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'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 10

“Time To Reconcile, Remember and Repair”

Victoria went to her closet once again to see those leather leggings and that cloth tunic hanging prominently on a hanger. That was proof positive to her that they -had- been there and the huge stallion was indeed her intended mate. The tigress could still smell his unique scent on the tunic where he had rubbed his chin on her shoulder as he held her.

She suspected that Robert had seen Conrad and her return with the goddess but he wouldn't let on that he had. Her cougar mate had been very stand-offish since their return from Torvald's home world and it was not getting any better now that a few days had passed. She could tell this was probably bothering Robert so that evening she just decided to go for broke.

“Rob, is something bothering you?” she asked at the dinner table. “If there is, please, let's talk about it.”

“No, there's nothing wrong” he said as he munched on a bite of Victoria's special spicy meatloaf. He looked up at her and after a very pregnant pause said “Well...yeah, there -is- something wrong.” He looked at her with a strange look on his muzzle. “You remember when you started having those weird dreams?” he asked as he sat his fork down on his plate.

“Yeah, I plainly remember when that happened” the tigress replied.

“Well, now don't get me wrong or get mad at me but I started having some dreams of my own.” The cougar sipped his beer before he continued with his thoughts. “I dreamed this house has been decorated by somebody else, not you” he stated. “The furnishings are all different. Promise me you won't get mad” he asked of her.

“I won't get mad unless you stop telling your story right there” Victoria stated with a slight smile. She was giving her mate her full attention at the moment because this seemed important to her current husband.

“Well, You know that femme ocelot that you sister hangs out with?” he asked his mate.

“Yeah, her name is Barbara Caine. They make SCA[®] and LARP[®] weapons as a hobby” Victoria pointed out to her cougar.

“Well, I keep dreaming that I'm married to her little sister Elizabeth and we have five little kits of our own” he said quietly.

The tigress sat there and thought this over for a while. He was having dreams from his alternate reality just like she had. Was it possible that they would be going back to their normal realities soon? Only time will tell.

###

The archangel Michael was standing with his compatriot Gabriel in Christopher's home. The lion had summoned them to take care of a situation that was rapidly getting out of control.

“I need you two to go search for the reason behind the berserker's timeline being disrupted. He was never chosen as a holy warrior and this in turn is causing major disruptions in several other timelines.” The lion was still thinking about his meeting with Victoria earlier and her apparent lack of knowledge concerning her real mission in life. “You must find out who or what has done this and undo the damage.”

The two archangels nodded and shimmered out of sight only to appear in the tigress' modest home in Bakersfield. “Victoria? Are you home?” Gabriel called out loudly as they looked around themselves. “Michael, this isn't her house” the smaller archangel stated as he looked at their surroundings.

“I homed in on her essence but you are right. I do not remember this dwelling” the larger angel replied. Presently the tigress came into view from the hallway.

“ Gabriel, Michael ... What are you angels doing here?” she asked as she sat down on the couch. “Is there anything I can help you with?” Victoria was obviously confused by their appearance in her home.

“We are looking for the source of the disruption in the berserker's timeline” the archangel stated. “Christopher said you had an idea when it might have happened.”

“I think I do” she said as she motioned for them to sit down. “It's still kind of foggy to me but I keep seeing in my mind a turn-of-the-century cottage. Something happened there and my memories of Torvald stop right there with it. The last thing I remember is Torvald screaming out my name, I'm yelling his name and a flash of light going off between us.” She looked at the angels with a serious look on her muzzle as she said “I think we may have been fighting with a demon of some sort.”

“I wish we had more information to go on but we will do our best to find out what has happened” Gabriel said to the tigress to reassure her. “This we must do for you and your mate.”

Michael nodded as he chimed in “We must go to that cottage and investigate.” The two angels stood and quickly shimmered out.

###

Victoria was lying in bed with Robert, snuggled up against his side. The cougar was lying on his back, paws behind his head while he was deep in thought. She had told him the story of what had been happening and he was still trying his best to digest it. “I still love you, Rob” she said to him softly. “I need to know that you still love me too.”

“If what you've told me -is- true, then you aren't my real wife” he said flatly, rolling over to look at her face to face. “We're together only because of a magical miscue somewhere in time.” He felt -odd- about the whole idea of being an alternate reality for her. He rolled on over onto his stomach, putting his paws under his chin while he thought about her story further.

“So tell me that you don't love me” she asked, giving him a kiss on the side of the muzzle. “If you can say that, I will believe you.”

“That's just it, kitten. I do love you” he said quietly. “Vicky, I have always loved you and if I can still remember you after the 'miscue' is fixed, I will still love you. Always.”

