelid had been. The tigress was just starting to nod off when she sat up and listened carefully.

"Torvald, Sweetheart. I hear something." she whispered, picking up her staff. He instinctively reached for his Dane axe as five very large wild kalis burst into the clearing. Each one was very big, weighing over 100 pounds apiece. They had a look of

wildness that neither warrior had ever seen before. They were a solid gray color with no shade variations that they could see. Their eyes were a silver color that had an unearthly glow to them.

The largest kali faced off and charged the pair. Torvald stood quickly and spun with his axe, slicing the top of its skull off. Two more of the wild animals charged them, forcing the tigress to strike one of them in the head, knocking it out. As that one fell at her feet, she observed the other one fall with a Francisca embedded in its skull. The remaining pair began to circle them, trying to find an opening. Victoria picked up her spear and readied herself for whatever the kalis might try. One charged them, trying to jump at the stallion. Torvald fended that one off only to have the kali latch onto his forearm.

Torvald took his dagger and dispatched the kali quickly. As it fell from his arm, he could see that the kali had bitten him very badly, breaking the skin multiple times. The remaining kali slowly circled and charged them only to be skewered by the tigress' spear. She was trying to pull her spear from the kali when she heard her stallion fall down.

She dropped her spear to rush to her fallen mate who was lying on his side, breathing hard. His eyes were rolling up in his head and he was frothing at the mouth. He was trying to say something so she got down close to him.

"P...p...poison...v..ven..nom..." he stuttered out as the venom coursed its way through his body. She could feel his body becoming limp as he lost consciousness and slumped against her. The tigress knew that he would most likely survive this but it would be a matter of time before he would come around. All she could do is wait and pray.

###

"That will change things." the younger entity stated, proud of his addition to the game of turning the pair. *"She will turn to my will now."*

"You have made a mistake," the older one pointed out. **"He is immortal. The wild kali bite will only slow them down."**

"You are wrong" the younger one retorted, rubbing his 'paws' together. *"She has been stabbed in the heart by this. She will turn."*

"I have never been wrong in matters such as these," the older one stated nonchalantly. **"You will see that you wasted your time."**

"Don't you have an empire to destroy somewhere?" the younger one said irritably, turning back to watch the pair.

###

Victoria had managed to drag the fallen berserker over to the lean-to and made him as comfortable as possible. She had once witnessed him survive over twenty rattlesnake bites at once. It had taken several hours but he had recovered with no ill effects. This wild kali bite was something different. All she could do would be to wait for him to regain consciousness. She kept the fire going, making short trips to gather more firewood. What they really needed right now was water.

She remembered a pool of water that they had passed just up the mountain. Hoping that he would be safe, she took the thickest of the hide pouches and set out to retrieve some water.

It was a quick trip up to the pool and as she walked into the clearing, several large deer stepped into the shadows. These were most likely not sentient as they walked on all fours. This made her feel better about the water as they had been drinking of it. She took the pouch and filled it with water to see that it was more or less watertight. She made sure that it was as full as possible and headed back.

Upon her return, she wet her paw and wiped her mate's forehead with it. She could tell that he was running a fever but he had done that with the snake bites. The tigress looked over the bite wounds to see that they were beginning to heal. Now this was a good sign. She sat there and stroked his mane, tears falling from her eyes.

###

Victoria roused to see that it was dark now and the fire was in need of stoking. It was just down to embers and she wasn't sure she could start a fire by herself. She got up and stretched out her body to get the kinks out of it. The tigress put a few pieces of wood on the fire, stirring it to get the wood to catch. Within a few minutes, she had the fire going nicely again. She stepped over to peer down into the valley to see a slight glow in the direction they had been going. There had to be some fur living there.

The tigress sat down and ate a little of another small animal she had caught and cleaned herself. It was late in the evening and the huge stallion hadn't stirred yet. She prayed to her god for his intervention in their plight and lay back down beside the unconscious equine.

Later that evening, the tigress was roused once again by her instincts. Her mate was shivering from the fever, his forehead very hot to the touch. She tried to cool him down by using the water but it seemed to have no effect. She hugged his limp body to hers as she cried tears of anguish over her fallen mate.

After a while, when her tears had run dry and she was just sobbing, she felt her husband move in her arms. She looked to see that he was trying to open his eyes. "Torvald! Are you OK?" she exclaimed as she hugged him even tighter. She was so thankful that he had regained consciousness that she forgot how hard she was squeezing him.

"A little air, please?" he whispered as he finally opened his eyes. "How long have I been out?" he questioned as he pulled the covers off of himself. The stallion was wet all over with sweat from his fever. He got up to a kneeling position and asked "Will you help me take this tunic off? It's soaked with sweat."

As the tigress helped him get his clothes off, she told him how long he had been out. "That was some bad venom," he commented as he wiped his body with the tunic. "I had some really bad nightmares while I was out." he told his mate as he was drying off. "This thing will probably stink in the morning." he stated as he hung his tunic over the lean-to to dry out. After he got a drink of water, the equine laid back down. "I am tired still. Lie down and keep me warm." he said to Victoria, motioning for her to join him under the covers. The tigress didn't need any encouragement, crawling in beside him.

###

The fur had patiently waited all day for the beings to come down off the mountain. He had observed their fire being stoked several times by the smoke coming off of it. He wondered if they had encountered some of those wild kalis as he had heard some sounds that were all too familiar to him. Had one of them gotten bit? That could be bad news as his friend that had come here with him had died that first night from the poisoned bite of one of those canids. He thought about that night, his friend dying in his arms as he watched the life drain from his eyes. What would he tell his friend's wife if he got to go back to his home? The fur had no clue how to tell his friend's wife that he was dead.

He hoped that the beings, whoever they were, would come off the mountain tomorrow. "Yes, maybe tomorrow." he said as he watched the smoke from their fire.

He wandered back inside and sipped on his tea some more. It wasn't the best that he had ever made but at least it was something besides water. If only he had some honey to put into it. "That would make it better." he thought to himself as he poured some more into his hand-made cup to heat it back up. He sat down in his chair and watched out the window in hopes of seeing the beings come down the mountain. "Maybe tomorrow," he said, smiling just a little. "Maybe ... tomorrow."

###

"I said I wouldn't but I will say it. You have wasted your time." the older entity stated, crossing his 'arms' as he watched the game unfold. He 'looked' over at the younger entity to 'see' his reaction.

"She will turn to my will and bring him with her." the younger entity replied. "I have not wasted my time. This is careful planning on my part."

"If you say so." the older entity said as he 'shook' his 'head' at this notion.

###

The huge equine woke up when the sun began to hit him in the face. As he roused and sat up, he realized that Victoria must be off hunting again. He got a drink of water and put his tunic and leggings back on. His mate suddenly made her appearance from the underbrush carrying what looked like a small gray rabbit. Where as a lapin would be at least 5' tall, this one was not over 12" in height. It also walked on all fours so maybe it wasn't a sentient being after all.

"I brought something else for you," she said in a cheery tone, reaching into her pouch. She took out a round red object and threw it to him. The equine smelled it, then cut it open with his knife. He smelled it again, realizing it definitely was an apple.

As he tasted it, a smile crossed his muzzle. "This tastes like a Braeburn apple with a hint of cinnamon." He took another bite and really enjoyed the taste and texture in his mouth. "I need to pick more of these," he commented as he got ready to fix her catch. She handed him another apple and more of those roots that looked like carrots for his breakfast. Victoria got the fire going again and began to cook her game.

Chapter 4

“The Meeting of Furs”

The fur had awakened early this morning in anticipation of having visitors. He cleaned up again and dug out his best tunic and leggings. These had been made of deer hide that he had tanned and processed himself. The fur had cut and sewn himself some clothing to replace what he had worn when he had been brought here. He still had his coat, a tough canvas work coat but the rest had long since given up the ghost. He had buried his friend's clothes with him out of respect but he knew that his friend would have wanted him to keep them for himself.

He looked up at the mountain from his window to see the fire had been quenched with water. They were coming down this way he hoped. It had been 22 years so he thought he could wait just a few more hours. The fur put some water on to make tea with. He would be patient and wait.

As his water was heating, he took a moment to straighten up his home. He had made a bed, a table with several chairs and a couch in the time he had been here. He remembered the way his wife would clean the house, making it look as if nobody lived there. This thought brought a smile to his muzzle. If only he could see her now, just for a moment, some memories that would give him strength to continue to wait. How he longed to be home with her right now.

###

“I still see the smoke coming up.” Victoria commented as they made their way down a section of slope that was not as steep as it had been. She was being careful not to stumble and fall on the equine in front of her.

“As long as this doesn't get steeper again, we will be OK.” her husband noted as he stepped over a fallen tree. The berserker had been thinking about the possibility that the being that they were en-route to meet would be hostile. It was bothering him that this may be the case so he silently prayed that the being would at least not try to kill them.

The pair finally made it to the valley floor and began to walk in the general direction of the smoke. Victoria had a thought go through her mind that the smoke would be from some destroyed village that had been sacked by evil forces. She remembered the last one that she had been through with her husband and the memories of that made her shudder. It had been terrible, the dead and dying scattered about and some burnt so badly that you couldn't tell what species they had been. She tried to push those thoughts out of her mind as they walked towards their destination.

Torvald noticed something ahead that made him stop in his tracks. He could see an obvious path that was heading in the direction he was going. "Oh well, I guess we use the trail." he commented as they continued their journey. It was apparent that some sentient being used this trail by the way the small branches were trimmed away from the path. After several hours, they came upon a clearing with a crude cabin standing in the middle of it.

The immortal pair stopped within shouting distance so Torvald could announce them. "I am Torvald Svensen. I mean no fur harm." he shouted, patiently waiting for a reply from the cabin. After a few moments, a paw beckoned from the open window. He thought he had heard something but he couldn't make it out. He shrugged as he motioned for his mate to follow him to the cabin.

Once they went around to the front of the cabin, they were shocked to see another equine standing in the doorway, crying. He was about 6' tall with a chestnut bay coat and a white blaze up his muzzle. He beckoned them closer, saying something quietly that might have been a prayer of thanks. They could see that he was trying to pull himself together and as they got within comfortable talking distance, he wiped his eyes and said, "My name's Kellan. Please come inside."

###

Torvald and Victoria followed him inside his cabin and took a seat when he offered it. It was apparent that the equine was emotionally upset by their presence so the tigress decided to break the ice. "I'm Victoria and well, you heard that my mate's name is Torvald. We mean you no harm, Kellan."

He looked up the pair with eyes that were red from crying. "I have been here for 22 seasons. I was camping in the Sierras when I was brought here. I ... uh ... don't know where to start," he said as he began to cry again. He looked up and said, "I've been so lonely."

The tigress sat next to the smaller equine and hugged him. "You don't need to start anywhere if you don't want to," she said to Kellan. "We too were brought here against our will. We just don't know where 'here' is."

He shook his head as he looked up again. "I'm sorry. I haven't heard someone's voice in such a long time. I'll be OK, just give me a minute to pull myself together, please?" He was still trying to regain his composure as he sat there sobbing.

###

"You have lost them." the older entity stated in a smug tone of voice. He was observing the meeting of the furs.

"You are underestimating my abilities." the younger entity said as he planned his next move.

"You cannot turn them. Give up the game now and save face." the older entity suggested to the younger one.

"I will use the other one to my advantage. Kellan will help turn them." he stated as he prepared his next moves.

"I have told you that I have knowledge beyond your imagination. You cannot turn what Surt could not turn." the older entity shared with the younger one.

"I will show you that I have more power than Surt." the younger entity said in an irritated tone. "You will see."

The older entity just shook his 'head' at the younger entity.

###

"OK, I think I'm over crying for now," Kellan stated as he sat up and gave his guests a closer look. "Anyway, as I said, I've been here for 22 years. I was camping with my friend that used to live next door when we ended up in this place. We had just figured out we weren't in California any longer when a pack of gray kalis attacked us. I fended them off with my camping hatchet, only my friend Jim Federline didn't do so well." the immortal pair could see the hurt in his eyes as he continued with his story.

"Jim was bitten by several of the kalis only to discover their bite was poisonous. I held him as he slowly died in my arms. That was right after we got here." As they sat there waiting for the smaller equine to speak again, Kellan noticed the fresh scars on Torvald's arm.

"You were bitten and didn't die?" the smaller equine blurted out in surprise. "That's a first for me. I've seen them kill a deer with just a scrape!" He got up to examine the wound site closer, noticing that it had healed and the coat had begun to grow back in.

"How long ago did you get this bite?" Kellan asked the berserker. He knew how long he took to heal up so this would give him an idea of how long the Svensens had been on this planet.

"I was bitten yesterday morning." the huge stallion replied, then suddenly realized what he had said. "I mean, I was bitten 2 weeks ago." He looked to see that Kellan had not bought his story at all.

“Is there something you would like to share with me?” the smaller equine asked as he crossed his arms and looked the berserker straight in the eyes. The huge fur thought that maybe the truth was the best thing to share with their host at this moment.

“It would have come out anyway,” Torvald stated. “We are immortal. That poison was bad but it couldn't kill me. I was unconscious for more than a half-day over it, though.” He felt much better about leveling with their new friend about this glaring fact. The big stallion looked to see a look of shock on the smaller stallion's muzzle.

“I ... uh ... you ...” The chestnut bay equine was at a loss for words, just stumbling over himself vocally. He had a look of utter confusion on his muzzle.

“I will show you.” the berserker said, taking out his Buck knife. He casually opened it and laid the palm of his paw open. Victoria took the knife from her husband and did the same.

“What the ...” the small stallion said, as he watched them wipe the blood off on a piece of hide. He could then see the new scars start healing before his eyes. This really threw Kellan for a loop so he quickly sat down as his head spun. “You'll forgive me ... that was something else!” he stated as he closed his eyes to wait for the world to stop spinning.

“You would have figured it out sooner or later.” the tigress interjected. “I have only been immortal less than a year. Torvald, however is over 130 years old.” She could see that Kellan was still trying to take this in. “Don't think about it right now. Let's get some rest from all of this excitement. We are tired from our trek down the mountainside.”

Kellan nodded, got up from the couch and crossed the room. He pulled a mat out of a storage box and laid it out for them. He had made it in hopes that somebody would eventually come and share his cabin with him. The huge stallion got out their blankets and quilt, shaking them out before putting them on the sleeping mat. Torvald helped Kellan get some more wood for the fire and assisted in closing up the window shutters.

“We're thankful for your hospitality,” the tigress stated to their host. “It'll be much warmer in here than outside.” she commented as the trio lay down in their respective beds and tried to get some rest. It may have been just a mat that Kellan had offered them but it beat the hard ground. As she lay there, she was positive that she heard the smaller stallion crying again. Once her husband fell asleep, she followed right behind.

###

“**You have lost the game.**” The older entity stated. He was sure about it this time as he watched the other entity's reaction.

"Do not count me out. All three will become my warriors." the younger one replied as he planned his next move.

"So you say." the older muttered as he watched on.

###

Morning came to the valley and Victoria was the first one up. She had quietly dressed and slipped out of the cabin to hunt some breakfast. The berserker had been vaguely aware of her leaving but he knew that she could defend herself if need be. He was thinking that they needed to find a way back to their home world but he wasn't sure how to do that. He knew the gods could transport them but that was the extent of that. There were no gods here to help out so he had to think of a different approach.

The thought had crossed his mind that he might be able to 'see' his home so he concentrated on his family room. He could see his home begin to appear around him and he was eventually standing in the family room where Conrad was playing a video game. The time and date on the VCR/DVD combo said it was still Friday night there, the day that the pair had left for Half Moon Bay.

He went and kneeled by his stepson and laid his hand on Conrad's shoulder. It surprised him that he could do that and that Conrad could possibly feel his touch. The berserker decided to try something else. He went over to his desk and picked up a pen. Satisfied that he could hold it, he wrote a note that said to get in touch with the Shieldmaiden and tell her that they were lost in an unknown realm. He knew that Aslaug would get help for them so he laid the note in front of Conrad just before he ran out of strength to stay there.

As the cabin reappeared around the huge stallion, he looked up to see that Kellan was standing there with eyes as big as saucers. "What in hell was that?" the smaller equine blurted out. "We were in somebody's home where a young tiger was playing a video game!" He had to sit down because the excitement was too much for him.

"Kellan, that was my home and the tiger is my stepson." Torvald stated. "I was trying to get a message to the other side for help." He could see that the smaller equine was having trouble with all of this. "I guess that we have more to tell you, then." He looked to see that Kellan was nodding his head.

"I could touch things," Kellan said, still in shock over the incident. "I felt your couch that was covered in leather and I picked up some popcorn that was by the tiger and tasted it." He thought for a minute before he said, "I think you have much to tell me."

Torvald was preparing to tell Kellan about them when Victoria came in with three rabbits that she had caught. "Breakfast is here!" she said cheerily as she looked at her husband and smiled. "I brought you two equines some more of those apples and carrot things, too."

Kellan stood in amazement over her catch. "I didn't think that there was any game left in the valley." he said as he took the critters and began to prepare them for cooking. He was trying to keep from crying as he hadn't had meat in some time. He looked up at the tigress and said "Thanks for hunting these. You don't know just how grateful I am."

###

Conrad was playing his favorite Z-Box game when he felt some fur put their hand on his shoulder. He looked back to see that nobody was in the room with him so he went back to his game. As he finally finished the game, he noticed a piece of paper in front of him. As he looked closer, it was in his stepfather's handwriting. It was a short message but right to the point.

Conrad,

Your mother and I have been transported to a realm that Loke said he had no idea where it is. Please tell Aslaug that we need help from the gods.

Torvald

The young tiger immediately jumped up and ran through the house to the living room where Valerie and Barbara were watching a DVD. "Aunt Valerie! Look at this message!" he yelled as he came into the room. Both of the femmes jumped when he did this as they weren't expecting a commotion. Conrad gave his aunt the letter and just stood there, shaking.

"What's so imp..." Valerie said as she read the short message, suddenly realizing what it meant. The two femmes had been made privy to the immortal pair's secret because it would have eventually come out.

"Conrad, get me the filly's phone number." she said calmly as she reached for the phone. The tigress dialed the number and waited for Aslaug to answer. After a few moments, she got the answering service supplied by the phone company. Valerie left a short message for the filly and hung up the pawset.

“This is a mess.” she stated as she looked over at her love interest. Barbara was still in shock over what she had just read. “Barbara, you have to remain calm if we're to get through this OK. I just don't have any idea where to start.” Barbara just nodded as she read the message again.

“Maybe I can call Loke.” Conrad suggested. “Dad does it sometimes so what's to lose if I can't?” He was looking at the two felines with a hopeful look that they might agree with him.

“Well, give it a try.” Valerie suggested as she looked at the note again.

“Loke? Hey Loke! We need help!” Conrad said in his best big voice. After a few moments, the weasel shimmered into view. He smiled as he sat down on the couch with the femmes.

“You didn't need to shout,” Loke stated, looking at Conrad with a crooked smile. “I heard you mention my name earlier before you started shouting about it. We are trying to find your parents as we speak.”

He took a finger and cleared his ear with it as he said, “You don't have to shout next time. Keep your hopes up and I will be near if you need me.” With that said, he shimmered out of view.

