

The Characters Torvald 'Tor' Svensen, Conrad (Parks) Svensen , Victoria Connell-Svensen (Sands), Valerie Connell, Barbara Caine, Elizabeth Caine-Sands, Luigi Tagglionne, Ivar Johnsen, Denise Berger, Sheriff Tom Huxley, Lawrence Cerruti, Pastor John and Lisa Aranow, Alexander, Maurine and Corrine Merriweather, Mitch Bolton, Theodore, Catherine, Walter and Laura Chevarez, Rocky Robbins, Reverend Stan Marchese, Roger Woodall, Melvin Platt, Algernon Forrest, Asbeel Wildehond Lycaon, Catarina Dunkel, Pastor Seamus Maclachlan, Doc James Bischer, Karl Jenson, Robert Sands, Matthew, Jonathan, Anna, Nicholas and Thomas Sands, Wilhelmine Andersdatter, Axel Torvaldson, Gytha Torvaldsdatter, Dana Torvaldsdatter , John Parks, Candace Ewing Parks, Frode Gunnarson, Wilhelmine Marie Kurzweil, James William Kurzweil, Milton Heydeck, Ralph Carapina, Coach Rebecca MacNaughton, Steven Nanomantube, Coffee 2 Go and Computer Shack are the property of Ray Stankewitz and may not be used without permission

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'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 11

"Taking Care Of Business"

The dark agent had fell to the ground at the berserker's hooves when the tigress finally pulled her sword from his dying body for the last time. She had this weird feeling wash over her that something strange had just happened but what that was, she wasn't sure. She was snapped back to the reality of the situation by her mate staggering towards her, holding his abdomen with his blood-soaked paws.

"Victoria, help me" was all that he got out before he collapsed to the ground at her feet.

This shocked the tigress but she quickly pulled herself together and screamed out "Christopher! Odin! Help us, Please!" as she dropped to her knees to see about her fallen mate.

"We're right here" Gabriel said to Victoria as the two angels knelt down next to the dying stallion. They rolled Torvald over onto his back to see that several of his internal organs were threatening to become external ones. The huge gash across his abdomen right above his navel was severely contaminated with dirt and bleeding quite profusely. This didn't look good at all because the huge fur was no longer conscious from acute loss of blood.

Gabriel nodded at Michael and gripped the equine's arm while his partner did the same to Torvald's opposite arm. "We'll take him from here, Victoria. Hang on to me tightly while we get him out of here to safety" he told the tigress as the four of them quickly shimmered out of sight.

###

The sheriff had stood at the doorway into the General store, watching the whole scene unfold in front of him. He still had this nagging feeling that he had thrown an orb at the weasel but then again, he -had- dropped it at the angel's request. This was just confusing as all hell to him at the moment. What really shocked him was the foursome shimmering out of sight. He had only heard of this but he had never seen it in action.

“Sheriff, are you OK?” the voice called out from behind him. Deputy Bolton came up to stand beside his boss and survey the scene. There was a bloody broadsword lying in the grass near a large puddle of blood. There was also a weasel lying face-down in the grass, a huge puddle of blood underneath him that was growing larger by the moment.

Mitch walked past his boss and went over to the sword, picking it up. He was quickly rewarded by a very nasty surprise. “Yeouch!” the feline shouted as his paw was scorched heavily by the weapon of a dark agent. “Why in the hell did that sword burn my paw?”

“Mitch, step away from that thing” the collie directed as he went to stand near the sword. “You didn't see me do this” the sheriff admonished as he created an energy orb and threw it at the weapon, destroying it.

“Well I'll be damned” the feline said as his boss walked by him.

“There was nothing damned about what just happened here” the sheriff replied. “It was all by divine intervention.” He then grabbed the cougar by the arm and headed him towards the mortuary to retrieve the undertaker. There was a dead fur lying in the yard that needed to be taken care of.

###

Robert and Elizabeth were standing in their kitchen in a loving embrace, feeling somewhat confused at the moment. As they looked around them, it seemed to them that there were more furs in the room with them just a few moments ago. The table still had two empty pizza boxes and five soda cans sitting on it, just the way they thought it should be. The pair finally sat down when the realization of what had been going on for the past 15 years of their lives began to finally sink in.

“Robbie, did all of this really happen?” the ocelot asked her mate. She was still thinking she lived in El Cajon in the same apartment complex as her sister. “We're married and we own this house, don't we?” she asked cautiously, trying to sort out her memories that were all jumbled up. She remembered their wedding and the honeymoon where their car broke down before they even got out of town. She also remembered giving Robert the brush-off at one of her sister's parties when he was trying to pick up on her. She was having trouble differentiating between which was the right memory and which didn't really happen in the proper timeline. The sounds of multiple pairs of small feet running through the house were heard followed by a spotted blur coming in their direction to disturb the moment.

“Mommy! Tell Matt to stop pulling my tail!” the little 10 year old femme feline, their second youngest child out of five yelled out as she ran into the kitchen and jumped up into Elizabeth's lap, hugging her around the neck.

“I didn't pull Anna's tail! Jonathan pulled it!” the young male cougar/ocelot mix retorted as he ran into the kitchen after his sister. Within moments, Jonathan, Nicholas and Thomas had made their appearances, telling their versions of the story all at once.

The two parents looked at one another and smiled. They knew everything was all right now.