“Torvald's first wife said roughly the same thing about him” she pointed out to her cougar mate. “I promised her that I would never let Torvald forget her.” She buried her nose in his neck, smelling his musky scent and memorizing it. “I will never forget you either.” She then began to sob softly, knowing that even though she would get her beloved stallion back, she would have to give up her feline mate that she loved so dearly.

“If this is all true” the cougar said, “When will the gods put everything back right?”

“I don't know” she replied as she wiped the tears from her eyes. “Torvald has been in his alternate reality for more than 3 years when I was with him last and I think we have been in our alternate reality ever since we met.”

“Well, I hope that we will both be happy after all of this is over with” Robert said to his mate. “I keep thinking about Elizabeth. Will I love her just as much as I love you?” The cougar was trying his best to keep from crying about the situation because he loved his tigress deeply.

“I think you will love her” the tigress said quietly. “You have five children by her if you are dreaming things right. I think you would have to love her to have that many kits.”

“I hope you're right” Robert said as he rolled back over on his side and held his tigress very close to him as he fought back the tears that were welling up in his eyes.

###

Michael and Gabriel materialized in a convenient empty alleyway, clothed in contemporary 1897 garb. The smaller of the two angels was sporting a handlebar mustache of all things.

“I'm not sure that lip warmer works for you” Michael commented with a smile as he slipped his duster on over his wings.

“I thought I would try it anyway since Denise suggested it” Gabriel replied. “I just wish we didn't have to hide our wings. It bothers me to cover them like this. It makes us look like we have hunch backs” he added as he put his duster on. “Come on, let's go over to the hotel and check in.”

Once the two angels had gotten checked in to their room it was decided to get some food, an earthly treat for any angel.

“I do not know where to start” Gabriel commented as he read the restaurant's chalkboard with the day's delicacies on it. “It all looks so good” he added, almost drooling over the selections available.

“You may seat yourselves” Corrine said to the angels, pointing towards a table by the front door. “May I get you something to drink?” she added as she put some flatware on the table for them.

“Coffee, please” they both said simultaneously, then started to laugh at what they had just done. The femme mongoose went to retrieve their drinks for them while they still pondered what they would ultimately order.

Once Corrine had returned to the table, the two felines were ready to order. “I will have steak and eggs with toast and fried potatoes” Michael said and then looked at his partner.

“I would like flapjacks with two eggs please” Gabriel said as he was practically drooling at the thought of the griddle cakes.

“Very well” Corrine said as she went to the kitchen. Within mere seconds after the mongoose had went into the kitchen, a femme began to swear loudly from the back area.

“Who is the \$&*@# idiot that wants #&^%\$ flapjacks?” Catarina Dunkel screamed at the top of her lungs when she came to the kitchen door. Spotting the angels, she headed their way.

“Did one of you order some \$&^\$ flapjacks?” she yelled at the felines. The two archangels gave her a very disarming smile each, tipping their heads as they looked at her. This had an immediate effect on the black colored feline chef.

“Uh...I am...sorry that I...swore at you two gentlefurs” she said uneasily to them. “If you want flapjacks” she struggled to say without swearing, “I...will fix them...for you.”

“I would like some of your flapjacks, if it's not too much trouble” Gabriel said, giving her another one of his best disarming smiles.

Joan Elfsborg came running out of her office at Corrine's suggestion to see the chef talking to some fur without swearing up a storm. She was completely stunned to hear the chef speak in a normal tone of voice without cursing a blue streak. The filly had never heard this before, ever.

“I will have your flapjacks...cooked in a few moments” Ms. Dunkel said in a voice that was a little less strained. “It would be my pleasure to fix them for you.” As she walked back to the kitchen, she smiled ever so slightly at Joan, something that the blond filly had never seen her do.

Corrine got Joan's attention and said to her quietly “Did you see that? She spoke to a customer without swearing and she even smiled at you!”

“I saw it with my own two eyes” the filly stated as she shook her head. “But I still don't believe it.” She went to the kitchen and confronted the cook about this situation.

“Is there something wrong?” Catarina asked her supervisor with a lifted eyebrow.

“You're not swearing!” the blond equine replied with an astonished look on her muzzle. “I just...don't believe it!”

“You're right” the feline commented. “I am not swearing and I do not feel the urge to.”

“Well, that's fine with me if you stop swearing” Joan stated. “I do have to say that you have a pretty voice when you're not cursing.”

“Uh...thank you” the cook replied. “Please excuse me, Joan. I need to get back to work.”