“I thought your mom told him he had to use the door?” Valerie stated as she sat there, still a little bewildered by the goings on.

Chapter 5

“Reconnaissance Missions”

Their breakfast over, the trio sat down to get to know one another better. Because he was the host, Kellan decided that he would go first.

“I live in, or I guess that I should say that I did live in Roseville, California with my mate, Tasha,” he began to tell them. “My Tasha is a Siberian tiger that I met in the Air Force. We married after I was out of the military and we settled in Roseville. We have two sons, Kellan Jr. and Kory. They're both equines, Kellan Jr. looks like me and his younger brother Kory has his mother's ruddy orange coloring and faint stripes on his arms and legs.” Kellan smiled with a look of love for his family. “Kory is named after my brother.” he added as a look of sadness crossed his muzzle. The two immortals could feel his pain as he said that last part.

After a few moments, Kellan looked at Torvald as he said “I would like to hear your story. I'm not sure why, but you seem ... different ... from other equines I have known.”

The berserker nodded and spoke. “I am different because I'm not from the 21st century. I was born in Denmark in the 10th century. I was a Berserker in my former life.” He looked to see that Kellan was not surprised by this information.

“I thought something was different about you.” the smaller equine stated. “I've never seen another blond equine since Kory's football team played a team from southern California. Their coach was a blond equine femme.” this caused the immortal pair to smile at one another and start chuckling.

“Was her name Aslaug Larsdatter?” Torvald asked with a silly grin on his mug. The tigress was trying her best not to crack up laughing at the situation.

“Yeah, I think so,” Kellan replied. “It's been so long ago it's hard to remember.” He was puzzled by the fact that his guests were laughing at this information.

“We know that blond femme,” the tigress stated. “She visits with us often. That game was just three weeks ago by our time.” Torvald was laughing now as Victoria continued. “We remember your son because he really stands out from the crowd.”

“That *is* scary if you ask me,” Kellan commented. “We must be from the same world then.” The immortal pair were nodding their heads in agreement. “You still haven't told me how you became immortal, though.”

The berserker got up and lifted up his tunic to show Kellan two scars about four inches wide, one on his back and one on his chest. “This was from a broadsword that killed

me in a battle over Saxony.” He saw the smaller equine's eyes go wide from that information. “I wasn't supposed to die that day so the gods made me immortal to continue my work. I was brought to Seattle in 1891 where I was to learn my craft. Some things happened to derail that however. I was left in a mess, freezing out in the snow. I was thankful that Loke sent somebody to see after me.” Kellan was still mulling this over when the Trickster shimmered into view.

“Torvald! My favorite immortal stallion! Odin says they're trying to figure out exactly where this place is!” Loke told the berserker excitedly. The weasel turned and looked around the cabin to realize there was some fur there that was new to him. “And who is this stallion that I haven't met before? Is he one of your friends or family?”

“This is Kellan.” the huge stallion said. “He has been here for 22 years but I think it's less time than that on our world. I think by what we were just talking about that he's from our world.”

“Well, any friend of yours is a friend of mine.” the weasel stated. “I am Loke.” he said to Kellan as he smiled at him. “I will see to it that you're rescued from here too.” he added, sitting down on the couch with the smaller equine.

Loke turned to face the berserker again. “Odin, Freya and Christopher are planning out how to rescue you as we speak. Wait a little while and summon me again. I will tell you any news that I hear.” The Trickster began to shimmer again so he stepped to the middle of the room. “Odin can pull me back from here. I will tell your family you are OK whe...” The weasel was cut off as he shimmered out of sight.

“Well, you see what we have to put up with.” the tigress said as she looked at the smaller equine. Kellan was trying to say something as he pointed to the spot where Loke had been just moments before.

“Apparently I can summon him by saying his name.” the huge equine stated. “Every so often I accidentally summon him. He really hates that.” The smaller equine was starting to grasp what was up with these two immortals.

“Victoria, how did you become immortal?” the smaller equine asked as he looked at her intently.

“Torvald had to overcome his fear of losing me to be able to fulfill his work for the gods,” she began. “The archangels interfered with that so I was pulled into his quest to overcome that fear.” The tigress swallowed hard as she remembered the evil she felt in Surt's realm. “I was taken into a dark realm that would have destroyed me if I were a mere mortal, so the gods saved me in the only way they could; they made me immortal.”

“OK, now that I'm totally confused, what do we do now?” the smaller equine stated.

“I guess we sit tight and wait for the gods to rescue us.” the berserker said as he made himself comfortable in his chair.

###

“The gods are going to know about your game.” the older entity said nonchalantly. He had watched the weasel visit the cabin with interest. **□You know Christopher will send the archangels after you.□**

“I am not afraid of the angels! I can defeat them easily!” the younger entity replied to the older one in a defiant tone of voice.

“You are making a mistake if you ask me,” the older entity commented. **“I wouldn't mess with the gods if I were you.”**

“Don't you have a war to start somewhere?” the younger entity said flippantly as he went back to planning his next moves.

###

It had only been a few minutes since he had left when Loke reappeared at the Svensen residence. “I have good news!” he said to the two feline femmes. They were still sitting on the couch, message in paw.

“Well, what is it?” Valerie asked as her tail twitched in anticipation. She was more than ready for her sister and brother-in-law to return home safely any minute.

“Odin, Freya and Christopher are formulating a plan,” the weasel stated. “I will no doubt hear something soon.” He started to leave but stopped quickly. “Your family are with another equine named Kellan. They are in a cabin so they are safe for now.” The Trickster then shimmered and left.

“At least they have shelter.” Valerie commented as she got a look of relief on her muzzle.

They went into the kitchen and were making some sandwiches for dinner when the doorbell began to ring, followed by knocking on the door. Barbara went to the door and looked out the peephole to see the filly standing there.

“Aslaug! Come in, please!” she beckoned as she stood to the side for the filly to enter. It was apparent that she had just come from a pickup game at the park. The Shieldmaiden was still wearing her football cleats, shoulder pads and her favorite jersey

that was custom made by a filly in San Francisco. It was a black jersey that said in clearly legible white letters on the front

**Your God died nailed to a cross.
My God carries a big hammer.
Do the math!**

“Loke found me and told me what happened,” the filly stated as she sat down at the kitchen table. “This is bad. I don't know what to do for them.” Aslaug took a sandwich that was offered and nibbled at it. She finally said quietly “This is something that's best left for the gods to deal with.” She was looking at the others with a look of sadness on her muzzle. “The gods will get them back.”

###

Odin, Freya and Christopher were sitting at a table in the lion's home, waiting for one more fur to join them. “What's keeping that shifty weasel?” the one-eyed wolf asked as he scanned about. “I asked him to meet us here some time ago.” As they waited a few more moments, a very rough-looking Archangel appeared with Loke in his custody. Gabriel, the feline archangel was bruised, battered, scuffed up and was missing a few teeth. The obvious injuries were his left eye being blackened and swollen shut along with his wings being held stiffly against his back, missing quite a few feathers.

“What happened to you?” Freya blurted out as she tried to stifle a laugh. “You look like you were in a battle and lost!” The angel was just shaking his head as he looked at the ground in embarrassment.

“Michael and I went back and tried to apologize to the Shieldmaiden like the boss told us to. Apparently she's still mad at us for that minor incident and didn't want our apology. It has something to do with Victoria being immortal now and how immortality sucks ...”

“Minor incident my *good* eye! I should give you and Michael both a sound beating for that!” Odin spoke out as he tried to control his anger. “You know well enough that we can't make the tigress mortal again. She's stuck with it and that's why the Shieldmaiden is mad at you!” As the wolf sat there and calmed down he finally said, “Besides, it doesn't look like she had a hold of you for long enough.”

“Yeah, I guess we had it coming.” was the angel's short reply. He let go of Loke and shimmered out of sight.

“Nice of you to join us.” The lion in the loud camp shirt stated as he motioned for Loke to sit down. Christopher looked at the Trickster and asked, “Is it true that Torvald can summon you to his location?”

“He can summon me. So can his stepson for reasons that I do not understand,” the weasel replied as he tried to get comfortable. “What does that have to do with me?” he asked as he looked at the others.

“We will use you to transport Freya to his location so I may find them.” Odin stated to the weasel. “You will stay near Freya until he summons you again. She will hold your paw and go there with you.”

“Oh Great!” the Trickster said to no fur in particular as he picked at the food on the table.

“Well I don't see it as a picnic either.” the vixen replied to the weasel. “I volunteered to do this for the Berserker and his mate. They don't deserve to be treated like this.”

Oh, OK then ...” the weasel said in a dejected tone. “So much for my plans ...”

###

Several days had gone by for the trio marooned on a strange world so they had passed the time by telling stories about their lives. Torvald was still trying to keep from laughing as he told of Aslaug beating on the Archangels.

“So anyway, when Gabriel dropped the shield, Aslaug beat the daylights out of him and Michael both!” The berserker was laughing as he remembered how battered the two angels had looked when they returned to Christopher's realm. “I heard that Christopher's father was going to make them apologize to her face-to-face!” he added. “I wish I could be there to see that! I know it won't go well ...”

“That's funny but I have to admit,” Kellan commented. “If I went home and told these stories, I would get locked up for being crazy!” He was still smiling as he said, “Still, I'd like to see the filly in action, that's for sure. She sounds like a 'One Filly Wrecking Machine' to me!”

“I'll have to remember that,” the tigress said thoughtfully. “We never know how to refer to her properly. That reference fits!”

The tigress was picking at the remnants of their snack as she asked their host “Where did the surname Meig'h come from? I don't think I have ever heard that one before.”

“It's an old family name that was turned into M-A-Y at some time or another.” he replied. “My grandfather revived the name by legally changing his to Meig'h. That apostrophe really wreaks havoc with some computer systems!”

It was noticeable to the immortal pair that Kellan had been in much better spirits since they had arrived. He was smiling and his voice even had an upbeat tone to it. They sensed that he was looking forward to being back home with his family. The truth be known, the Svensens were feeling exactly the same way too.

As they sat there, Kellan noticed something going on outside. "It's snowing" he said as he went to look outside. The smaller equine saw that the flakes were rather large as they fell. "It's going to be a cold one tonight." he commented as he turned to look at the immortal pair. "We'd better get some wood inside before we get snowed in." The trio went and carried in enough wood to last a week just as the snowfall got heavier.

"It doesn't snow much here," the smaller equine said to his guests. "When it does, it gets pretty deep out. I've had it above the window openings before." He put a few more pieces of wood on the fire before he began to peel some tubers and roots for a stew. "At least there's no shortage of water when it snows!" He was smiling as he added, "It's good to have company when the weather's bad."

"You're a good host, Kellan. I hope we'll see you often when we go home." the tigress said as she helped peel the tubers. "You're a very likable fur." Kellan just smiled to that in embarrassment.

The trio sat around that day and enjoyed the quiet of the snow, the smells of the stew cooking over an open fire and each other's company.

###

"The snow will coop them up," the younger entity stated. "They will get angry with one another and then I will turn them to my will." He was 'smiling' at the thought of having three new warriors under his control.

"You have not paid attention." the older entity pointed out. **"The immortal pair share a love that transcends time itself. Cannot you feel it?"** He was watching the stew slowly cooking in the fireplace. **"There is too much love present to turn them."**

"You still underestimate my abilities," the younger one stated. "I will have them and I will have the Shieldmaiden too."

"You have told me that before." the older entity commented as he watched the game unfold.

###

The Shieldmaiden had returned home after having a light meal with the femme lovers and Conrad. She showered up and put on an oversize t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants to lounge around the house in. The plight of the Svensens really bothered the filly so she knelt in front of her shrine that she had made and said a prayer for their safe return.

The filly and the squad had been sent on missions by the gods but the gods had always known where they were so they could pull them back home afterwards. This was something different altogether. As she had been told by Odin, there are many different parallel worlds so a hunt across all of these worlds would take forever. She hoped in her heart that the gods had a plan. As she had told Victoria more than once, being immortal sometimes sucks.

After straightening up her house a bit she retired to her bedroom. It had been a long day and the filly needed some rest for her mind. The last thing that she was thinking about before she fell asleep was how could they possibly find them if it was an unknown realm.

Chapter 6

“Time For All To Go Hunt”

The immortal pair and their host had watched the snow fall for several days. It wasn't too bad as far as Kellan could estimate. He had placed marks on the side of his cabin that marked off seventeen years of snowfall, month by month. This storm hadn't been nearly as bad as other fall flurries, only dropping several hand widths of snow on the ground.

“We should probably hunt for game now,” the smaller equine stated. “They will come down to the valley floor because of the snow.”

“You have the advantage there,” the tigress commented. “We don't know the weather around here. We can hunt if you think we should.” The prospects of hunting made her even more cheery than before. Victoria was getting antsy to go do some stalking of prey.

“We should leave right after breakfast.” Kellan suggested as he dished up some hot cereal for them. “I know where they'll most likely be.”

“I'm up for some hunting. Fresh venison sounds real good to me.” the berserker commented as he tasted the cereal. “This is not bad. Reminds me of something my first mate would have made.”

“It's a grain that's like oats. I roll it with a heavy stone to crush it open.” he told them as he began to eat it himself. “It's better with milk on it but I lost my goat-thing a few winters ago. Wild kalis got it.”

“Those things are nasty,” the tigress commented. “I hope we don't see more of those things.”

“They don't like the cold.” Kellan pointed out to them. “That's why the deer come down here when it snows.”

“Then it's decided. We will hunt.” Torvald stated as everyone nodded their heads.

###

“You did not turn them.” the older entity stated in a confident tone. **“I told you...”** the younger entity cut him off.

"I will send more kalis after them," the younger, larger entity retorted. "The one named Kellan will die and this will turn the tigress and the large stallion."

"Kalis don't like cold weather." the older entity pointed out to the younger one. **"You must come up with something else."**

"I have just the thing," the younger one stated, putting three new objects in the game. "I will turn them now."

"That is a twist, I must admit," the older entity said. **"You might have a chance yet."**

###

The hunting party was preparing to go out stalking for deer or any other large game they could find. As the immortal pair got their weapons ready, Kellan pulled out his two main weapons. One was a standard Estwing camping hatchet that he had kept sharp with whetstones he had brought with him to this realm. The other weapon was his Browning Rage compound bow.

"A bow?" Torvald queried as he stared at the other stallion. "How ...?" The huge stallion was left without words over this sight.

"Everything that was in our tent came here with us," Kellan explained to his guests. "That's how I have pots and pans to cook in. My rifle was still in my truck," he added with a dejected look on his muzzle. "It doesn't matter anyway. I would have been out of bullets by now."

They were finally prepared to start out so Kellan lead the way to the hunting grounds. The trip to the location was not too far so they reached it by mid-day. Kellan pointed out the paths that the game were taking so Torvald determined which was freshest. As they got into a shielded location to watch for game, Victoria heard something that she had never heard before.

It sounded like a male feline that was angry but there was a feral component to it that gave her a chill up her spine.

"I hear something," she said in a whisper as she listened for a direction for the noise. "Over there," she nodded, indicating a cluster of bushes. Kellan nocked one of his hand made arrows with a deadly sharp flint point on it and stood ready. The tigress suddenly heard something behind them.

“Look out!” was all she had time to shout as she spun with her spear and struck at a large wild feline beast that was not of a kind she had ever seen. She managed to keep them from being taken from behind but the other one had charged their location.

“I have it!” Kellan shouted as he pulled and released his arrow at the charging animal. The projectile found its target, embedding deeply into the chest of the beast. The smaller equine watched as he quickly nocked another arrow to see the stricken beast stagger and fall down with blood running out of its mouth.

The one that the tigress had fended off had joined up with the third one and began stalking the hunting party. The eyes of the beasts seemed like there was no life in them at all, they were just dark dead pools of death. Torvald pulled his Franciscas from their holster and readied himself as he kept his eyes on the animals. He saw his opening and threw both of them at one of the beasts that had become distracted. He was pleased when the beast staggered and fell with one small axe embedded in its skull.

“One left.” Kellan stated as the remaining beast ducked behind some bushes. The tigress listened carefully as it tried to circle them, first one way then the other. The beast finally charged at them from the bushes and leaped at the huge stallion. Torvald ducked and used his Dane axe to disembowel the creature as it flew over his head. He ran over to it and used his dagger to dispatch the fallen beast.

“What are these things?” Victoria blurted out as she went to examine one. It looked like a very large khat but it had the coloration, mane and tail tuft of a sentient lion. She was guessing it weighed over 200 pounds or more. “Look at his claws” she said as she poked at the dead animal's limb with her staff. The claws on this beast could have disemboweled any one of them with no trouble at all.

“Now what?” Torvald said to the others. “Should we keep hunting or turn back?”

“Let's bury these creatures and stay.” Kellan suggested. “We need the meat but I don't think I would eat these beasts.”

The immortal pair agreed with Kellan so they spent the time necessary to bury the dead beasts before the smell of death would drive off the game they sorely needed.

###

“Somebody has interfered again!” the younger entity 'shouted' out. “Those beasts should have killed at least one of them!”

“There was no interference.” the older entity replied in a calm tone. **“You are underestimating the resolve of these sentients to stay alive.”**

"I have not! I still say somebody has interfered!" the younger entity said as he planned his next moves. "I will have them yet!"

"I cannot watch your mistakes any longer." the older entity muttered as he tried not to watch the game continue.

###

Freya and Loke were sitting at a table, eating a light snack. The vixen seemed to be lost in thought as she nibbled at a piece of meat in her paw.

"What are you thinking?" the weasel asked of the vixen.

"I was trying to think if this has ever happened before to one of our warriors." she replied in a level tone. It was obvious that she was not happy with the situation. "This waiting is really bothering me. I hope the stallion summons you soon so we can be sure you'll take me with you."

"What if Odin cannot sense where we go?" Loke asked. The thought had crossed his mind that they might get stuck there too.

"Odin has pulled you from that realm before," Freya replied. "It will be no different when we go together. I will use my strength to pull them back with us from that realm."

"I hope you are right." the weasel said as he suddenly lost his appetite.

###

The hunting party's patience had rewarded them with a large buck that took all three of them to lug back to the cabin. They had spent the rest of the day and part way into darkness to gut, skin and cut the deer up into manageable pieces.

Kellan had made a cellar behind his cabin that was cooled by ice taken from the nearby river in winter. The weather was cool enough in the summer that he never ran out of ice. They put the meat into storage except for a piece that they started roasting over the fire.

"It's been a long time since I've had venison." Kellan proffered up to his guests. "Last year it didn't snow so the deer stayed up on the mountain." He turned the meat on the hand made spit before he continued. "I went up there and spent a month in a lean-to trying to get a buck or doe. The cold, rainy weather finally forced me back down here."

"That must've been the lean-to we stayed in," the tigress stated. "It probably saved us when Torvald was poisoned."

“By the direction of the smoke I saw, yeah, that was it.” Kellan replied. “I’ve used it in summer to hunt those badger-looking things that dig up the carrots.”

“Those are tasty critters” Victoria commented as she peeled some tubers to cook for a side dish. “You know, we should dig up as many tubers as we can for winter.” she suggested as she put them in a pot.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. I think I have plenty but it wouldn’t hurt to have a few more.” Kellan replied to her suggestion. “There are some close to here that we can get in the morning.” He checked the meat to see that it was almost done. “We’ll eat good tonight.” he commented as he turned the meat some more.

After their meal was over, the trio sat around and let their food settle. Outside they heard sounds that were like a sentient wolf’s call at the moon.

“Those are a type of kali that I call a wolf-kali” Kellan told them. “They seem to stay away from my cabin, like they don’t care for my presence.” The wolf-kalis continued to howl into the night, making a lonely sound that seemed to serenade the trio.

“I want to say something,” Kellan said as he slouched down in a chair. He waited until he was sure he had the immortal pair’s attention. “Since you two have been here, I have been happy for a change. I feel like I can wait to go home now.”

As Torvald nodded his head, Victoria replied to Kellan. “We’ll all go home as soon as the gods figure out where we are.”

Kellan smiled as he said the word, “Home.”

###

Aslaug had left for home a few hours ago and the two femmes were staying in the Svensen’s guest bedroom to be close to Conrad. “I hope that Victoria and Torvald get home OK.” Valerie said softly as she wiped the tears from her eyes. Barbara had been holding her close to comfort her since they had gone to bed. The tigress was trying not to cry but it was very hard for her not to. “I miss my sister already.” she said, snuggling up against her lover even closer.

“The gods will get them home.” Barbara told the tigress to calm her down. She thought to herself, “I hope they get back home for Valerie’s sake.” She knew the loss of her lover’s sister would be very traumatic for the tigress so she just hoped for the best as they drifted off to sleep.

###

The Shieldmaiden had partially woken up from her sleep to realize that the room seemed inordinately cold to her. The heat for her home had been going on the fritz lately so she thought it had given out again. Stretching out a little, she opened her eyes to see that she was face to face with a small badger-looking animal. She sat up quickly to see that she was on the side of a mountain, lying on her bed covers but the bed was gone. It wasn't quite sunup yet and she could see her breath in the air.

"Loke!" she shouted as she stood up. "I'll tie you in a pretzel when I catch you!" she yelled as she looked around for that sorry weasel. After a few moments she realized that she wasn't on her home world or the present world she had been living on. "Oh Damn!" she said as the realization sank in concerning her plight.

The filly looked around to see there was some smoke coming up from the valley below so she decided to head that way. She picked up her covers and pillow, putting the quilt over her shoulders for warmth in this snow. Taking a deep breath, she headed down the mountain. "I hope Torvald and Victoria are there." she said as she walked along.

###

"That move puts me closer to my objective," the younger entity said smugly, watching the game at paw. *"This will tax their food reserves."*

"You risk Odín's wrath by doing that," the older entity stated. **"I believe he has the power to destroy you."**

"I cannot be destroyed," the younger entity pointed out. *"I was born of hate and I have the power to rebuke Odin."*

"Suit yourself but don't come crying to me when Odín sends the danger for you," the older entity said in a smug tone. **"I will not help you."**

Chapter 7

“Persistence”

The sun had finally come up and Aslaug was trying her best to make it off the mountain before darkness fell. She was substantially more agile than the berserker so she was making good time in her trip down the mountainside. The thought kept going through her mind that she was going to deal out a large helping of her favorite brand of hurt on whoever or whatever was responsible for this mess she was currently in.

As the filly came into a clearing, she noticed her spear, Dane axe, Franciscas and a dagger leaning against a tree trunk. There was also a hide pouch hanging on a low branch nearby. Aslaug carefully approached the spot to see that there had been nobody walking around the trunk by the lack of prints in the snow. What she did notice were hoof prints and paw prints in the dirt under the tree where the snow didn't fall. “Torvald and Victoria have been this way.” she commented to herself as she checked the pouch. It contained a nondescript woven cloth tunic, hide leggings and a belt. “This has the feel of *sejd* to it.” she muttered as she looked around herself carefully to make sure that weasel wasn't standing nearby. The filly picked up her spear and ran her paw over the shaft, feeling the familiarity of its heft. She smiled as she held the spear for a few more moments before setting it down again.

She quickly put the tunic on over her t-shirt and traded her sweatpants for the leggings. Once she had them belted on, she picked up her weapons and continued her trip down the hill. As she descended the mountain, signs that the berserker and tigress had been this way kept showing up. “I am on the right path.” she thought as she carefully picked her way down a particularly bad section of incline. She could see where the berserker had no doubt slipped several times on the shale-like ledges as he made his way down. She noted an area where the huge equine had slid for some distance before regaining his purchase on the hillside. Aslaug had caught on to their tracks where they had backtracked around the worst sections. “He has left a trail that a blind fur could follow.” she muttered as she stepped over a fallen log. The snow on the ground was making things harder than necessary at times, obliterating the immortal couple's trail in places.

“The Archangels had better not have something to do with this,” she thought as she made her way towards her destination. “I am not sure what I would do to them.” she thought as she descended the mountain. “I have had enough of WhiteChrist's angels to last me several lifetimes.”

###

Torvald roused from his sleep to the smells of breakfast being cooked. There was one smell that he wasn't sure of, however. He got up and went to the fireplace where his

tigress was making something in a pan. Upon closer inspection, she was making a large pan full of scrambled eggs.

“Where did you get those?” he asked as he watched her intently. He could already taste the avian delicacies in his mouth, they smelled that good.

“I gathered them from a few nests that I know of.” Kellan answered him. “The birds lay eggs all year round so I have plenty.” He thought for a minute before he added “I’ve even gotten burnt out on eggs a few times, there’s that many available.”

“I’ll eat them,” the berserker commented as he washed up for breakfast. “That is my favorite for my morning meal.” While he waited, the huge fur folded up his bed covers before he picked up the sleeping mat and stowed it in its place. After a few more minutes, the tigress had their morning meal ready.

###

“You will be lucky if Odin doesn’t send the Shieldmaiden herself after you.” the older entity stated coolly. **“I would stand by and watch you suffer greatly at her paws.”**

“She will be my warrior,” the younger entity retorted. “I turned Hitler and I can turn her too.”

“Hitler was just one fur,” the older entity pointed out. **“I was the one that manifested the conflict between furs. Many good furs suffered for my amusement. Without me, the conflict would have never happened.”**

“I’m not so sure about that.” the younger one said to the older one. “You will see my best moves soon. You just wait around and see.”

“As you wish.” the older one stated in a bored tone.

###

Christopher was sitting in his celestial home, waiting for his Archangels to arrive. He had just spoken with the one-eyed wolf about his plans for retrieving Torvald and Victoria from the place they were marooned in. They had decided that the lion would mount a second search party from his end. While he was pondering all of his options, two figures shimmered into view.

“I have brought Michael,” the smaller feline stated, helping the other one to stand. “I am not sure if he will be of any help.” the angel added as the larger one mumbled something. Christopher was looking at Michael with surprise.

“Did Aslaug do this to you?” he asked, trying to keep from laughing at the sight in front of him. “I don't remember you looking that bad when you threw Lucifer out of here!” The larger Archangel was nursing two black eyes, numerous cuts and scrapes and it was quite possible that his nose was broken. Michael was still dabbing at his busted lips with a towel as another feather fell from his wings.

“Yeah, she beat us up again.” the larger feline eventually admitted. “She said to stuff our apologies up our ... well, maybe I won't say where she said to put them.” Christopher was straining to keep from laughing at them as Michael continued on with his story.

“She said it was all our fault that Victoria is immortal now. That's what she's mad at us about.” Michael said sourly as he dabbed at his lips again. “And believe me, she is *mad..*”

“Well, let's just look at this situation for a moment or two,” the lion pointed out as he struggled to contain his anger with the two in front of him. “What you two pulled off was just completely over the top! What about my father's new “No Interference” policy? I guess you two didn't read it or just plain didn't care!” The two angels were looking at the ground and nodding their heads as the lion spoke to them quite tersely. “You two interfered with something that was none of your business in the first place! Aslaug barely got to know the Svensens before your screwing around caused the curse of immortality to be dropped on a very nice femme 'just' so she wouldn't be destroyed in Surt's realm! Now do you understand Aslaug's anger with you two? I'm really surprised that Torvald and Victoria didn't kick your asses for that too!”

“Now that you put it that way, we understand it now.” Gabriel said sheepishly. The smaller feline was still looking at the ground as he said “Do you want us to try to apologize to her again?”

“No, not right now. After we are done with this pressing matter.” the lion told them as he stood up and took a few steps closer to them. “I need both of you to search for Torvald and Victoria. They're lost in some unknown realm.” As the two angels stood there looking at him he finally said, “I want you to use whatever resources necessary to find them. I do not want to see them lost to some unknown force. Do you both understand me clearly or do I need to put it in writing this time?”

“No Sir, we understand you perfectly.” they both said as they shimmered out of sight. The lion sat down and took a sip of his wine as he contemplated what else needed to be done.

###

The marooned trio had walked down towards the river to dig up some tubers to add to their larder for the winter. Torvald had mentioned that it might take a while for the gods to find them so a little extra food wouldn't hurt. As they walked along, Kellan was pointing out the various plants that he had found a use for.

"This plant is similar to Soap root," the smaller equine said as he touched the plant in question. "The bulbs will make a lather if you crush them for the sap. I found out the hard way by tasting them. They are just like eating a bar of soap!" He smiled as he added, "The river is my bathtub, in case you wondered." Victoria was blushing as she thought about bathing out in the open like that while the berserker was smiling at the thought of skinnydipping with his mate.

"Here's the tubers," Kellan pointed out as he turned the ground with a digging stick to expose the bounty below. "I think they look just like a potato." The trio carefully dug up several pouches worth to take back with them, wiping the dirt off of them before putting the tubers in the pouches.

It was a nice sunny day and the river's sounds were soothing so they decided to stay for just a little while. The trio sat in the shade and rested for a bit by the river before heading back. "This river runs year-round but it does ice over in winter." Kellan mentioned as the tigress washed her paws in the water. "I have caught fish out of here too." The tigress noted that the river water was extremely clear and cold, too.

"Maybe we should head back before it gets dark on us," the berserker said as he got up from his resting spot. It was now getting on towards late afternoon so the others agreed that would be the thing to do. As they finally headed back towards the cabin, Torvald saw a reflection off of something on the mountainside.

"There is someone on the mountain," he said as he stopped to look closer. While they stood there, another flash from a reflection was seen. "Yeah, there is someone on the mountain," he stated confidently as he looked at the other two.

"They'll be at the cabin by dark, judging by their location," Kellan commented as he watched some more. "Maybe sooner. Whoever that is, they're moving pretty fast."

"Let's pick up the pace a little," the berserker suggested to the others. "Let's beat whoever that is back to the cabin." Victoria and Kellan nodded in agreement as they began to jog towards their destination.

###

"What is this?" the younger entity blurted out. "How did the Shieldmaiden get clothes and weapons?" It was clear that the entity wasn't happy with this turn of events.

"I did not interfere, if that's what you're getting at." the older one replied. **"Some other entity may be at work here. You must be careful now."**

"I will find out who is interfering with my plans!" the younger entity said angrily as he watched the filly make her way along the slope of the mountain.

"You had better watch your back." the older one suggested. **"The angels are no doubt looking for the large stallion and the tigress by now."**

"I am not afraid!" the younger one spat out. "I have no reason to worry about a few angels!"

"You should worry," the older entity pointed out. **"Can you take on the angels and Odín's warriors at the same time?"**

"I ... I have never tried before." the younger one said thoughtfully. "I ... I will have to be careful as you suggest."

"As you should." the older one said in a smug tone. **"As you should."**

###

Conrad was lying in his bed, trying his best to be brave during this ordeal. He kept thinking over and over in his mind that he might lose his mother and stepfather. As he lay there in his bed, he thought it was sort of funny in a way that the huge equine had insisted that he be referred to as his stepfather. Torvald had said this as he didn't want to overstep his boundaries in his new family. Even though Conrad had met his biological father a few times, the berserker was the only one he felt had been a real father to him.

Conrad thought about the few times he had been with his biological father to do something together. He knew this fur just didn't know how to relate to children because he seemed so quiet and reserved around his son. He remembered the time that they went to the park and his biological father didn't say more than ten words to him. Maybe that's the reason he chose to be a truck driver. Maybe he just didn't want other furs around him.

Conrad knew that if his Mom and Torvald returned, he would have a talk with the two of them. The young tiger thought it was about time that he referred to the huge fur as his father. Not his stepfather, but just his father. The other fur had helped to conceive him but he wasn't there when he had broken his arm at school or when he played all those football games. The berserker had always been there for his stepson. Maybe they

could just be father and son from now on. He tried to be brave as the tears streamed from his eyes.

###

The marooned trio made it back to the cabin in good time and had put their food stuffs away in storage. On the way back, they had picked more apples and carrots that they had spied on their way out. "I am glad we made it back in one piece." the huge fur stated as he squatted down by the fireplace to re-stoke the fire. "Kellan, do the gray kalis always stay away when it snows?" he asked of the smaller equine. The thought of being attacked again chilled him, even though he knew he could not die from their poison.

"As far as I know, they go to the low valley to the south and stay there when it's this cold out." the bay colored equine replied. "That valley is a week's walk from here." He knew that as long as it was cold, the kalis would leave them alone. Those feline beasts however were another story. He had never seen them before so he couldn't be sure about them at all.

"Have you done any exploring?" the berserker asked as he tended to the fire. It was always good to know your surroundings if at all possible.

"The first few years I was here, I went out in early summer in search of civilization." Kellan replied. "I went a month's walk in all directions to see that there were no signs of other living furs about." The smaller equine sat down as he recalled what he had seen.

"West by my compass takes you to the ocean in about 2 weeks. I saw no signs of others that way. East goes over the mountain range to a desert beyond. It looked like it would be impossible to cross. North and south I followed the low valleys but I found no other living furs."

"You say that like you did find something." the tigress commented.

"I would always find signs that others had been there but the most I would ever find were dead bodies, *except once*." He had to swallow hard as a cold wave rushed over him. "I did find some dying warriors to the south but they weren't like us." he told them in a hushed tone. "They didn't have fur on their bodies, just on the tops of their heads and some had hair on their faces. They also didn't have tails." The immortal pair were giving the smaller stallion their full attention. "They were wearing 17th or 18th century style armor. Not a heavy armor, but a gentleman's style of armor. They had been in a heavy battle with some unknown forces. I couldn't save even one of them." After a few moments, Kellan added "If it were possible, I would have brought their armor back with me."

“It must be some entities at work here,” Torvald said in a reverent tone. “They are using this place to do something, but what is it they're doing?” It was apparent that the huge stallion was thinking about the things that they had been through. “I hope we get out of here soon. This is really beginning to get on my nerves.”

“I'll start our dinner.” Kellan said as he went to get some meat out of the cellar. “Maybe we'll feel better on a full stomach.” The pair just nodded in agreement.

After Kellan had left the room, the tigress got her mate's attention. “Maybe you should summon Loke again,” she suggested to the huge stallion. “Let's find out what's going on.” The stallion nodded and said the Trickster's name a few times. After a few moments, the weasel appeared, looking slightly irritated.

“Did you have to do that just now?” Loke stated with a slight tone of irritation in his voice. “Freya had just gone for more wine. I was supposed to bring her here with me and then she would pull you furs back with her.”

“Sorry. I didn't know,” the berserker said in a sheepish tone. “I will refrain from doing that too often, then.”

“You didn't know so I can't be mad at you. Wait the same interval and then summon me again. I will ...” Loke got cut off as he was summoned back by Odin.

Kellan had returned with a piece of venison to cook for their dinner. He carefully sliced it into steaks and put them in an iron skillet to cook. “This pan came from the remnants of a camp to the north that had been burned in a way I've never seen before. Just the camp was burned, not the surrounding forest. It was sort of like a fairy tale dragon had done it ...” He looked to see that the pair wasn't shocked by that statement.

“I have seen dragons before, on a mission,” the berserker said to the smaller stallion. “It really did breathe fire, just like the books say it could. It is a very impressive sight to see one fly.” he added, getting that far away look in his eyes again.

Kellan was shaking his head as he worked on their dinner. “Dragons ... I must be losing my mind.” He was beginning to question his sanity for even entertaining the idea of dragons for just a moment.

“No Kellan, I'm dead serious,” the berserker said as he sat up. “They really do exist, just not on our world.” Torvald was getting that far-away look again as he remembered riding on the back of a striped dragon on a mission with the squad. He thought for a few moments before he decided not to tell the smaller stallion about the mechanized beast the coyote was so fond of.

“If I were to tell anything we have talked about,” Kellan commented; “I'm sure my Tasha would have me committed to a loony bin somewhere. You can be sure your secrets are safe with me.” The smaller equine was shaking his head as he worked on their meal. “Dragons yeah, I'm losing it”

While they waited for their dinner to cook, Victoria heard sounds outside. She got the two stallion's attention and pointed out the window opening. “Someone's out there.” she said quietly as she picked up her spear. The other two got their weapons in paw as they started for the door. Just as Torvald touched the door to open it, a voice came from outside.

“Torvald? Victoria? Are you in there?” the femme's voice queried. The immortal pair knew that voice so they went outside to see Aslaug standing nearby. The filly smiled as they met and shook paws warrior style. “I am glad I found you two,” she stated, obviously relieved by this fact. “I followed your trail that was so obvious a blind fur could have tracked you.” she explained as they walked back towards the cabin.

As they grew nearer to the cabin, Torvald stopped the filly and his mate. “Victoria, I would like to talk with Aslaug alone, please?” he asked. His mate could see that there was something bothering her husband so she agreed and went into the cabin.

“What is wrong?” Aslaug asked as they stood there in the cold. “You look upset to me.” she said as she waited for him to speak.

“I wanted to tell you that I am very sorry if it was my fault you were pulled into this mess,” the berserker stated as he looked at the ground. “I know it's not really your thing anymore to gallivant around time and space.”

“Please ... no, it's OK.” she said to the huge fur as she gave him a crooked smile. “Joe, you and I are the only ones that know the whole story so just forget about it. We'll get out of this mess soon enough.”

“No, I'm serious about this.” Torvald retorted. “You have other things you need to be doing. You don't need to be stuck here on this god forsaken planet.”

“Please, Torvald. I told you it's all right.” she replied again with a rather serious look on her muzzle. “Come on; let's get inside where it's no doubt warmer than out here.”

As they turned to walk towards the cabin, Torvald accidentally brushed against her newest weapons acquisition, her Valkyrie's spear.

“Yeouch! That darn thing shocked me again!” he stated as he rubbed his arm. “Can't you be more careful with that pointy thing?” he suggested to the filly, who was smiling back at him.

“Well, quit touching my spear.” she hinted as they walked inside. The filly was still smiling just a little as she finally sat down in the room to rest.

###

“You should give up your game.” the older entity said in an urgent tone of voice. **“The gods will destroy you when they see this.”**

“They cannot destroy me, they can only cause me to have to regroup,” the younger entity replied to the other. “I will turn the equines and that tigress before I am found out.”

“You are taking foolish chances.” the older one stated in a smug, knowing tone. **“The gods will punish you greatly for this. Let them all return to their realms.”**

“You are weak. I will have them as my warriors yet.” the younger one replied as he plotted his game finishing moves.