The blond filly turned and slowly began to walk towards the back door of the kitchen when the femme mongoose stopped her.

“Joan, are you OK?” she asked, concerned for her supervisor's condition. It took a moment for the equine to respond to her question.

“Yeah, I'll be fine once I've gotten a little fresh air” she replied, seeming just a little dazed by the events that had just happened. “I'll be back in a while” she added as she picked up her purse from her office and left the building, stopping on the way out to look at the black femme feline one more time, shaking her head in disbelief.

###

Victoria had just gotten off the phone with Tigermark, who had called just to see how things were. He had been informed by Joe about what had been going on and he felt compelled to call her, showing his concern from one warrior to another. She had enjoyed her chat with him and he was quite relieved to hear that she had all of her memories back.

“Who was that on the phone?” Robert asked as he came through the family room from the back yard.

“That was Tigermark” she replied. “He just called to see how I was doing.”

“This is just so weird” Robert commented as he sat down on the couch by her, giving her a kiss on the cheek. “I’m still trying to get my head around all of this. I’m sorry but I still think of you as -my- tigress.” He was looking over at that picture Victoria had brought home from Joe’s house. It was strange to see her standing arm in arm with the huge stallion, obviously happy by her appearance in the photo.

“I know, it feels weird” she replied to her cougar mate. “I’m still having problems with it too even though I know where I really need to be.” The tigress knew where she belonged and this wasn’t the place for her. She belonged with her stallion and her son in a different timeline. She prayed silently for the gods to straighten this out this mess as quickly as possible. Victoria also knew in her heart that she would miss Robert deeply.

While the couple was trying to decide what to do for the evening, Victoria received a phone call from her sister Valerie.

“Sis, could Barbara and I come by tomorrow afternoon?” she asked. “We need to talk to you about something that’s been going on.” The tigress could hear the concern in her sibling’s voice as they spoke.

“Sure Val” the tigress replied. “I’m sure we’ll be at home. Come on by.”

“Thanks, Sis. We really need to talk to you.”

###

The two archangels were strolling around town to work off their meal. Both of them had decided to call it quits after three pieces of apple pie apiece.

“That was real good” Michael commented as they were wandering around town. “I’ll have to see if Luigi can make us some pies like that.”

“You know the rules, Michael” the smaller angel pointed out. “No apples allowed in our celestial home.”

“You’re right” the larger angel stated. “You think we could sneak a few in? That pie was delicious!” he commented as he rubbed his full belly.

“After what happened with Eve? I don’t think so” Gabriel replied. “I wouldn’t want to get caught with them in my possession.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right” the larger angel commented. “Maybe Luigi could...” Michael made a motion to be quiet as he sensed something that shouldn’t be here. “There’s a dark agent and a mage nearby” he said as he closed his eyes and tried to sense their direction. “And there’s something flooding out my senses so I can’t get an exact location. It feels like white power to me.”

The pair started to walk towards what they sensed to be the general direction of the furs they were looking for when they happened across a familiar looking tall, blond filly coming their way. The smaller angel greeted her as they met up with her.

“Good morning, Aslaug” Gabriel said to her, not knowing if she might still be mad at them for their interference in the matters regarding her and the tigress. The blond equine looked at them very strangely right before she reached up and grabbed a convenient ear in each paw and pulled them right into her face.

“I’m not sure who propagated this insane rumor that I was somehow named Aslaug!” she spat out at the two feline angels. “I am -not- who you think I am.” she then let go of their ears and dusted her paws off as she glared at the angels standing in front of her.

“Oy Vey!” Michael muttered as he rubbed his ear that still hurt quite a bit.

“My name is Joan Elfsborg for your information” she said tersely as she smoothed out her blouse while she continued to glare at the angels. “Please try to remember that if you would.”

“We’re sorry, Ms. Elfsborg” the smaller angel offered up. “It’s just that you...” the blond filly held up her paw to cut him off.

“Let me guess. There is more than a passing resemblance to another blond filly that you know who is possibly a Norse Valkyrie or a Shieldmaiden” she said in a slightly sarcastic tone. “I have already been told that by the managers of the General store.”

“Not to be mean about it but you do have her temperament when you were giving us what for” Gabriel commented.

“I am sorry” she said quietly. “I did not mean to hurt you but I was taken off guard by your calling me Aslaug. I have never been mistaken for another femme before.”

“Well, that won’t happen again” the taller angel stated. “Please excuse us Miss Elfsborg but we must be on our way” he added as they nodded and quickly left the filly behind.

Once they had gotten out of earshot, Michael made a comment.