“I have warned you.” the older entity stated as he began to devise his own plans.

Chapter 8

“Fox And Hound”

The ever-growing group of furs had returned to the warmth of the cabin and huddled around the fire to warm up. Kellan continued to prepare their meal while the filly was briefed on what they knew so far.

“Gray kalis?” the Shieldmaiden commented. “I have never fought against something like that. *Sejd* must be involved with those.” It was apparent that the filly was not happy with this situation by the way she sat there, continuing to stay alert.

“We have been here for five days now,” the berserker told the filly. “Did Conrad get in touch with you?” Torvald was in hopes that his family was aware of the situation.

“I spoke with them not more than a few hours before I was brought here.” she replied. “Time must run at a different speed here. We have experienced this before.”

“That is good.” the berserker said with a sound of relief in his voice. “Maybe when we are taken home, we will still be able to have our weekend to relax.” He reached out and hugged the tigress while he kissed her on the cheek.

“I hope so too.” Victoria chimed in. “We paid too much to let that weekend go.” She was purring at the thought of finally having her husband all to herself.

As they sat there warming by the fire, a figure shimmered into view. It was a very large solid black equine with copper colored eyes. He was wearing an ornate tunic and hide leggings and he was holding an incredibly large battle axe. There was an aura around him radiating energy that all of them could feel.

“I mean you no harm.” he said as he stood there, the top of his head almost touching the ceiling. “I have come here to help you if I can.” The foursome were giving the huge fur their full attention as he continued to talk to them.

“I have taken this form so you could hear what I have to say. I am the entity known as 'War'. I have been watching all of you since you were brought here against your wills.” The giant figure looked to see that they were paying attention to him before he continued. “Myself along with the entity known as 'Compassion' have been helping you when we could. Another entity, whose name I will not mention wants all of you as his soldiers.”

The berserker began to say something but the black equine cut him off. “I have little time left so listen carefully. Do not get angry with one another as this will help the other entity to reach his goal. Your gods have sent out many to search for you. It is only

a matter of time before you are found and returned home. I only hope that I can delay this game of turning all of you until the gods find you. I must leave now.”

Just as he had come, the huge fur shimmered and left.

###

The Archangels commenced to gathering so they could begin their search for the immortal pair. Michael was still tending to his bottom lip that had been split open substantially worse than the upper one.

“Will you let me suture that up?” the angel Raphael asked as he looked at the damage that had been inflicted by the filly. He hadn't remembered ever seeing an angel that was that badly injured in battle before.

“No; It'll be OK.” Michael replied as it began to bleed again. “Well, yeah ... maybe you should suture it up.” He was looking at the towel that was being saturated by his own blood. “We need to make amends with the filly and soon.”

Gabriel was looking around to see that all seven of the major Archangels were present. By the doorway stood Uriel and Raguel. Sitting at a table nearby were Remiel and Zerachiel. As soon as Michael's lip was sewn up, they would be on their way. They took this time waiting to carefully go over their plans.

“I will try to get a sentience trail from Loke's travels,” Uriel stated as he checked his broadsword for sharpness. “I have worked with him before so I shouldn't have any trouble.”

“I will search the underworlds with Remiel,” Raphael said as he worked on his fellow angel's lip. “I have been there on occasion.” Michael winced as the other archangel started to stitch him up.

“I will go to the pair's last whereabouts and try to follow their trail to wherever they are.” Zerachiel told the others. He was sure he could trace the pair if he had their starting point.

“I will search the parallel worlds for them.” Raguel told them as he sipped some tea.

“OK, Michael and I will search the nether realms for them.” Gabriel stated as he put his broadsword in its scabbard. “I ask you all to be careful out there. Remember what happened to Zacharial. Good luck and good hunting. May we be successful in our search.” He then turned to Michael and said, “Let's go. Time is wasting.” Within a few moments, the angels had all shimmered and left on their missions.

###

"I will have them as my warriors soon." the larger, younger entity said in a smug tone of voice. He was busy preparing his final moves.

"You are running out of time." the older entity stated as he watched the game.
"You must return them to their realm before you are found out."

"I have told you, I am not afraid." the younger entity said in an angry tone.

"I have warned you." the older one stated as he scanned for signs of the searchers.
"I will not be a part of this."

"You may leave if you wish. I am almost done." the younger one said in a dismissive tone.

"You are right. I am leaving." the older one said as he turned to look for a safer place to watch from.

###

The marooned foursome were eating their evening meal while they discussed what had just happened.

"If that was 'War', why didn't he try to recruit us?" the tigress pondered out loud. She thought that the entity would have relished the idea of immortal soldiers under his control.

"War needs many furs to battle against one another," the filly replied. "We are too few in number to keep him amused."

"You are right," the larger equine stated. "All wars involved many furs that gave their lives for their cause. This entity needs many furs to feed off of their fear and anger. We would be less than a snack for him." All of the others agreed with him on this.

"Not to change the subject, but how will we sleep tonight?" Victoria asked. "We don't have enough bed space to go around." Kellan had his bed and the Svensens were sleeping on the mat and the couch wasn't padded at all. This seemed like a dilemma to her.

"That is a problem, isn't it?" Kellan said as he began to think about it. "I still have the air mattresses but I'm not sure if they will even hold air. We'll check them out after we

eat.” With that said, the two stallions finished their meal quickly to start checking the mattress.

###

Loke was sitting across the table from Odin and Freya. The one-eyed wolf was giving him a hard stare as the trickster tried his best to explain the situation.

“I was finishing my meal when the berserker pulled me away from here. I didn't have time to summon Freya before I was taken.” The weasel was looking at the ground as he told them this information.

“It is true, Odin.” the vixen said to the one-eyed wolf. “I had gotten up to retrieve some wine only to come back and find Loke gone.”

“Very well. I will be patient with all of this.” the wolf told them. “I beg of you please don't leave one another's sight from now on. It is imperative that we retrieve them as soon as possible.”

The vixen and the weasel just nodded in agreement.

###

Valerie had been awakened by some noises from the family room of the house so she got up and crept through the house armed with one of Conrad's aluminum softball bats. The noises that she heard were soft but nonetheless from inside the house. She could see that the desk top light in the family room was on and the shadows of some fur moving around were showing on the hallway floor. As she turned the corner to confront the intruder, she was stopped by the sight in front of her.

“Uh, I'm Zerachiel the Archangel,” the feline with the wings stated. “I am tracing Torvald and Victoria's travels.” The angel was looking at a stunned tigress holding a bat in her paws. “Please, I will not harm you.” he offered as he stood there looking at the tigress.

Valerie finally got her composure back and lowered the bat but she didn't let go of it just yet. “So ... if you're looking for my sister and her husband, why are you here?” she asked the winged feline. This was just creeping her out to no end that angels and weasels and other such things have free reign to pop in and out of their house at will.

“I am trying to get a 'fix', or a starting point to work from on the immortal pair's location so I can track them.” the angel replied. “If you could tell me where they were the last time you spoke with them, it would help immensely.”

“They were on a second honeymoon in Half Moon Bay when this all happened.” she told the winged feline. “They were supposed to be staying here,” she added, showing the angel the brochure from the bed and breakfast. “Will this help you out?” she asked as a tear ran down her cheek.

“You have helped greatly with our task.” he replied to her as he wiped the tear away from her muzzle. “Please have faith in our ability to find them.” he said to her as he smiled and shimmered out of sight.

The tigress sat down on the couch in the family room, trying her best to hold her emotions in check. It felt like a good thing that the angels were looking for her family but on the other hand, it wasn't like they were broken down on the side of the road somewhere. What made her upset the most was the fact that she couldn't do anything about the situation at all except wait.

“Valerie, are you OK?” Barbara asked as she sat down next to her lover and put her arm around the tigress. “I woke up to see you weren't in bed so I got up to look for you.” The ocelot pulled the tigress over to her and held her tightly as she said, “They will be found soon. We have to wait and be patient.”

“I'm sorry, I'm just very upset over all of this,” the tigress said as she wiped the tears from her eyes. “I hope we hear something soon.”

“Why don't I summon Loke again?” the young tiger asked as he came into the family room. He was holding a longstaff in his paws as he sat down in Torvald's favorite chair. “He said he would be nearby if we needed him.” Conrad was looking upset by this turn of events.

“Yeah, maybe you should summon him,” the tigress said quietly as she tried to hold her emotions in check for the young tiger's sake. Momentarily the weasel shimmered into view along with a red fox vixen in a blue robe.

“I told you it was the young tiger summoning me,” Loke said to the vixen. “Well, now you get to meet the berserker's family.” Everyone was looking at the pair that had just come into view.

“This is Conrad, the tigress' son,” Loke said as he motioned towards the young tiger. “This is Valerie, the tigress' sister and her lover, Barbara,” he continued, motioning towards the two felines on the couch. “Everyone, this is Freya, goddess of love and war.”

“It is nice to meet Torvald's family.” she said as she bowed slightly to them. “We had hoped that it was the berserker summoning Loke this time. I was going to go with him and pull everyone back with my powers.”

“Do ... do you think you can do that?” the young tiger asked. Conrad was trying to be brave for his aunt's sake but his stammering gave him away immediately. Whenever the young tiger would get upset, he would stammer quite badly at times.

“I am sure that I can at least trace him to his location,” Freya replied. “Once we are sure of where they are at, we will be able to pull them back home.”

“That sounds complicated.” Valerie commented as she pondered that thought.

“It is not complicated, just time consuming, that's all.” Loke said as they began to shimmer out. “We will be nearby so please keep a positive a...” He was cut off as they shimmered out of the room.

###

“What have you heard?” the older entity asked of the beautiful femme entity. They had met on another planet to discuss this matter away from the others.

“The Norse gods are mad.” she replied, looking to make sure they weren't followed.

“As are the Celestial gods.” he commented. The older entity was getting bothered by all of this. The younger entity was causing trouble for all of the other entities.

“Try to find a safe haven when the warriors of the gods arrive here.” the femme entity suggested to her older compadre.

“Yes, I will seek shelter. The ruckus that will ensue will be worse than playing a practical joke on Surt.” the older one said as they 'stood' there. **“We must go before we are found out.”**

Chapter 9

“Actions Of The Gods”

Zerachiel was standing in the middle of the room where the immortal pair had been staying. The bed covers and pillows were missing from the bed and he could detect a slight aura where some entity had been standing in the room. The winged feline walked around the room, concentrating carefully to feel their life forces amongst all the others. It was obvious that whoever did this was a powerful being.

The only force he could clearly detect was the one from the entity proper. “This is not good.” he said to himself as he tried to pull in the immortal couple's signatures. After a few more minutes, he was sure that he had detected something. It was another signature that was very faint but distinct. Sometimes furs were known to carry another life force signature on them after being in contact with another fur. “I will try to follow after this particular signature.” he thought as he shimmered and left the room.

The Archangel reappeared in another dwelling that had a certain familiar 'feel' to it but there was no fur present. He knew this force, it felt like some fur he had been near to recently. Zerachiel walked slowly around the room, analyzing the life forces that he felt until he noticed a shrine to the Norse gods on a low table. There were only two furs that he knew of that had a shrine like that. He quickly put two and two together and hurriedly shimmered out of sight to reappear in the home of Christopher. It didn't take him long to track down the lion and give him the news.

“The Shieldmaiden has most likely been taken by the same entity or entities that took the immortal ones,” the feline stated to Christopher. “I can feel the entity's after-presence in her home.” The lion could see that his archangel was highly disturbed by this discovery.

“**Oh Nuts!** That's the last thing I wanted to hear! Whoever is behind this has Aslaug too!!” the lion spat out as he face-pawed himself and shook his head. The lion looked up at the angel as he asked, “You are quite sure of this?”

“I am very sure.” the feline angel said as he chewed on his lower lip. “I have been near her when Gabriel and Michael went to apologize to her so I am sure this is her signature.”

After the lion got his composure back, he quickly got up to leave himself. “You will go with me to see Odin.” he told the angel as he prepared to shimmer out.

“Yes sir.” the angel replied as they both shimmered out of sight.

###

Torvald and Kellan had finished their repairs to one of the air mattresses and were pumping it up with the built-in paw pump. “This will be perfect for the filly to sleep on,” the huge equine stated. “It’s not big enough for two so she gets the mattress by default.”

“I do not need a mattress to sleep on,” the filly told them as she sat on the couch with her spear across her lap. “I will most likely stay up and keep watch for us.” she added, looking to see if they understood her.

“Aslaug, we are safe for right now,” the tigress said in an attempt to get the filly to settle down. “The gods will find us in due time and we’ll all go home.” As the filly finally started to unwind, the tigress took the Dane axe that was sitting beside the filly and propped it up against the wall with the rest of their weapons. The tigress then reached for Aslaug’s spear only to have the filly pull it away from Victoria’s grasp.

“I will keep this with me, if you don’t mind.” she said with a concerned look on her muzzle. “It will make me feel more at ease to have it nearby.” she said as she rested it across her lap again. The Shieldmaiden had told Torvald how she had come across the spear because he was aware of its energy field. This only proved the fact that he had not told his mate her secret. The filly sat there and tried to not fall asleep but the need for rest was becoming great as her eyelids kept slamming shut on her.

“Maybe you are right about the mattress,” Aslaug said as she yawned wide and stretched her arms out. “Maybe a little sleep would be good. That was a hard walk down here from the mountainside.” She then stood and did some stretching exercises to unwind some more and stretch her stiff legs a bit.

Kellan got out one of the sleeping bags that he had saved and laid it out for Aslaug. As everyone prepared to go to sleep, the filly said a prayer to her gods that was short and to the point.

“May you find us and return us to our world as quickly as possible.”

###

After everyone had lay down to sleep, Torvald was feeling extremely restless so he went out on the porch and looked up at the stars above. “When will this end?” he thought to himself as he sat down on the end of the porch and leaned up against the cabin wall. He was thinking about nothing in particular when his other half came outside to see where her mate had gotten off to.

“Torvald, are you all right?” she asked as she sat down on the porch next to him. “Something has been bothering you ever since Aslaug arrived.” She looked over to see

that he was staring off into space. "There's something about that spear she carries," the tigress said in a quiet voice. "I think you know. When I touched it ... I felt something, like energy from it. It made my fur stand up on end and it shocked me just a little." she related to her mate.

"You are right, there is something very special about that spear." the berserker replied to her. "Joe Latrans and I know the whole story but I am held to complete secrecy by the filly. She made me promise not to tell another living or undead soul. The rest of the squad doesn't even know the whole story. The only reason I knew something was up with that spear was the fact that I can see the energy coming from it." He swallowed hard as he got a cold shiver up his spine. "I have seen those particular kind of spears before, they're Valkyrie's spears." His mind momentarily drifted back to that day in Saxony so many years ago. A Valkyrie had argued with the white warriors that had carried his dead body off the heath. His soul had stood by and watched the argument carry on for some time until Frigg herself intervened on the warrior's behalf.

"That sounds like some real serious stuff." Victoria commented as she wrapped the quilt around herself tighter. "Maybe some day, do you think she'll tell me the story about her getting her spear?"

"Trust me," her mate retorted. "You don't want to know how she received her spear. It made my blood curdle when she told me." Just thinking about what Aslaug had said to him caused another cold shiver to go up his spine.

He sat there for a moment more before he stood up. "Let's go to bed." he said as he helped the tigress up off the porch. Before they went inside, he stopped his mate and turned her to face him. "You are to tell no fur, living, undead or otherwise, what I have just told you." he said in a serious tone of voice. The stallion had a very serious look on his muzzle as he stood there waiting for his mate's answer.

"OK, if it's that important, I promise to stay quiet." she replied to him. "You know I would never do something to hurt the filly. She's a very good friend to both of us."

The tigress looked at her husband with a very concerned look on her face. "Not to change the subject but I'm afraid that we will be here for a long time." she stated as she stood closer to her husband to stay warm. "This is not looking good so far." she added as a tear slipped down her cheek.

"We will get out of here," her husband replied to her. "It might take a few days but the gods will find us." He then herded the tigress back off to bed again.

###

Christopher and Zerachiel materialized in Odin's realm and began to head towards his location. The one-eyed wolf was surprised to see the two of them coming towards him in a hurry with such a concerned look on their muzzles.

“What is wrong my friend?” he asked as he shook paws Norse-style with the lion. This was quite unusual for the lion to even step foot in his realm so there had to be a good reason for his appearance.

“We believe that the entity that took Torvald and Victoria has taken Aslaug as well.” the lion told Odin as they sat down. The wolf could see that Christopher was worried by this new turn of events. “Zerachiel is sure of this.” the lion added as he sipped some of the wine that Odin offered to him.

“I had been dreading to hear some fur say that.” the wolf stated as he leaned across the table. “I am sure now that it's the entity known as 'Violence' that has them. He wants them for his personal warriors.”

“I should have suspected as much.” the lion commented. “That particular entity may be easy for us to track down.” he added. “I will recall my angels and tell them of this new development.”

“And I will recall my warriors to give them new instructions.” the wolf stated as he began to plan their next moves.

“Tell Frigg that I said 'Hello', will you? I will stay in touch with you, my friend.” the lion told the wolf as the two felines shimmered out of sight.

###

The feline trio were sitting around, trying to settle their nerves. Barbara was making some hot chocolate with a small amount of mint in it. Conrad was sitting next to his aunt, trying to pull himself together. He had begun crying when Loke and Freya had left so suddenly.

“I hope they find mom and dad soon.” the young tiger commented as he wiped his eyes that were red from crying. “Why would someone do this to them?” he pondered out loud. Because he was an only child, the young tiger had a strong bond with his mother. When the stallion had begun to date his mother, Torvald always treated him as his own child. Because of that, the young tiger also had a deep attachment for his stepfather.

“They’ll be OK.” Valerie said to her nephew. “They can defend themselves if need be.” she reminded Conrad. While they sat there, Barbara brought their beverages out to them.

“You two look a mess,” she commented as she sat down on the other side of Valerie. “It won't help anybody if we get all worked up about it.” While they sat there and sipped their drinks, Conrad began to think about all of the good times he had been through with his parents. He put his drink down and picked up his hammer pendant that he wore around his neck. Holding the pendant in his paws, he closed his eyes and silently prayed to the gods for help.

*“I am new to this so I am not sure if I am doing this right or not.
All I ask is for your help in returning my mother and father to this world.
We all miss them very much.”*

The two femmes eventually shuffled Conrad off to his bed again and then returned to their bed. “I know you're upset,” Barbara said to the tigress. “We need to show a strong face to Conrad so he will feel more secure with what's going on.”

“You're right. I need to pull myself together.” Valerie replied. “I know the gods are doing what is necessary to get them back.” The two lovers finally drifted off to sleep in one another's arms.

###

“There are many out searching for them.” the older entity pointed out to the younger entity. **“You are flirting with disaster.”**

“I am almost done.” the younger one stated in a confident tone. “I will have them before the sun warms their dwelling.”

“Odin has sent Thor and Hel's daugr legion after you by name,” the older one said in an even tone. **“You are doomed to fail and be destroyed.”**

“What do you mean ... daugr?” the younger one asked in a curious tone of voice.

“The undead.” the older one replied. **“They cannot be turned as they have no soul. The daugr will overwhelm and destroy you. You will not be able to stop them.”**

“I ... I am n ... not afraid of soul-less warriors.” the younger one said cautiously with just a hint of fear in his voice.

“You should be very afraid.” the older one said coolly. **“Return them all to their realm before you are destroyed.”**

As the older entity watched, the younger one returned a previously removed object back to the field. After a few moments, the younger one added more objects to another area of the field.

"This," the younger one stated, "will be my best finishing move ever."

"I will watch from over there," the older one stated, indicating a spot in space and time that was many leagues away. **"I will not get caught in the crossfire. I have to say it was nice knowing you."**

"Suit yourself," the younger one said flippantly. "I will finish my work now."

###

Gabriel and Michael had gone back to the Shieldmaiden's home to try and sense where she had been taken to. They had carefully retraced her movements through the house by her lingering life force imprinted on objects that she had touched. Both of them kneeled in front of her shrine, feeling her life force very strong right there.

"I feel this is the strongest force in the dwelling," Michael stated as he put his hands over her shrine. "She was here only hours ago."

"I agree with you," Gabriel replied as he slowly stood and held out his hands to capture the force's direction. "I have it now. Follow me closely. I am not sure how strong the trail is." he said as the pair prepared themselves to shimmer out.

The pair shimmered out and in just a split second they were on a mountainside standing in several feet of snow. The sky was shades of blue, red and orange as the sun was beginning to peek over the top of the mountains across the valley.

"This is not good." Gabriel said as he looked around them. There were no visual clues at all that would lead them to the filly.

"Look down there." Michael said in an excited tone. "There's smoke coming up from the valley. I'll wager they're down there."

"Uh ... we have a new problem," the smaller archangel stated. "Our tracking senses don't work here." After a few seconds Gabriel added, "We can't shimmer either."

"Well, we better head that way until somebody comes to rescue us." Michael said as he began to walk down the mountain.

“This is messed up.” Gabriel muttered as he followed behind his partner. “I am with Michael again and I am in trouble once more ...”

###

The Siberian husky was slowly realizing that he was propped up against a fallen log and it was light out, possibly early morning. His head hurt and his body seemed unusually stiff to him. “Darned arthritis acting up.” he muttered as he opened his eyes to see a solid white equine mare cooking something over an open fire.

As he tried to stand the equine came over to him and kneeled down beside him. “Jim, are you all right?” she asked as she helped him to sit up better. The husky could see that she was wearing an elaborately decorated white tunic and furred leather leggings of a style he had never seen before.

“Yeah, I think I'm OK but I had this bad dream that I was killed by a wild kali's poison bite.” he told the mare as he rubbed his muzzle. He then noticed that he was wearing a tunic and leggings too. “Am ... am I d ... dead?” he asked hesitantly. The mare was white like an angel so maybe he was dead after all.

“You are no longer dead.” the equine replied. “You are now quite alive, no thanks to the entity that is playing games on this planet.” She went to the fire and poured a cup of steaming liquid from a pot for the husky and brought it to him. “It is coffee but I am not sure I made it right.” she confessed. “I scanned your mind to see what was a good elixir to help wake you up.”

Jim smelled it and then sipped it cautiously to see that it was as strong as any that he had experienced in the military. “This is good coffee” he commented as he sipped it some more. He could see that the equine was smiling at him. “So, who are you anyway? Are you an angel?” he asked out of curiosity.

“I am the entity called Compassion.” she told him as she smiled warmly at him. “I have taken on this form so that I may interact with you.” she added. “You are not far from your friend Kellan. He has a cabin over there,” she said as she pointed in the proper direction. “I will accompany you to his domicile so that you will arrive safely.”

The white filly helped the husky to his feet and they took off in the direction of Kellan's cabin. While they were walking towards their destination, she stopped for a moment. “We will no doubt need these.” she said as she caused two compound bows to appear out of thin air. “These weapons you should be familiar with.”

“Wow!” was all that Jim could say. When he took one of the bows from the mare to examine it, she caused two quivers full of arrows to appear.

“We are ready now.” she stated as they continued to head towards the cabin.

###

“I must stop for a moment,” the smaller archangel said as he sat down on a fallen log on the mountainside. “I have another thorn in my foot.” He was trying his best to pick it out of one of his pads on his left foot. “I feel strange, like I am no longer immortal.” he stated as he tried to get the foreign object out of his foot. “There are scrapes on my arms that are still bleeding.” he pointed out to Michael as he sat there. “Will you try to get this thorn out? I can't see it.”

“OK, let me see,” Michael asked as he knelt down to see better. “Yeah, this one's in there deep. Give me a minute and I'll have it out.” Michael used one of his claws to dig into the pad, eventually dislodging the thorn. “I think you are right,” he mused as he looked at the scrapes on his own arms. “We are not immortal on this planet.”

“I hope it's not much further.” Gabriel thought out loud. He could see the valley floor below. He then ripped a strip from the bottom of his tunic and wrapped his foot to protect it. “I will need a long rest after all of this excitement.”

“You and me both.” Michael chimed in as they continued on down the mountainside.

###

“Ah, angels that are mortal now,” the younger entity exclaimed as he rubbed his 'paws' together. “Those would make excellent soldiers.”

“**You are completely out of your mind if you think you can do that!**” the older entity shouted out from his vantage point that was out of the crossfire. “**You should just as well hang yourself right now. That would be suicide! The gods will destroy you for that!**”

“I have this under complete control.” the younger entity said as he made more plans.

“**Yeah, right ...**” the older entity said as he shook his head. “**You are playing a deadly game now.**”

###

While all of this was going on, another entity looked on at the game unfolding below. This game was not an entertaining game to that entity; the entity was hoping that it would change soon. Some of the players seemed very strong and one particular fur carried an instrument that had great power. It was hoped that this game would end

soon, before the gods became involved. It didn't look that way anymore. The entity that was as old as time itself began to pay close attention.

Chapter 10

“Strength In Numbers”

The younger larger entity was checking the progress of the game when he noticed something amiss with the field. He had returned the long-deceased husky's remains to the game only to see that the body wasn't where he had left it. He looked closer to see that there were two sets of tracks leaving that drop off point towards the cabin. One set was canid and the other set were obviously wrong as they were equine in nature.

“Somebody is still interfering with my work!” the young entity muttered as he prepared to make another move happen. *“They will now pay with their lives for this interference!”*

He smiled as he put several new 'objects' into the game.

###

Aslaug had been awake and up for some time, bothered by the current situation they were in. In an effort to at least be helpful to the group, she had brought in more wood and re-stoked the fire. A trio of the non-sentient badger-looking animals had ended up on the business end of her spear and they were currently cooking over the fire. The slight noises that she had made while stirring around the cabin had woke up the tigress so they were both sitting by the fire, watching the food cook.

“I hope the gods find us soon.” the filly said to no fur in particular. She turned the meat that was roasting and stirred the fire some more, making the blaze a little bigger. She was thinking that the smells of this food cooking over the fire reminded her of her home world. Those memories caused her to smile a small, wistful smile.

“The entity said they had sent out many to find us. I hope he's right” the tigress commented as she helped with breakfast. “Being out in the wilderness like this would be fun for the weekend but I'm not sure I would have made it twenty-two years.” Victoria liked to camp out at the lake but this was just a little over the top for her likings.

“Victoria, this is how I lived on my home world.” the Shieldmaiden told the tigress. “It was a hard life but we didn't know anything else. The modern world has much that we take for granted.” The tigress was nodding her head in agreement to this statement.

“I guess I'll never say we have a hard life again,” Victoria said as the meat cooked away. “I know I won't take things for granted anymore.”

“I think we should wake the others,” the filly stated. “The meat's just about ready.”

###

Jim Federline and the equine entity were following a path that was leading in the direction they needed to go. He had noticed some fruit hanging from a tree that looked like apples. "Are these edible?" he asked as he pulled one from the tree.

"Those are quite edible." she replied with a smile. "I put these trees here for Kellan when he didn't have much else to eat." The mare picked one off for her snack. "I particularly like the flavor and texture of this fruit that your friend likes." she added as they walked along.

"This is wonderful." the husky commented as he devoured the fruit in his paw. "I have never had an apple this tasty in my life." He was getting ready to bite into another one when he heard a noise off to his left in the brush.

"Over there" he said quietly as he got the equine's attention. He motioned towards the sounds and pulled an arrow out of his quiver. It was a modern style arrow with a razor-sharp broadhead hunting point on it. He nocked the arrow and prepared himself for impending trouble. The entity did the same and listened carefully to the noises Jim had heard. Momentarily five black and brown kalis burst out from the undergrowth, looking ready to kill the first thing that they saw.

Jim quickly dispatched one of the kalis closest to him and scanned the area to track the remaining ones. He looked over to see that the equine had dispatched two of the kalis with one very good shot, the arrow jammed through both animals. "Be careful." he said as he nocked another arrow. He could hear both of the remaining canids in the thicket, panting as they waited to pounce again.

"Do not let them bite you." the equine stated as she nocked another arrow herself. "It's possible their bite may be venomous." The pair was trying to anticipate the canid's return when the kalis both burst from the brush. Jim quickly dispatched another one while the remaining kali clamped down on the entity's right thigh and began to shake it viciously.

"Kill it!" she yelled as she hit at the kali's head with the counterbalance of the bow. The husky quickly launched an arrow through the creature from point blank range, a perfect heart shot. The stricken canid convulsed and died, finally letting go of the equine's leg and falling to the ground.

"Are you all right?" the husky asked the injured entity. He could see that she was not doing very well from the bite she had just sustained. She was looking quite bad, like she might possibly pass out and her lips and tongue were getting pale and blue. The thing

that was scaring him the most was the fact that the entity was starting to foam at the mouth just a little.

"I will be fine in a few minutes," she replied as she sat down on the ground with the husky's help and shook her head to clear her mind. "It hurts like nothing I have ever experienced before." she mused as the poison coursing its way through her body made her sick. She blinked her eyes a few times as she turned to look at the husky and said "Now I know what it feels like to be mortal."

"Here, let me help you over to that log." Jim suggested. "You'll be more comfortable leaning back against something." After a few moments of thought, the entity agreed to it. As they sat there waiting for the mare to recover, she asked him a question.

"Where did you learn to shoot a bow like that?" she asked as she tried to get comfortable on the ground. It was clear she was just trying to keep her mind working as her body shook off the poisonous venom in her system.

"I took archery in school," the husky replied. "I really like the sport and I found out Kellan was into archery too. We were going to bow hunt deer when this all happened."

"You are very good with a bow." she commented. "You would be a worthy archer for any king."

"Well, I'm OK at it" the husky replied sheepishly. "There are far better archers out there than me, Kellan being one of them. I'm not sure I would want to be a king's archer anyway. It sounds *waaay* too formal to me." That last statement made the mare chuckle just a little.

As they sat there, the husky became curious about something the mare had told him. "You said that I was alive again. How can that be?" He always thought that dead meant dead and there was no reversing it. "So I really did die from a kali's bite? Is that what you're trying to tell me?" It was clear that Jim was confused by these ideas.

The entity had to think for a moment about how to break this to him. "We entities possess the powers to do things that you would deem quite impossible." She wiped the froth from the corner of her mouth with her forearm before she continued. "Your life force was taken from you by the kalis that bit you when you first came here. When the entity known as 'Violence' put you back on the field, he didn't want you alive, he just wanted your dead body to be found by Kellan so your friend would get mad. That was so he could turn Kellan to his ways."

The white mare stopped and took a few deep breaths to clear her mind. Her head was beginning to pound from the poison's effects, making it hard to think. "I observed what happened so I drew on the other entities to restore your life force to you. I have one

other thing to tell you so please don't be upset with me.” She waited until she was sure he wouldn't freak out. “Jim, the only way to give you back your life force was to make you immortal.”

The husky was visibly shaken by that last statement that the mare had made. “I don't understand,” he said as his head started to spin. “How can I ... NO, that can't be!”

She put her paw over his mouth to quiet him as she said, “Cut yourself and see what happens.”

Jim took one of the arrows and used the tip to cut his finger. The cut began to heal right before his eyes. “Oh My God!!” the husky blurted out as he sat down hard on the ground from shock. As he watched, the cut healed within a few more moments.

“I must tell you this,” the femme equine stated rather formally. “You are only immortal as long as you are here on this planet. When you leave this realm and world, you will certainly be quite mortal again.” She sat there and made sure that he understood that particular fact. “I guess I should tell you to enjoy it while you can. This is something very special that you are experiencing right now. Very few have ever been made immortal and been allowed to stay that way.”

“Uh, so why are you sick from the poison? Aren't you immortal?” he asked now that he was totally confused. He could see that the mare was in great pain from her injury. It was scaring him that she was still foaming at the mouth a little.

“I am immortal in a sense.” she replied in a strained voice as she squeezed her eyes shut from the waves of pain that she was suffering. “My essence that makes me what I am is timeless but this physical body that I am using reacts just like yours. I must wait for my body to reject the poison as you would have had to do if you had gotten bit.”

“Can't you just heal yourself?” Jim asked as he held her close to him in an attempt to comfort her. “If this is hurting you so badly, what can you do for yourself?”

“I appreciate your concern,” she replied to him as she clenched her paws from the pain. “When I took on this form, there were certain restrictions and dangers associated with it. I am trapped within this form while I am injured. I must be healed before I can leave this form and it is remotely possible for me to perish. It has happened before to other entities.” It was becoming obvious to the husky that the mare was taking a great chance with her very existence just to help him.

The entity rested for a few more minutes then asked the husky, “Please, will you help me up? We must get moving now.” He could see the pain in her eyes as she stood up with his help. Once on her hooves, she staggered for a moment until she got her

balance back. It didn't make much sense to move so soon but he didn't particularly want to argue with an entity this morning.

"We are not far away from our destination," she said in her strained voice as they began to slowly make their way towards their destination. "You will be among friends soon enough."

###

Thor was standing in a realm, and he was not comfortable with the idea of being there. It was extremely hot and the smell of sulfur was heavy in the air. He was waiting for the entity that dwelt in this realm to make his appearance.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?" the old hothead himself asked as he came into the room with the brass doors. "I DO NOT HAVE TIME TO BOTHER WITH YOU RIGHT NOW. CANNOT YOU SEE THAT I AM BUSY?"

"I am looking for the entity known as 'Violence', you old fire demon." the Thunder God replied to him coolly. The rottweiler was checking his grip on his hammer as he stood there.

"WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I WOULD TELL YOU, OF ALL FURS?" Surt replied to him. The room grew hotter as the entity drew closer to the god.

"I would turn loose Hel's daugr warriors on you if you do not talk to me." Thor replied casually. There were over two hundred armed undead warriors standing in ranks behind the god of thunder, ready to do his bidding. It was clear that Thor planned to make good on that threat if need be.

"RUMOR HAS IT THAT HE IS TRYING TO TURN THE IMMORTAL EQUINE AND HIS TIGRESS TO HIS WILL." Surt said casually as he came closer to Thor. The room was becoming unbearably hot from the entity's presence, causing the Norse god to sweat heavily. Even Thor's armor and hammer were getting very warm to the touch from the heat.

"HE CANNOT TURN THEM. THERE IS A POWERFUL BOND BETWEEN THEM THAT EVEN I CANNOT UNDO." The room got cooler as the fire entity said "HE WILL FAIL MISERABLY. HE MAY ULTIMATELY BE DESTROYED FOR DOING THIS THING."

The rottweiler began to turn and leave but the entity got his attention. "THEIR BOND OF LOVE, FUELED BY THE ANGER OF SOME FUR TRYING TO SEPARATE THEM, IS VERY POWERFUL." he informed the Thunder God. "YOU WILL SEE THAT VIOLENCE WILL FAIL. LOOK IN THE NETHER REGIONS FOR THEM."

Thor nodded to the entity and left with his daugr army, headed towards the nether regions as Surt had suggested.

After the Norse god had left, Surt went over to his doors and started to close them. He stopped for a moment to look at the dent that the huge Berserker had made in one of the doors with his hoof, shaking his head as he touched it. "I SHOULD MAKE THE BERSERKER FIX MY DOOR." he said as he finally closed the doors to his chambers. "VIOLENCE HAS DONE SOME STUPID THINGS BEFORE, BUT EVEN I AM NOT THAT STUPID." he muttered as he went back to his work of destroying things.

###

The foursome in the cabin had finished eating their morning meal and were trying to decide what to do next. It wasn't long before a voice was heard outside the cabin that caused the smaller equine to get a shocked look on his face.

"Kellan? Kel ol' buddy, are you in there?" the voice called out to him. Kellan quickly got up and went out the door to see if his mind was playing tricks on him. He looked around to see two figures standing about fifty feet away. One was a white mare and the other was a familiar male Siberian husky.

"Jim? Is that you?" Kellan asked as he began to run towards his friend. "Dammit! This had better not be a mirage!" he said excitedly as he finally reached the husky and gave him a strong hug just to make sure he had substance.

"Yeah, it's me" he replied to the equine after Kellan let go of him. "This filly and her friends brought me back from the dead." Kellan's jaw dropped as he took in that last piece of information. He could tell by the way that Jim had told him that he wasn't kidding.

"Well, aren't you going to invite us in?" the husky asked with a smile on his muzzle. "I'm tired from all that's gone on this morning and I could use some rest."

"Yeah, sure ... uh ... come inside." the equine said as he was trying to digest all of the new information he had been given. Kellan was looking at the filly that was with Jim,

thinking something was wrong with this picture. He then noticed the blood all over her right leg.

“Do you need help with that?” he asked as he indicated her right leg. It looked like she had lost quite a bit of blood from her injuries.

“I will be fine.” she replied as she began to limp towards the door. She could feel that her injuries were just starting to sap her energy away from her as she healed. “If you would,” she asked, “Help me inside, please? I am weak from loss of blood.”

Kellan helped her by supporting her as they went inside. Once he had put the mare down in a chair, he looked at his friend again. “I guess I should introduce my guests to one another.” As he finished, he asked the inevitable. “I’m sorry but I don’t know your name.” he said as he looked at the white mare.

“I am not what I appear to be,” she answered back. She was looking very tired as she told them, “I am the entity known as Compassion. I have taken this form so I could interact with the husky.” She could sense that they were curious about the blood all over her leg so she told them, “I am immortal in a certain sense. This body is much like your own. I was bit by a brown and black kali so my body had to work hard to reject the venom.”

“I’m being a bad host right now,” Kellan said as he put together some food for Jim and the entity. “Both of you are probably hungry from walking.” he stated as he gave them some meat and vegetables and some water to wash it down with.

“Thank you.” the white mare said as she tasted the meat. “This is good.” she said as she took another bite.

“Yeah, this is very good” Jim said as he tried the roasted tubers. “This is real good, Kel. Any chance you have more of this?” he asked as he devoured the food on his plate.

“We have plenty, just not cooked.” Kellan answered. “I’ll cook some more in a while.” He was glad that Jim was finally back with him. Now if they could just go home.

###

Hel was standing with her father, who was trying to work out a reasonable payment for the use of her daugr army. “I am sure that Odin will compensate you well for your help.” the Trickster told his daughter. “I have been told that he is thankful for the use of your soul-less soldiers.”