“I’ll never make that mistake again” he said quietly. “She would no doubt be dangerous with a sword.”

Once they had reached the General store, the two angels quickly jimmed the lock on the front door with a little assistance from above and went inside to observe Thammuz slipping out the back door quietly.

“A dark agent” Gabriel pointed out right before he quickly pulled Michael behind some crates of merchandise that were stacked up to hide from the next fur coming inside. They watched as the sheriff crept up to the back door and looked outside.

“Can you see outside in your mind?” Gabriel asked in a whisper. What’s he looking at?”

“I cannot see a thing” Michael replied quietly as he tried desperately to scan the area behind the store. “The white power is flooding out my mind completely. I am totally blind to remote sight.”

As the two angels watched, the sheriff began to create an energy orb and conjure a banishing spell that they could hear in their minds. It suddenly made sense to Gabriel what had happened to the timeline. The white power could only mean one thing; it had to be the immortal couple that were outside. Victoria had said something about a flash of light which was probably the orb exploding on whatever the mage had thrown it at.

It was oh-so-clear to him now; this canid mage had created the shift in the timeline with this energy orb banishing spell. Without another moments' hesitation, the smaller archangel made a headlong run at the mage to stop him.

###

Valerie and Barbara had made their way up from El Cajon to see Victoria and her mate. They had brought a third femme with them, Barbara's younger sister Elizabeth. The five of them were sitting around the dining table, enjoying pizza and soda pop.

“I wanted to come and see for myself” Elizabeth said as they were finishing their meal. “I feel like I've been here before” she commented as she looked around at the surroundings. She went on to describe the home's layout in great detail, including the bedrooms and the pull down stairs to the attic that were inside the master bedroom closet. She even included the fact that there was a trick to getting them to come down without them getting stuck.

“You couldn't have known about that trick with the stairs unless you had lived here” Robert stated. “I wish there was a way to tell you what was going on without you thinking I was crazy.” Robert just shook his head as he rubbed his forehead, a doozy of a headache coming on from the stress.

“Well, as crazy as this might sound, how about if I said we were married?” the younger ocelot replied to him in a questioning tone. “We were married in my dreams with five children, four males and one femme.”

“Maybe I can help out” the red fox vixen in the blue robe said from the kitchen doorway. “Elizabeth deserves to know the truth before she thinks she has gone insane.”

“Who are you?” Valerie said and then a look of astonishment crossed her muzzle as she and Barbara both said at the exact same time “Freya.”

“I am Freya, Norse goddess of Love and War” she confirmed to the younger ocelot as the goddess sat down next to her. “I think that Valerie and your sister have gotten their memories back by the sounds of it.” The elder ocelot and the younger tigress were slowly nodding their heads as the gravity of the situation was sinking in.

“Robert, please come over here” the vixen indicated as she urged the younger spotted feline to stand up. “I wish for the two of you to hold paws.” The cougar hesitated for a moment but at Victoria's urging finally got up to walk around the table and face Elizabeth. After a few moments, they cautiously reached out to one another and held

paws. It was clear when their memories returned to them as they took one another in a strong embrace and began to cry.

“Robbie!” the ocelot cried out between sobs. “Robbie, I missed you!” she exclaimed, still holding onto the cougar.

“Ellie!” was all that he could squeeze out as he was sobbing almost uncontrollably in her arms.

Once the two embraced felines had settled down, Freya got all of their attention. “Things are going to get strange in just a few moments when the angels put the timeline back to right.”

###

Gabriel had crossed the few yards from his hiding place in a split second to grab the mage's arm, preventing him from throwing the energy ball.

“Drop the orb!” the angel demanded tersely of the collie. He spun the canid around to face him and loudly demanded once again “Drop it NOW!” with a look of death on his muzzle. Gabriel had drawn his broadsword and it looked like he was preparing to use it on the intoxicated collie if the mage didn't comply.

“Who the hell are you?” the sheriff asked with a look of confusion on his muzzle.

“He's the Archangel Gabriel” the larger angel stated as he came out of his hiding place. “I'm Michael, in case you didn't know.” The larger angel had taken his duster off and he was spreading his wings out for effect. Gabriel was trying to keep from laughing at this display of theatrics by his partner while Michael casually strolled across the room with a sinister look on his muzzle, flexing his wings out and up to their fullest span of over eighteen feet in width. Michael then said in an ominous tone as he drew his broadsword, “Now do as Gabriel asks and drop that orb before I smite you dead, mage.”

Once the collie had dropped the energy ball at Michael's request, the two archangels went outside to see what was happening. What they saw in front of them shocked them both.