“He should be thankful,” the femme wolf stated as she looked at her father. “My daugr army cannot be turned by the will of that entity. They are without mortal soul.”

“I will tell Odin what you have suggested to me as payment.” Loke said to his daughter.
“I am sure he will compensate you well.”

“Tell Thor I expect that he does not lose them all in battle.” she reminded the weasel.
“I will be mad if he comes back with no warriors left.”

“I will tell him.” her father replied as he shimmered out of Hel.

Chapter 11

“Adapt, Improve, Overcome”

“Someone has interfered again!” the young entity shouted as he observed the dead carcasses of his brown and black kalis. “This has completely ruined my plans!” The entity was frantically thinking of how to salvage this latest turn of events.

“**You must now realize that you have lost the game,**” the older entity replied calmly. “**Thor and Hel's daughter legion are hunting you as we speak. You must declare defeat.**”

“I am not done yet! I will ...” The older entity cut him off and forced him to turn and 'face' his older peer.

“**You have exhausted all of your chances to turn them,**” the older entity stated in a knowing tone of voice. “**Please admit to yourself that you have failed.**”

“Are you trying to tell me that I have lost the game completely?” the young entity inquired.

“**You have lost and you are now endangering your very existence.**” the older one told the younger one. “**The Norse god Thor and his warriors will destroy you if he finds you here.**”

“I will not give up! I swear I will go out trying!” the younger one shouted angrily as he placed numerous assorted objects on the field. “The entities will talk of this for eons to come! I will be a legend!”

The older entity watched on in horror as the younger one transfigured himself into a mortal form on the field.

“**I do not believe I just saw that! That is sheer suicide!**” the older entity said to himself as he thought about what he could do to stop this. After a few moments, the older entity transfigured himself into a form on the field. That hooved form began running as fast as possible in the direction of Kellan's cabin.

###

The two archangels had been moving as quickly as possible towards the valley floor and their destination. As they came into a clearing, Michael spotted some objects hanging from a tree branch. Pointing out the objects to Gabriel, they both went over to

investigate. The pair discovered some armor that was obviously made to fit the angels along with a small cache of weapons.

“What do you think?” Gabriel asked of the larger angel. He could clearly see that this armor would fit them properly. There had even been provisions made for their wings in the armor.

“Some fur is trying to help us.” Michael replied as he checked over the armor himself. “Let's not look a gift khat in the mouth.” he said as he handed Gabriel a chainmaile tunic. The two angels quickly put on the armor, picked up the armament and continued on their way.

Within an hour, they had reached the valley floor and discovered the trail towards the cabin. There were clear signs that a large hooved being had been this way.

“The size of imprint and the length of stride tells me this huge fur was running,” Gabriel pointed out as he carefully sized up the distance between hoof prints. “I sense that this is an entity.”

“You are right about that,” the larger angel replied. “We must get to their location quickly.” Gabriel nodded in agreement as they began jogging towards their destination.

“I hope we get there soon,” Gabriel said as they went. “I can feel something malevolent nearby.” His fur was crawling and his tail was puffed up from the feelings he was receiving.

“I had hoped that it was just me.” the larger angel replied to the smaller one with a hint of dread in his voice. “I can feel it too.” As they made further progress, they could both sense several entities present.

“I feel as if we are running headlong towards our own doom.” Gabriel stated very matter-of-factly. He looked over to see that Michael was praying to their boss as they continued on towards their destiny.

###

Freya and Loke were sitting at Odin's table with the one-eyed wolf. It had been some time since the berserker had summoned the Trickster and the waiting game was wearing on all of their nerves. The vixen was sitting quietly, paws steepled in front of her. She was carefully scanning for any trace of something going on. She knew she could feel something, like a gathering of power somewhere but she couldn't pinpoint its exact location.

“Odin, do you feel that ripple, like a gathering of power?” she asked quietly as she continued to scan with her mind.

“I feel it” the wolf replied quietly. “It is a gathering of good and evil from what I can sense. I cannot feel an exact location, unfortunately.” The weasel could even detect the surge of energy around them.

“It feels like ... it's coming from that place the berserker is in,” he commented as he tried to locate it himself. “I ... I am sure of this,” the weasel commented as he turned to 'see' further in a certain direction. “It is ... there!” he blurted out. “I am sure now. It is there.”

The wolf and the vixen brought their senses into alignment with the weasel's to see that he was right. “The surge in power is coming directly from that realm.” Odin commented. “Both of you go that way and look for them!” the wolf said excitedly. “Find them now!” The goddess and the weasel were gone in a heartbeat.

“I must tell Christopher about this.” the one-eyed wolf said to himself as he stood and shimmered out.

###

The large black equine had finally reached his destination as the cabin came into view. He paused for a moment to lean against a tree and catch his breath before he continued on to the door of the dwelling. “This mortal stuff isn't what I expected it to be,” he thought to himself. “I am out of breath from that run.” The equine jogged the last few yards to the cabin door and walked right in unannounced. A hush fell over the dwelling as all of the furs present gave him their full attention.

“I have come here to (*wheeze*) try and stop (*cough, hack*) this game once and for all,” he stated to the assembled beings, sounding completely out of breath. “I am here to help you in any way possible.” he stated as he leaned against the door frame to finish catching his breath.

The white equine mare slowly stood up and waited for her balance to come to her before she went over to face the other entity. “I can tell that something has gone wrong,” she stated as she stood there in front of him. His eyes alone told much to all in the room; things would not go well today.

“The entity 'Violence' has taken on mortal form to lead his legions into battle,” War replied to his comrade. “This invasion is not going to be easy to fend off.” he added, looking around the room. “All of you will be in danger from the legions of mixed beings he will descend upon you with.”

“I am not afraid of anything that I may face!” Aslaug spat out as she picked up her spear. “I will not be intimidated by anything that this entity may send my way!” As everyone gave the filly their attention, she said in a very knowing voice, “I know what death feels like. Bring them on.”

“Yes, I believe you are right, Aslaug,” the male entity replied to the equine Valkyrie. “You are without a doubt the most fearless warrior in this assemblage of beings. Please do not underestimate what he will send this way. They will no doubt be poisonous in bite and lethal in claw or weapon.” The black stallion was interrupted by the arrival of two more beings.

“Torvald! Victoria! Aslaug! We are so glad to have finally found all of you!” Michael blurted out as the two archangels made their way into the room.

“You two again!” the Angel Breaker said sourly as she began to advance towards the two angels. “Have I not beaten you enough?” She was beginning to get a murderous look upon her muzzle as she checked her grip on her spear. The berserker quickly put his paw on Aslaug's shoulder and turned her to face him.

“It looks like you have beat on them enough.” Torvald stated as the two angels took cover behind the black stallion. “Shouldn't we find out why they're here first before you go and kill them?” The Valkyrie wasn't happy with the berserker's suggestion but nodded her head anyway.

“Go ahead and tell us why you are here,” the filly said in a dejected tone. “I will not kill you just yet.” Aslaug rested her spear on her shoulder as she sat back down in her chair.

After Torvald introduced everybody around, the smaller angel spoke up.

“We were sent to find all of you after Loke had been summoned here,” he explained. “We had finally obtained a fix on your whereabouts from the filly's home but we had no idea that our powers wouldn't work here.”

“So, you are saying you are mortal now?” the blond femme equine asked, that murderous grin coming back to her muzzle.

“We are mortal but please, we are here to help in any way possible,” Michael chimed in. “We have been told to do so and we will fight to our deaths to save you.” he told the filly as he looked directly at her. “It is what we must do to make you understand that we are truly sorry for Victoria being made immortal.” The filly could see that the angel was serious about this. “The boss said that we must apologize to you and Victoria for what we did. I ask that you please accept our humble apologies for our indiscretions.”

“I accept your apology” the tigress said as she looked over at the angels. “It was really stupid what you did but we all make mistakes at times. I'm just glad to still be alive after being in Surt's realm.”

“I will have to think about this.” the filly stated flatly. It was clear to every fur that Aslaug was in turmoil over this request from the angels. She still felt like she wanted to pound on the angels some more but she had heard the sincerity in their voices. She just didn't know what to do right now. It wasn't helping things that she, a Valkyrie now, was more or less on their level. She just shook her head as she mulled this over.

“I hate to bring it up,” the male entity said to them all. “We will need some kind of a battle plan if we are to survive this.” Everybody gathered around the table as a plan of defense was drawn up.

###

The one-eyed wolf and the Lion in the loud camp shirt were sitting at a table in a beautiful alpine meadow. They both had a look of exhaustion on their muzzles as they consumed a light snack for energy.

“This does not bode well” Christopher commented. “We should have heard something already.”

“Agreed” Odin replied as he rubbed his muzzle. “I thought Freya and Loke would be back by now.”

“Shall we go look for them ourselves or should I activate the squad?” the lion asked.

“No, let's be patient. Besides, we don't know exactly where to send the squad.” Odin pointed out. “I do not know if that planet was the right one or not.”

“You are right. Let's be patient” the lion finally agreed.

###

The vixen and the weasel were standing on a mountainside in knee-deep snow. It was obvious that some beings had been here by the paw prints in the snow.

“This is the planet.” Loke told his companion. “I don't know why we were led here, though. This is not where they are.” He was looking around for any clues that would show their whereabouts.

“I cannot get a fix on their life forces,” Freya muttered as she scanned about. “There are too many entities on this planet. They are disrupting my ability to scan.” Loke could see that the vixen was under considerable stress just trying to find the immortals.

“I suggest we follow these tracks,” the weasel pointed out. “They may lead us to them.”

OK, let’s see where these tracks lead.” she replied as they began to hike down the mountain.

###

“This will be my greatest conquest ever.” the hyena said as he started across the river. “I have a feeling that my actions today will become legendary.” He was smug with his feelings about the final confrontation with the immortal ones and Kellan.

“Are you sure about this, my Liege?” The armored ruddy fox asked. The fox was starting to have his reservations about the resolve of their leader.

“Do not question my abilities, you insolent dolt!” the entity known as Violence spat out. “I am stronger and wiser than you could ever comprehend.”

“Yes my Liege,” the fox replied as he walked beside his commander. “Will we be there soon?” he asked as they continued to wade the river.

The hyena stopped in the middle of the river to turn and look at the fox. “We will be there soon enough. Then you and your legions will destroy all of them in my name!”

As the column of soldiers stopped to wait for the hyena to quit ranting at the fox, a maned wolf carrying a battle axe turned to the cougar with a pike standing to his left.

“You know, I think this was a bad idea,” the wolf said quietly. “I died once in a war zone and I think I might just die again.” The wolf turned to see if the column was moving again before he continued his train of thought. “I don't think the hyena knows what the hell he's doing. Maybe we should blow this pop stand and get the hell out of here while we can.”

“I think you're right,” the feline replied. “When we see a chance, let's beat feet out of here.” He looked over to see that the wolf agreed with him.

Chapter 12

“The Impending Clash Of Furs”

Freya and Loke had reached a spot that many had stopped at before. There were numerous tracks around a certain tree that made no sense to her at all.

“Why would they walk around like this?” she mused out loud. She looked over to see that Loke was just as confused as she was.

“I say we continue while we have daylight left.” the weasel suggested as he looked around.

“I hate to admit it but you're right,” the vixen replied. “Come on, let's continue our journey.”

###

The white mare had managed to summon the group some extra armament and armor for the imminent battle. They had been taking turns looking out for any signs of warriors approaching their cabin. So far, they had not detected any movement but they weren't going to let their guard down just yet.

“I think we have a workable plan,” the black equine stated as he looked around the room. “We should be able to defend our position until some fur arrives to pull all of you from here.”

“I just hope that Loke can bring Freya here with him,” the berserker commented. “We need the god's help right now.”

Within moments after Torvald had said his name, Loke and Freya appeared in the middle of the cabin.

“Well that worked out good,” the weasel said with a smile. “You brought us right to you!” He then noticed the two entities in the room. “Um ... are these friends of yours?” he asked as he indicated the two equine entities.

“Well, I guess they are,” the berserker replied. “They are going to help us battle the entity 'Violence' and his army.”

The vixen walked over to the white mare and gave her a hug. “It has been a long time since I had seen you last.” she said to the entity. “I wish you would visit more often.”

The white mare smiled as the vixen hugged her. "Yes it has been a long time. I have been busy as of late." the femme equine replied. Freya gave her another hug before she walked over to the huge black stallion.

"And you, you old warhorse," she addressed the entity. "Have not you created enough strife among the worlds?" She was still smiling as she awaited his answer.

"That I have." he replied. "Although sometimes I do not need to start a war; the beings seem to do it themselves nowadays."

After a few moments, the vixen turned her senses outwards in search of the third entity. Freya was scanning quite carefully to see exactly where the malevolent entity was. "He's less than an hour's march from here in that direction." she told them as everybody picked up their weapons. "We must get all of you out of ... No! Odin!! Not Now!" she shouted out as the weasel and the vixen shimmered out of sight.

"I take it that wasn't planned." Kellan commented as he looked at the berserker.

"I do not think so." Torvald replied with a puzzled look on his muzzle.

"At least we know when the rogue entity will get here," the male entity stated as he checked his broadsword and bow. "We must prepare." The band of marooned warriors pulled some of the logs nearby towards the cabin to shield their position as they waited for the inevitable.

###

Odin and Christopher were facepawing themselves over the miscue by the wolf. "I am sorry," the wolf said as he looked over at the lion. "Maybe the berserker will call them back." he said as he sat there pondering what else they could do about this situation.

"Hold on a minute," Freya said as she concentrated on the forces around her. "I might be able to detect them." she said as she sat down in a nearby chair.

"There are two other equines with them along with Gabriel and Michael." the weasel chimed in as he took a seat at the table. "I think the two equines are entities in mortal form."

"That is a move that I call insane." the wolf said to nobody in particular. "They could get killed with no way to escape their mortal shell."

"There is more to this than what we know," Christopher suggested. "We will probably never know all of the facts."

“Will you guys hold it down,” the vixen admonished the males. “I’m trying to locate them again.”

###

Thor had been searching across many dimensions for the immortals and he was getting tired. It was a good thing that Odin summoned up this daugr army from Hel because they wouldn't tire out like him.

As he sat down to rest for a minute on a remote planet, he sensed a surge in energy around him. “That is not right.” he thought as he scanned for the direction of the disturbance. As he felt the disturbance again, he pinpointed the direction it came from. “That is it.” he said quietly to himself as he got up and started moving again with his army of the undead.

###

Jim had been standing guard outside the door of the cabin, tired from the stress that he was under. He had been thinking about how he would tell his wife that he was dead and then brought back to life when he spotted movement out of the corner of his eye.

“Who goes there?” he shouted as he readied his bow. “Show yourself!” he shouted as the others readied for the eminent battle. While he stood there, a hyena wearing roman Lorica Segmentata style armor carrying a spear walked into view.

“My battle is not with you,” he said as he took off his helmet with a flourish. “Send out the immortal ones. I wish to take them as my warriors.”

“Do you hear that?” Torvald asked as he looked out a crack in the shutters, “He has watched too many Clint Eastwood movies.” After a few moments, he looked at his mate as he said, “I will go out there and try to stall him.” He then held his pendant as he said a silent prayer in his native tongue.

*“I pray for the power to defeat my enemies
and to have the good judgment to know
what to do and when to do it.”*

“Loke will return as I have said his name now,” the berserker said quietly as he walked towards the door. “I hope for all of us that he brings some help with him.” He paused for just a moment then walked out the door.

The husky heard the blond male equine walk through the doorway behind him to stand by his side. “Watch my six.” the berserker said quietly to the husky as he stepped out into the clearing in front of him.

“Where are the others?” the entity known as 'Violence' asked in an irritated tone as he stood there. “I wish all of you to be part of my legions.” It was clear that the hyena was becoming agitated by the situation that he was slowly losing control of.

“You will fight me one-on-one for the outcome,” the berserker told the hyena. “If I win, you will let us all return to our home worlds. If I lose, you may have my soul to be a soldier for your cause.”

“I want all three of you!” the hyena shouted out angrily. “I will have all of you or I will die trying!” He threw his helmet down on the ground and pounded the shaft of his spear on the soil at his feet. “I am warning you! I will turn loose my army upon you and you will be destroyed by them!”

“I guess we don't have a deal, then.” the berserker said casually to the enraged entity. “I cannot speak for the others. I can only offer myself to you if you will fight me one-on-one.” The berserker was gripping his Dane axe in preparation for a charge by the entity's army.

“Very well, I will take your life forces away from you by sheer force!” the hyena said as he turned and walked out of sight.

###

Another entity had been watching this game unfold for some time now. It wasn't really something the entity would have normally gotten involved with, considering the players that were involved. It appeared like it would be necessary to intervene on behalf of the entities 'War' and 'Compassion' this time. As the entity watched, it planned out just how to help them.

###

“He is madder than all get-out.” Torvald stated as he returned to the cabin. “I think he is not kidding about turning loose his army on us.” he added as he sat down. Within a few moments, the weasel and the vixen appeared in the room once more.

“We are ready to pull you back with us.” Freya said as she looked around the cabin. “All of you, hold paws right now.” Jim came back inside and all of them held paws. “Any time now.” she said in hopes that Odin could hear her. Momentarily, just the weasel shimmered out of sight, leaving everyone else behind.

“Uh ... that did not go as you planned, Freya,” the white mare said as she looked outside quickly. “And I think the entity's army is getting ready.”

“Loke, come back here!” the huge blond equine said loudly as he checked his weapon again. “This will not go well I'm afraid,” he added as he looked out the door himself. “They are massing to charge us.” he commented as he shook his head at the situation. The berserker could see the enemy army preparing their ranks.

“I will say it then,” Victoria told the others. “It has been nice knowing all of you.”

As they waited for the impending charge, the tigress heard some noises behind the cabin that sounded odd. “There is some fur behind the cabin.” she said as she checked her grip on a broadsword. After a few moments, they heard a voice from the doorway.

“Torvald? Victoria?” the voice beckoned. “It is I, the god of thunder.” They observed an armored rottweiler with a huge hammer come into view. “Good, I have found you!” he said as he gave the goddess a kiss on the cheek. “It is good to see all of you.” he said as he shook paws with everyone Norse style.

“Did you bring reinforcements?” the vixen asked in a concerned tone.

“I have brought a legion of Hel's daugr soldiers to fight with.” he replied with a smug smile.

“Well, don't just stand there,” the tigress said in an excited tone. “Call them up because the entity's army is preparing to attack us!”

The rottweiler called up his army to mass around the cabin on either side as the rest of them took up their positions. The white mare, Jim and Kellan got behind some logs for cover with their bows. The black stallion, the berserker, the tigress, Aslaug, Freya and Thor stood their ground in front of the archers, blades, axes, spears and one huge hammer at the ready. The two angels were on the flanks with their long swords held in check. They all looked around to see that everyone was ready before the entity's army reached them.

###

The young tiger woke up from a strange dream he had just had. He could see his mother wearing armor and holding a broadsword. The huge equine was armored similarly holding his Dane axe. The coach was standing by them with a spear in paw. They were in a room with others that looked ready to do battle. This disturbing scene woke the young tiger up.

He lay there for a moment before he looked at the clock. It was barely after one in the morning. He got up to get a drink of water to find his aunt and her lover sitting at the kitchen table. “What's wrong?” he asked the two femmes as he retrieved a glass to get a drink with.

“We had a bad dream, both of us.” Valerie told her nephew. The two femme's eyes got wide as Conrad told them about his dream. “Now that is scary,” the ocelot commented. “We had the same exact dream.”

###

“What do you mean, she didn't come back with you?” Odin said to the weasel in an excited tone of voice. “Weren't you holding paws?” The one-eyed god was straining to keep his temper in check as he faced the weasel.

“I was holding her paw,” the Trickster replied to the wolf. “I was holding her paw quite firmly. She just didn't come with me, that's all.” It was clear that the weasel was upset by what had happened. “I shall try again.” he said as he shimmered out of sight.

###

The fourth entity had transfigured into its familiar mortal shell not far from the cabin. The form put on some armor and picked up a large battle axe and broadsword. The form stood there for a moment to sense which direction to go. What the entity had felt was not good. “I hope I am not too late to fix this problem.” the entity muttered under its breath as the huge form began jogging in the direction of the cabin.

###

The opposing army had not moved yet, causing the defenders to become very anxious. The Valkyrie was getting antsy for the action to start so she finally walked out towards the opposing army by herself to everyone else's horror.

Once she had gotten half-way there she stopped and checked her grip on her spear. “Come out and show yourself, you steaming pile of kali dung!” she shouted out towards the enemy's direction. “I will kill you in battle if you do not leave right now!” she added as she sat the tip of her spear on the ground. It was obvious that the entity's army was shaken by this display from the blond femme equine. “Are you so cowardly that you must hide behind your army?” she shouted out. Some of the opposing army even took a step back from her in fear. When the hyena didn't show his face, she shouted out “You have been given your chance, entity. We must now decimate you and your ranks.”

She turned to walk back towards the cabin as she pulled a Francisca from her belt and held it in an odd way by her muzzle. Momentarily an archer from the opposing ranks stepped into view. He lifted his bow, pulled the projectile back and launched it. Aslaug dropped to the ground as the arrow sailed by, missing her completely. Jim and Kellan's

arrows, however hit their mark with deadly precision. The enemy archer fell to the ground with two shafts sticking out of his throat.

The filly got back up and continued to walk back towards Torvald with a huge grin on her face. As she got close enough, she said, "I saw him in the reflection off of my Francisca." Before he could say something, she said, "It happened once before so I learned from that mistake." Once she was ready again, she looked at Torvald as she asked, "What is it you like to say ... Let's Rock and Roll?"

"Yeah, today's just as good as any day to die." the berserker said as he checked his grip. After he looked to make sure everyone was ready he shouted out, "Everybody, let's Rock And Roll The Place!!"

###

The maned wolf and the cougar had deliberately hung back towards the back of the column. As the others prepared to charge the cabin, the wolf looked over at his partner.

"Ya know, I died once already on a mission in Vietnam back in '71", the maned wolf told the cougar. "I was a door gunner on a Huey that was shot down by a MiG fighter." He swallowed hard as he continued to tell his story. "I was standing over my dead body that was still trapped in the wreckage, wondering what the hell had just happened to me when that hyena came along and said he could bring me back to life. I shoulda never listened to him 'cause it looks like I might just die again."

"I know what ya mean, dude," the cougar replied to the wolf. "I was an army ranger on patrol in Afghanistan. I was killed by an IED that destroyed our HummVee." The cougar looked at the others that were beginning to get ready. "I was wandering around for a few days, wonderin' why nobody would pay attention to me. The hyena said I was dead but he could give me life again." He looked to see that the others were moving towards the cabin. "Dude, let's get the hell outa harm's way 'till this is over." The wolf nodded his head as they quietly slipped away from the battle.

Chapter 13

“Everybody Rock And Roll The Place!”

Once Torvald had given the command, the army of the undead rushed towards the legions of the entity's opposing forces. The sounds of arrows whizzing through the air along with the sounds of blades clashing was almost deafening. The Valkyrie waded right in, hacking and slashing with her Dane axe. She had a look of sheer murder on her muzzle as she killed every living fur that made the mistake of getting in front of her.

Torvald and Victoria had taken the left flank along with Gabriel, not leaving a single living thing in their wake. The tigress had taken an arrow in the leg and she had stopped to try and remove it. The arrow had a metal shaft so breaking it off didn't apply here. Gabriel pulled it out of her leg only to take one in his shoulder, almost knocking him down with the pain.

“My God that hurts!” the smaller feline angel exclaimed as he knelt down, grimacing in pain. “This is gonna hurt.” he said as the angel gritted his teeth and pulled the arrow from his shoulder. As the tip of the projectile came out, Gabriel almost passed out from the pain. “Damnation!” he spat out as he held the wound. Michael had come to the smaller angel's aid, binding the wound with a strip of cloth to keep him from bleeding out. They were wishing for the battle to end for everyone's sake.

“Tighten up your ranks!” the rottweiler yelled to his troops. “Get the wounded back to the cabin!” he shouted as he smashed the skull of another of the opposing warriors. “Warriors! Go that way!” he shouted as he noticed the ranks thinning on the side of the wounded angel.

The two equine entities were doing their best to hold off the troops that were advancing on them. War had decided just to wade in like Aslaug had done, getting that look on his muzzle that meant he was relishing the act of destroying the soldiers in front of him. This was the thing he thrived on; conflict, emotion, pain and death.

Freya was backing up the white mare, wielding her sword with deadly precision. She was wasting no movements as she decimated the hyena's legions that were advancing on them.

“Victoria! We must go that way!” the berserker shouted to his mate who had rejoined him in battle. “The entity is trying to escape!” She could see the outline of the hyena making tracks away from the battle, deserting his troops like a true coward.

“Torvald! You go while I hold these warriors back!” she shouted as she hacked the arm off of another soldier. The huge fur took off in that direction in search of the hyena. He knew when he found that worthless cur he would kill him slowly with his bare paws.

As he ran after the entity, Torvald momentarily lost sight of the hyena. As he rounded a large boulder, he almost ran headlong into the biggest white buffalo he had ever seen. The berserker brought his axe up in an attempt to dispatch the buffalo when he saw the hyena held firmly in the buffalo's grasp.

“I mean you no harm, Berserker.” the huge creature said in a low resonant voice. “I have come here to stop this insanity that was fostered by Violence.”

“What ... Huh??” the berserker queried as he sized up the situation. This fur was huge even by Torvald's standards. The fur did seem to have custody of the entity for now so he thought that he might just go along with this. “Well, if you say you are here to stop this war, then let's go do it!” The buffalo and the berserker turned and began to jog back to the battle site.

###

Back at the battle in progress, Aslaug was still wading into the opposing soldiers with total abandon, leaving a wake of dead or dying furs. There were even a few of those hairless ape-things called humans fighting on the side of Violence that suffered at the business end of her axe. “When will they ever stop coming?” she said to no fur in particular as she dispatched several more furs and stepped over them.

“Aslaug! Duck!” a voice rang out from behind her. As the filly did a duck and roll, she observed Michael taking the head off of one of the opposing forces that was trying to do the filly in with a dagger. It was clear to Aslaug that the angels were serious about fighting to the death to save them all.

It was becoming apparent to the combatants that the struggle was turning into a plain old fashioned gorefest. There was not a one of them on the front line that wasn't soaked with blood and viscera from killing the evil legions. For some reason, the tigress was recharged by the smell of death around her. She was hacking and slashing with total abandon as she killed every fur that challenged her. Eventually the opposing forces began to fall back due to a lack of a leader to direct them. The ruddy fox had fallen dead from multiple arrows to the chest and heart from Kellan and Jim.

While the combatants were regrouping, the buffalo and Torvald walked out into the clearing. The buffalo dropped the hyena on the ground and yelled, “**STOP THIS RIGHT NOW!**” at a volume level reserved for deities, entities and large jet aircraft. This caused all action to cease on the battle field. Many furs even dropped their weapons as everyone gave the huge white fur their complete attention.

“I am the essence of Mother Earth herself!” the buffalo said in a low resonant voice that sounded both young and old at the same time. “I have been watching this game since the beginning, when the pair known as Kellan and Jim were brought here. I have seen the lengths that 'Violence' has gone to in order to recruit more soldiers for his cause.” The essence reached down and picked the hyena up by the scruff of his neck.

“This one had lost this game a long time ago,” the buffalo continued. “He didn't have the guts to admit his defeat. He also didn't have the nerve to stand in harm's way during the battle.” The essence dropped the hyena to the ground again as she continued.

“I realize you two probably thought you had good reason to take on mortal shells,” the huge white fur stated as she walked over to the two equine entities and hugged them as she stood between them. “I thought you two knew better than this.” she said to them with a smile. “You could have died in this mortal shell with no way to escape it.”

The two equines looked at the ground in embarrassment, like a pair of children would have done. “We knew we were taking a risk,” the entity Compassion said to the buffalo. “We were willing to take that chance to stop this perverse travesty.”

And you of all entities,” she said as she walked over and picked up the hyena by the scruff of his neck again. “You have taken this too far this time!” It was easy to see that the buffalo was pissed off at the hyena. “I hereby sentence you to twenty two years alone here in that mortal shell for your actions.”

“You can't do that!” the hyena argued, trying to touch the ground with his feet. “I am Violence! I was born by Hate and I have powers that...” He was cut off by another entity that had joined the group.

“Yes, you were born by me,” the femme Timber Wolf said in a soft yet powerful voice. “Your powers are not what you think they are.” The femme wolf walked over and struck the hyena very hard on the side of the muzzle with her closed paw. Blood began to drip from his nose and he spat out several teeth that the wolf had knocked out. “You never know when to stop, even when it is obvious that you have lost. You of all entities disappoint me greatly.”

She turned to look at the berserker and his mate. “You could not have possessed these two because of their bond, you stupid, idiotic excuse for an entity!” she said as she walked over to stand by the immortal couple. “Their special kind of love, when fueled by the anger caused by some fur trying to separate them, creates a bond that cannot be broken by any fur, ever. You could never possess them as your warriors. You have only wasted your time on this pair.”

The wolf then walked over by the blond filly as she continued her berating of the hyena. "This special fur you could never possess because her heart and soul belongs to another. You cannot take what is not hers to give." She turned to look Aslaug square in the eyes as she said, "You fought valiantly for your friends today. You were willing to give your all so that others could live. You are a courageous fur and some day you will enjoy your rest in Fólkvangr." This statement caused the filly to almost drop her spear in shock. She had not told any fur except Torvald and Joe the whole story about what had happened to her recently so how would this entity know?

The timber wolf leaned in very close to her as she said in a whisper, "Do not worry Valkyrie. Your secrets are safe with me."

Everyone was still trying to digest what had already been said when the femme wolf walked over to Kellan and Jim. "You two should have never been here." she said as she stood near them. "I'm not sure which was worse; to be dead and buried for all this time or to be alone for that same span."

She looked at the husky and smiled as she said, "This one could never be turned by you, ever. His heart is such that he would never consider violence except as a last resort." She then turned to the bay colored equine next as she said, "You are a military fur so your mind is disciplined. You have done well these years here without turning bitter. You could have never been turned to violence either." She held both of their paws as she said to them, "You two will be taken back to where you belong. I am sorry that this happened to a pair of fine strong furs." She hugged each one of them before she went to stand by Thor and Freya.

"The gods have sent their best to fix things," the timber wolf said as she hugged the vixen and shook paws Norse-style with the rottweiler. "I think things would have been worse if you two had not been here." She then turned her attention to the angels, who were standing off to the side.

"The two of you have fought well today." she stated as she stood in front of them. "I would be proud to have you in my army when time comes to an end." She smiled as she gave each one a hug. "I should have stopped this a long time ago. There has been much damage done by letting 'Violence' have his way." She walked back over to stand by the buffalo as she said, "Twenty-two years is not long enough. I invoke the Law of Three. What they have suffered, so shall you suffer three fold!"

"You cannot do that! I will not survive that long!" the hyena blurted out as his eyes got wide. "You cannot..." He was cut short by the wolf.

"I can and I will." she said calmly. "You have brought this on yourself so you have no fur to blame for it." She took great joy in telling him, "You were told more than once to give up and save face. You did not listen so this is your punishment." As the hyena looked on in shock, she continued to tell him the criteria of his sentence.

“You will be mortal while you serve your punishment.” she informed him as she circled him slowly. “There is a cabin that you may use and there are some provisions that may last you for a while. You will have to hunt for food or perish when your provisions run out.” She felt comfortable with this sentence as she added, “No fur or entity may help you or try to pull you from this planet.” The hyena hung his head and began to weep softly.

###

Thor had rounded up the remnants of Hel's daugr army and departed while the furs under the hyena's command were sent back to the places where they had come from. “I will be glad to get home,” Kellan said as he was talking with his friend. “I want a nice long, hot soak in a tub followed by a weekend in bed with my Tasha.”

“Just the thought of a real bed is enough for me.” Jim Federline replied. “I think I could sleep for a week.” he commented as they stood around waiting for all the loose ends to be tied up.

“Are you ready to go home?” the femme wolf asked Kellan and Jim. She was smiling as she stood there waiting for their answer.

“We are ready.” Jim said as they both smiled. The two were waiting for 'Hate' to send them home when a voice called out.

“There is a matter of my payment.” Hel said as she walked over to the remaining group. “I have provided my army's services for which I expect payment.” The wolf, who was on one side young and beautiful but on the other side a rotting corpse, was standing there with her arms crossed while she waited.

“For what it's worth, I was told that when I leave here, I would no longer be immortal.” the husky proffered up. “Torvald and Aslaug have both told me that immortality bites and that I wouldn't want to be immortal anyway.” This information made Hel smile as she thought about it for a few moments.

“The immortal ones are very correct in what they have told you. The long span afforded by the lack of death leaves you cold. Torvald and Aslaug have both known this feeling. I will take that energy that makes you immortal for my payment and spare you the pain of being without death.” she stated with a smug look on her muzzle. This made the husky kind of nervous when she smiled that way at him.

“Will I die when you take that energy from me?” he asked, getting really nervous by now. He wasn't ready to die again if that was the price to pay.

“No, you will just be mortal again, able to die when your time comes.” Hel replied as she held out her young paw and touched his chest. There was a faint glow of blue energy between them as Hel finally made a motion as if pulling something from Jim. The husky could feel something, a strange tingling as the glow subsided. “There, I have been paid and you are now quite mortal again. You must be careful with your life force now,” she said as she stepped back a few paces. “It is time I must leave.” she said as she shimmered out of sight.

As they watched, Kellan smelled something kind of odd. It was an unusual odor that wasn't there just a few moments ago. He followed his nose to his friend, who had sensed that strange smell too.

“I suddenly smell like a compost heap!” the husky said as they both began to laugh. “I really need a bath now.” he added as the entity known as Hate sent them home to their campsite in the Sierra Mountains of northern California.

Freya had finished talking to the immortal pair and she was now standing with Aslaug. “I will take you to your home myself just so I know you arrive safely.” she told the filly as they disappeared from sight.

The two angels had been sent back to Christopher's realm by Mother Earth as they couldn't otherwise leave. “And now for the immortal pair,” the buffalo said as she went to stand in front of them. “You were brave on the battlefield but it is time for you to return to your world.”

“We're ready.” the tigress said as she held her mate's paw. “I need some rest in a real bed.” she added as she smiled at her husband.

“Then it is time for you to return.” the buffalo said as the immortal couple were returned to their world. As the buffalo used her senses to ascertain they were back to their world safely, two figures walked into the clearing to face her.

“Hey, would you send us back home too?” the maned wolf asked as they drew nearer to the essence that was Mother Earth. “We didn't want to have a part in the hyena's madness.”

“Ah, you two,” the buffalo said with a smile. “I sense you have both learned your lesson about violence and its ramifications.”

“Yeah, we learned a lot today,” the cougar stated as the two former soldiers stood in front of her. “We want to live as normal furs again.”

“I will then send you back to the places in time where you belong.” she said as she touched them both at the same time. “Think of home.” she said as she sent them on their way.

The buffalo then went over to the two equines that were entities. “I am sorry it came to this,” she said sheepishly. “We should have given more attention to what was going on.” she added as she hung her head.

“No, it's my fault,” the male equine replied to her. “I let it go too long. I should have stopped it when the immortal pair were brought here.”

“It's all wrapped up now,” the white mare stated as she looked around. “Let's go home.” Within moments, the only thing left there was the hyena to serve out his sentence and a few dozen black and brown kalis that he had completely forgotten about.

###

The immortal pair had reappeared in their room at the B&B where it had all started. The bed covers were folded neatly on the foot of the bed and they were still wearing their tunics, leggings and armor. Their clothing was now clean, no longer covered in blood and gore. It took a moment for them to fully realize the situation and react to it. They sat their weapons down and began to take their armor off when somebody knocked at the door.

“Is everything all right in there?” the male voice asked. Torvald went to the door and opened it to see the owner standing there. The border collie's look went from one of annoyance to one of confusion. “Oh ... uh ... nice costumes there, folks. Sorry to bother you.” was all he said as he pulled the door shut. As he walked back to his room, he was thinking, “It takes all kinds.”

Victoria was trying to stifle her laughing as she sat on the edge of the bed. “Now he's going to think we're nuts.” she said as her mate sat down beside her. After she settled down, she thought of something important. “Sweetheart, look at your watch and see what time it is.” she said as she took off her armor. The berserker dug his watch out of his vest pocket and looked to see that it was two in the morning on Saturday.

“At least we didn't lose much time.” he commented as he picked up the phone to call home. After a few rings, Valerie answered.

“Torvald! Are both of you OK? We've been worried sick since Loke didn't come back right away!” She said excitedly. Barbara and Conrad's voices could be heard in the background. “The weasel hasn't been back to talk to us in hours!”

“We are just fine.” he replied to his sister-in-law. He could hear sobbing over the phone from Valerie. “We made it back in one piece, thanks to a little help from Mother Earth and a few other entities.”

“So, you two are going to stay in Half Moon Bay after all, or are you coming home?” the tigress asked her brother-in-law as she sniffed and blew her nose.

“You better believe we are staying. We paid too much money to just leave now. We will be home Monday night.” he told her. “We will call you before we leave, OK?”

“That's fine by me as long as you're sure that the two of you are all right.” Valerie said as they said their goodbyes and ended the call.

The equine sat the pawset down and helped his mate put the covers back on the bed. The immortal pair took a quick shower to get some of the grunge off of themselves. It seemed like a necessary thing to do as they hadn't bathed in many days and the berserker was particularly ripe smelling. They finally lay down and went to sleep snuggled up against one another.

###

The next morning, Torvald woke up as the sun came up and made the room light. Victoria had almost all of the covers while the berserker was trying to stay warm under just the top sheet. “She has all of the covers again.” the huge fur thought as he lay there, almost shivering. He finally gave up and retrieved his robe from the suitcase and put it on for warmth.

A little while later the tigress was roused by the sounds from the television that her husband was watching through closed eyelids, “Sweetheart? Are you awake?” she asked as she got up to see if he was sleeping.

“M'wake ...” was his response to her question so she knew he was dozing off again.

“Honey, Loke says the house is burning down.” she said softly in his ear as she stood behind the recliner he was sleeping in.

“That is good” he mumbled as he pulled his robe up under his chin.

“Sweetheart, Conrad took your car for a joy ride in the ocean.” she said almost in a whisper to her mate. She was having to fight laughing as she thought it would have been funny to videotape all of this.

“Tell him to gas it back up when he's done.” the berserker mumbled as he rolled over on his side in the recliner. It was then that he finally realized he had been had by his mate.

“You are not funny!” he said as he got up from the chair and stood up. “I'm still tired from all of that fighting.” he said as he stretched out his arms.

The tigress ran the water for them to take a long soak in the tub to get rid of the remainder of the grunge from that other planet and clean up just a little bit better. Torvald ended up with that 'Hollywood' look again from the fur dryer while the tigress used some conditioner to manage her fur this time.

They had dressed and gone downstairs to get a seat for breakfast when they met up with the black stallion and the white mare waiting for a table. Their clothing was of a current style and they both looked tired.

“What brings you here?” the berserker asked with a knowing smile. He had said something about how nice this B&B was to 'Compassion' when they were on that other planet.

“We needed a rest from all the goings on back there,” the mare replied. “Even we entities get tired from time to time. We just never thought to try this planet.” Her stomach was growling quite loudly from lack of food. “So what's on the menu?” she asked as they waited.

The berserker grabbed a menu from the rack and almost laughed at the breakfast offered that morning. “We are having eggs, hash browns and venison sausage.” he told them as he tried not to laugh. This caused the group to all chuckle at that information. The border collie came out of the kitchen to see what was going on.

“What's so funny?” Don asked as he stood there with a puzzled look on his face. “Is there something wrong with my menu?” He had his arms crossed as he looked at the foursome.

“No, it's just fine” the tigress said as she was still trying to stifle her laughter.

The border collie went back to the kitchen to continue cooking. “It takes all kinds” he thought to himself. “It takes all kinds.”

As the owner went back into the kitchen, Torvald looked over at the two other equines. “How long are you staying here for?” he asked, smiling at the two entities.

“We're here until Monday of your calendar,” the stallion said with a smile. “We really needed a rest. The worlds are getting so crazy with wars and such.”

“So what names are you using?” the tigress asked.

“We are Comfort and Warren Pierce this weekend,” she replied. “Maybe we can go sight seeing together later. You no doubt know the best spots to go.”

“I think that would be fun.” the berserker stated. Momentarily, the owner came out of the kitchen again.

“OK femmes and gentlefurs, breakfast is ready.” he announced as they got up to find their tables.

“Want to share a table?” the black stallion asked the immortal couple.

“Sure, why not?” Victoria replied as they all sat down at the big table by the window.

The foursome had taken their seats when Victoria noticed a newspaper on a nearby stand. She retrieved it mainly to compare home prices in Half Moon Bay but stopped when she saw the cover story. She slowly handed it to her mate who almost choked on his coffee when he read the headline story.

The headline news story stated that two hunters had been found by the Sheriff's department early this morning after being missing for ten days. The picture under the headlines showed Kellan and Jim, still wearing their tunics, leggings and armor.

“We will have to call them when we get back to our home.” the berserker commented as he handed the paper back to his mate. “I am glad they are back safely too.”

“I hope it stays quiet while we finish this weekend.” Victoria said as she looked at the house prices in the real estate section. “I need some rest.” While she scanned the real estate ads, a voice rang out in the room:

“Torvald and Victoria, it is time. Prepare yourselves.”

“Oh No!!” they both exclaimed as they facepawed themselves. “Not Now!!”

Chapter 14

“What A Long, Strange Trip It's Been”

Kellan and Jim were driving home in the equine's 1977 Chevrolet ½ ton pickup after the authorities had finally determined that they weren't under the influence of drugs. This had been forced upon them because they refused to tell the sheriff's office anything except that they had been lost in the wilderness for ten days.

“If I had told them what had happened to us, we'd be on our way to a mental institution right now.” Kellan said as he looked for the road signs for Jim's exit. His arm still hurt where he had to submit to a blood test at the hospital in Truckee.

“Yeah, I know what ya mean,” the husky replied. “You're really sure I was dead for twenty-two years?” he asked as he looked at himself in the mirror over the sun visor. “I don't look any older and neither do you.”

Yeah, you were buried and the whole bit, buddy.” the equine replied. “I was dreading having to tell your mate that you were gone.” Kellan could see in his mind Jim's gray fox wife first bursting into tears from the initial blow but then coming after him to skin his hide off of him for getting her husband killed. “You know that Cathy would have killed me for sure.”

“Yeah, she would have,” the husky commented. “Here's my exit.” he added as the proper exit came into view. Kellan took the offramp and began winding his way around the streets of Carmichael to Jim's home. As they turned up Jim's street, there was a small welcoming party waiting for them in the street. The crowd swarmed the truck as Kellan stopped in front of the driveway.

“Get out of that truck right now!” Jim's wife demanded as the truck stopped. “You scared the shit out of me!” She said as she hugged him fiercely and kissed his face and neck. “Don't you ever do that a... what the hell are you two wearing?” Cathy looked at their tunic and leggings with a solid look of confusion. “Do you want to explain to me why you're wearing that get-up?” she asked, pointing at his clothes.

“It's a long story that I won't ever tell,” he replied to his mate. “Just be glad that I'm back home.” He hugged his mate and turned her towards the front door of their house. “I'll come over tomorrow for my stuff.” he said to Kellan as he shut the truck door and headed inside.

###

Kellan made the trip from Jim's home to his own dwelling in Roseville in fairly quick time. As he turned onto his street, he observed another welcoming committee

anxiously awaiting his arrival. The crowd split open just enough to allow him to park in the driveway but it quickly re-converged upon his vehicle. He shut off the engine and took off his seatbelt just as his tigress opened the door and pulled him from the cab of his truck.

“Kellan! I missed you...” was all that his mate could get out before she grabbed him in a strong hug and started to cry again. She had already been doing a lot of crying earlier in the day when she was told her mate had been found. He carefully guided her inside and put her on the couch in the living room. As he stood there by her and shook hands or hugged the other furs filing in from outside, his son Kory brought something up.

“Nice costume, Dad. Where did you get it?” his youngest son asked. This made his mate take notice of his unusual clothing.

“I guess you're not going to tell me about the clothes, huh?” Tasha asked as she felt the soft deerskin that made up his tunic. “You know, Jim wouldn't tell Cathy either.”

“If I told you what happened to me and what I have been told, you would just think I'm crazy.” he replied. “Let's just leave it at I was lost, OK?” His mate nodded but looked at him in a strange way.

“I guess you don't realize just how badly you need a bath.” she commented rather casually. “You reek to high heaven, my dear husband.” Kellan had to check to see if she wasn't just joking around. As usual, she was correct. Even his sons both nodded their heads in agreement.

“I guess that I need to take a bath, then.” he said as he kissed his wife again. “You guys don't know just how much I missed all of you.” He reluctantly headed for the master bathroom and an appointment with a shower.

Kellan took off his belt, tunic and leggings, taking care to fold them properly to put them away later. He was looking for a towel in their linen closet when Tasha walked in on him.

“Kel, sweetheart, you've lost a lot of weight.” she remarked as she looked her husband over. “There's no way you could've lost that much in just ten days!” The tigress was concerned for his health when she put her arms around him, not to hug him really but to see how his body felt. She was surprised when she felt the hard, firm body of a young colt and not her cushy, out of shape husband.

“You've lost weight and firmed up quite a bit, dear.” she said to him as she felt his rock-hard abs. “Step on those scales for me.” she asked as she guided him towards them from behind. He had weighed almost 200 pounds before his trip and he shocked both of them by stepping on the scales to show his current weight at 154.

“That's impossible!” his mate exclaimed as she stared at the scales. She even weighed herself to see that the scales were not lying to them. “Something happened on that trip.” she said in a cautious tone. “Out with it, Mister!” She crossed her arms and gave him a serious look. “I'm not moving from this spot until you spill the beans!”

“I knew this was going to come up,” he said as he turned on the shower and set the temperature to a very warm setting. “I'm telling you, if I tell you what happened, you'll just call the funny farm to come and get me.” He was looking to see if she understood what he had said only to see that she was still waiting for an explanation. She was standing her ground so he just decided to let it all hang out.

Kellan stepped into the shower but he left the curtains open just a little so his mate could see him. He stood with his back to the shower head, letting the hot water beat down upon his neck and back. “OK, here goes. We set up the tent and started a camp fire that first night. We went to bed only to wake up a little later on the side of a mountain on another planet. Jim was killed within a few hours by wild kalis with poisonous bites that attacked us.” He looked to see that his mate hadn't budged an inch.

“I spent twenty-two years on that god forsaken planet, living off of the land. That's why I'm so skinny and lean.” He could see she was now leaning against the wall as she continued to stare a hole through him as only a feline can. “I built one cabin that was burned down in a flash fire so I had to build another one. Some other furs showed up about seven days ago that were from southern California. She was a real estate salesfur for Century realty and he worked for the Los Angeles Metropolitan police department as a youth counselor. He was also a tenth century immortal Danish berserker. Oh, and by the way, his tigress wife is immortal, too.” Tasha was still standing there, waiting patiently for him to finish his story.

“Another blond filly showed up that was a high school football coach and an immortal Valkyrie, also from the tenth century. Then a couple of entities showed up and one of them had brought Jim back to life, only he was immortal now. We fought a battle against the entity 'Violence' and won, more or less with Loke, Freya, a couple of angels and Thor's help. Hel had loaned Thor some undead soldiers to fight on our side and her payment was the force that made Jim immortal so he's mortal again. That's when Jim and I were sent back to this planet by the entity known as Hate. She was a timber wolf, by the way.”

So that's your story?” his mate finally asked, giving him that 'the kids made up better stories when they lost their jackets at school' look. She was still staring a hole right through him as she said, “You know, you're right, my loving husband. Let's just stick with you were lost. That sounds better.” Tasha still didn't look too happy with what she had heard but she decided to just drop it. “Would you like me to scrub that dirty back

of yours?" she asked as she grabbed the shower brush. Her mate got a look of ecstasy on his muzzle as she scrubbed his back thoroughly for him.

"Your back really is dirty!" she remarked as the dirty lather started to build up. "Rinse that off so I can scrub your back again." she directed as she scrubbed his back and the lower part of his mane a second time. "My god, you're flat filthy!" she stated as she scrubbed his back for a third time only to get dirty lather again. "Maybe I should go get some laundry detergent." she joked as she scrubbed him for a fourth time.

"Will you leave a little skin back there?" Kellan asked as he lathered up his chest and arms. "You know, you aren't kidding" he commented as he looked at the dirty lather on his chest. "Man, that's just crazy. I bathed once a week with that soap root sap ..." He turned to see that his mate was looking at him again real funny. "Uh...just forget I said that." he asked sheepishly as he lathered up again.

###

Jim had finished his shower and he was trying to dry off while his mate had other things in mind. "Will you just let me dry off, please?" he asked as he reached for his towel again. Cathy had taken it away from him as she tried to get him to go into the bedroom with her. "Come on, Sweetheart, I'm dripping on the carpet!" he stated as she took the towel away from him again. "Oh, OK." he finally said as the vixen closed the door to their bedroom and turned to look at him with a seductive look on her muzzle. "Cathy, just let me dry off, please? Cathy?!?"

###

Kellan and Tasha were sitting in their family physician's office, waiting for their doctor to make his appearance. "You look funny wearing Kory's slacks and polo shirt." she commented to her mate.

"They're the only things I found that fit me in our house," he retorted. "I really lost a lot of inches around the middle while I was gone." he commented to himself as he looked at his reflection in the mirror on the back of the door. He looked much leaner than he was in the military, almost gaunt if it weren't for a healthy glow about him. "We're going to get charged through the nose for this Saturday appointment, you know that?" he pointed out to his mate. "We could have waited ..." He cut off his train of thought when the doctor arrived.

"Hello you two," Dr. John Carpenter said as he came into the room. "What's young Kellan doing here? Where's his father ..." The elderly beaver was suddenly dumbstruck as the realization set in as to just who was sitting in his examining room. "Kellan Senior?" he asked cautiously. "You look ... good ... Kellan ..." he said as he sat down on

his stool and leaned against the counter top. It was apparent that the doctor hadn't expected this at all.

"Tasha made me come down here to see what kind of shape I'm in." the equine proffered up. "I feel fine, Doc. Tell her I'm OK so we can go home. I need some rest after what I've been through."

"Well, let's see here. You've lost over forty pounds in 3 months. That's not good" the doctor said to himself as he looked at Kellan's chart.

"Dr. Carpenter, he weighed almost 200 pounds before he left to go hunting 10 days ago!" the tigress pointed out. It was clear that she was concerned for her husband's health and well being.

"That is a lot to lose in just ten days. Kellan, take off your shirt for me so I can have a look-see." the doctor requested. As he did so, the doctor was amazed at his leanness. "You're in very good shape." he said as he checked Kellan's body fat. There was almost nothing to get a hold of. "I think you're just fine however I would like an explanation of how you did this feat, though."

"I already told Tasha and she didn't believe me so I will just say that I was lost in the wilderness for 10 days. That's how I did it." the equine stated in a level tone. "That's all you will get from me."

###

Kellan was finally back home after being poked, prodded, irradiated and drained of blood again. He was putting away his gear from the hunting trip and Tasha was helping him as she knew where most of the equipment was stored in their garage. She picked up his bow and quiver and started to put them away when she noticed something odd. "Kel, is this your new bow you just bought?" she asked. It was all scuffed and scratched up along with most of the labeling worn away.

"That's it." he replied to his mate. "Why? What's wrong?" He looked over to see her examining his bow in great detail.

"Oh, nothing. It's just that it looks very old and worn out now. What did you do to it?" The tigress started to quickly put two and two together in her head. She added a few more to that total when he took the chainmaile tunic, Dane axe and broadsword out of the back of the camper shell. She was so thunderstruck that she sat down hard on the garage floor in shock.

It took her a few more minutes before she said another word. "Your story ..." she said cautiously. "You were serious, weren't you?" The tigress was shaking her head in

disbelief. “NO! This couldn't have happened...!” She was on the verge of tears as this information raced around her mind. “It's ... it's ... impossible...!”

“Tasha, dear. I was lost in the wilderness for 10 days. Anything could have happened to me in that time span.” he said in an effort to try to stave off her next crying fit. As he held her close and comforted her, Kory came out into the garage to help.

“Nice axe!” Kory said as he picked up the huge weapon. “This has a gnarly looking blade on it. Check this...Ouch!” he yelled as he cut himself on it. “Hey! This thing's actually sharp!” he blurted out as he sat it back down and went into the house to take care of his wound.

Finally the tigress looked up at her husband and said, “OK, you're right. You were lost in the wilderness and anything could have happened to you.” she stood back up and looked at her husband straight in the eyes as she said cautiously “Yeah, you're right. You ... you were ... Lost.”

Chapter 15

“Post Script”

Conrad was busy in the kitchen helping his mother fix lunch for their family and company. The tigress was really tired from taking a last-minute emergency mission with her husband and not getting the weekend of rest that they had sorely needed. At least they could now take a few days to rest up and forget about what they had seen on this particular mission.

“Conrad, I hope your father is ready for lunch.” she said to the young tiger as she put ice in the glasses and sat them on the table. She clearly remembered the carnage that they had to deal with on this last impromptu mission. It was just unimaginable what would happen when some fur misread the holy word and used their warped interpretations of the good book for their own gain. She needed a rest from all of the dead, incinerated bodies that they had walked around and over on the first day of the mission.

As she put the glasses on the table, the thought of what had happened still made cold shivers run up her spine. A dragon made a very effective offensive weapon against mere mortal furs. The sight of her mate facing down the dragon holding his Dane axe high and screaming out a war cry in his native tongue while the huge winged lizard tried very unsuccessfully to barbecue him was stuck in her mind. It also gave her a good idea what he would look like dyed black.

“Sis, you look rough,” Valerie commented as she came into the kitchen and sat at the breakfast bar. “You should go right to bed and rest.” she added as she got back up and helped with the salad. She could see her sister was totally exhausted from her second job for the higher cause.

“I know I should go to bed, Sis. I'm beat,” she replied to her sister. “I guess that you have to be mentally tough to be an agent for the gods. Maybe I'm just not cut out for all of this.” The tigress sat down on a breakfast stool and put her elbows on the counter and rested her head on her paws. “It was terrible, Val. Those poor furs were roasted alive by that dragon! He kept circling, making pass after pass until Tor threw a Francisca at him, striking him in the throat.” she began to cry softly as she thought of her mate standing up to the dragon's fiery breath. “He could have been hurt by all of that evilness.”

“Isn't there something else you can do for the gods?” Conrad asked his mother.

“I don't know what else we could do for the gods,” she said softly. “I'll have Torvald ask Christopher the next time he sees him. Maybe we can have a job that doesn't put us in harm's way quite so often. Just because we're immortal doesn't mean it's open season

on the Svensens, for crying out loud!" She shook her head at the thought that she even agreed to be a celestial agent. "What was I thinking!" she said to herself as she thought about the last mission again.

Once Valerie had finished the salad, she asked about their guests. "Are Torvald's friend and his mate going to stay for lunch?"

"I don't know but I think they're staying for a little while longer," the immortal tigress replied. "They haven't come inside, have they?"

"No, the males are still in the garage and Barbara along with the femme haven't returned with some sodas." Valerie stated as she got up to retrieve the males for lunch. As she looked out into the garage, Torvald was working on something while a smaller bay-colored equine male watched on.

"Are you two coming in for lunch?" she asked as she stood there in the doorway.

"We will be in shortly. I'm almost done." the berserker replied as he worked to finish the job at paw. He got out a file and worked on a particularly nasty ding in Kellan's broadsword where he had accidentally banged it on a rock. "Kellan's mate called his cell phone earlier. They're on their way home right now."

"So that's your sister-in-law?" the smaller equine asked as she went back inside. "I would have guessed wrong and said that was Victoria standing there."

"They do have a strong family resemblance," the stallion stated. "Victoria's stripes on her cheeks are wider and they start closer to her muzzle. Her color is a bit darker, too."

The visitor chuckled at his statement. "Let's face it, Torvald. We both love our femmes."

"I know I love Victoria enough that I'm asking our boss for a change of pace for a while," Torvald stated. "I can tell she's getting tired of these crazy missions."

The two stallions came inside once Tasha and Barbara had returned with some sodas for their meal. Kellan's mate had talked at length to the immortal tigress about their second jobs for a higher cause. Victoria had a great deal of trouble convincing her that it was for the good of all furkind that she and her mate did these missions. Tasha had listened very carefully to her but had finally stated that she would never let her mate be a warrior for the gods. It seemed just too dangerous to her.

Kellan was making a comment about there being a strong family resemblance between the young tiger and his mother when a voice rang out in the room.

“Torvald and Victoria, it is time. Prepare yourselves.”

“Oh No!” Victoria exclaimed. “Not Again!” She looked up as she said ever so calmly,
“Christopher, you owe us big time!”