###

Torvald had been somewhat awake for a span of a few minutes. His abdomen and arms were hurting intensely and his mouth and tongue felt like he had been licking cotton balls. As far as he could determine, there was only one other fur in this room with him presently. He finally decided to sit up and see just where in the heck he was. The hurt that he was rewarded with by trying to move made him grunt loudly as he fell back to the bed in intense pain.

“Torvald? Are you awake?” the familiar femme voice asked in her native tongue. He felt the soft touch of her hands against his neck as she helped him to sit up slightly and drink some water from a ceramic cup. “We thought for a while you wouldn't make it” she added as he greedily drank up the refreshment. He opened his eyes to see that he was staring into the face of a femme that he knew quite dearly. It was his immortal mate Victoria.

“Where are we?” he asked as he blinked to clear his eyes and looked around himself at his surroundings. “Is this Valhalla? Did we lose? Are we finally dead?”

“Yeah, this is Valhalla, we've been here for three days, we won and we're not dead” the tigress replied to his questions as she gave him a kiss. “You were cut up pretty badly by that dark agent so it was touch-and-go for a little bit. You were -almost- dead when we got here.” He could see that his abdomen was heavily bandaged and there was a bandage wrapped around his left paw from the dark sword's burns. Both of his forearms had small bandages here and there from the superficial cuts the dark agent had made.

After some time had passed, the immortal couple received some special visitors. “I'm sure that you've made Lucifer extremely mad, tigress” the one-eyed wolf said with a smile as he came into the room with Freya. “You destroyed his right-paw agent. That's why your stallion's wounds are taking so much time to heal. That sword was forged of evil and blessed by Beelzebub himself.” The god smiled widely at the tigress as he added “You did a nice job on Thammuz. He was cut almost in half by your sword.”

“I had to stop him, Odin. It was either him or my stallion” she replied. “I wasn't going to let him have my mate without a fight.” The tigress had to stifle a sob as the thought of her mate dying crossed her mind.

“Now I see why Christopher likes you two” the wolf commented as he sat down next to the berserker. “You're not afraid to use might over reasoning when the situation warrants it.”

“We try to get the job done as quickly as possible” the huge fur stated as he scratched the scabs on the cuts to his arms that were healing nicely. “We need to get back to the current mission at paw soon.”

“Not until you're properly healed up” Freya said as she peeked under the bandages on the huge equine. The gash was healing nicely and there was the possibility that it wouldn't even leave a scar afterwards. “I don't want to see you moving around until I hear from Frigg that you're ready. That was the nastiest wound I've seen in a long time, stallion.”

“Freya, you really know how to take the fun out of a mission” Torvald said with a smile on his muzzle. He knew he would be properly cared for while he was here if the last time he was healed up by the gods was any indication.

###

The two archangels were sitting outside Torvald's room, waiting patiently for Odin and Freya to finish visiting with the immortal couple so they could talk with them for a moment about finishing their mission. While they were waiting for that moment, they were discussing what had happened when they had arrived at Valhalla with the berserker.

“I thought Aslaug's sisters were going to throw us out of Asgaard until they saw Torvald's condition” Michael commented. “They were still none too happy with us transporting the stallion. That tall lioness over there said that was their duty to perform and not ours.” He motioned to a rather fit feline femme sharpening her spear and glaring at them menacingly. The taller angel swallowed hard as he told Gabriel “She told me her name is Elin. I'm sure she's real upset with us doing their work.”

“I think that one red-headed Valkyrie mare really wanted to claim Torvald as hers. She said something about her portion of the warriors” Gabriel stated. “I thought for a moment we would have a fight on our paws. I'm real sure I would have been nursing severe wing injuries again.” He was shaking his head over all of this. “She looked pretty tough, if you ask me.”

“Maybe we should see how the stallion and tigress are doing and then go check on that mage” the taller angel suggested as he pretended not to notice the stares that they were garnering from the Valkyries that were gathered around them.

“Yeah. Anything to get out the sight of that one over there” Gabriel said, pointing out a beautiful leopard appaloosa colored Valkyrie mare that made Aslaug look positively small by comparison. She was leaning on her spear as she watched the two felines intently with a slight smile on her muzzle. “I talked to her for a few moments and she told me her name was Hrist. She seems nice and everything but something tells me she's waiting for us to move so she can throw us out of Asgaard all by herself.”

###

Conrad was sitting with his birth father John Parks in the local Coffee 2 Go[®] coffee shop, talking about the events that had transpired.

"I'm glad Robert and your aunt Valerie filled me in on what was happening" the elder tiger stated. "I was beginning to think I had lost my mind when I went to Robert's home in Bakersfield and your mother wasn't there!" He had been shocked to see the home and yard decorated in such a different style from what the tigress had done. It took a while for him to realize that he remembered it two different ways and this way was the right way.

"Yeah, this whole thing has been really weird" Conrad commented as he sipped his coffee and nibbled on his tuna sandwich. "I still remember that wreck in your diesel truck up on the Cajon Pass..." He stopped talking because the thought made him feel odd all over to talk about something that hadn't happened in this timeline. He reached down and felt his legs, thinking of all the months it took him to learn to walk on a prosthetic leg in that other existence. It was hard not to remember falling down at school numerous times when some bully would trip him just for the fun of it.

"That wreck was a bad one" John stated then changed his mind about it. "No, that could have been a bad one but it didn't happen to us in this timeline" he restated. "I think I learned something from all of this" he added, looking at his son with a sad look on his muzzle. "I need to have more contact with you. I've been an ass for not seeing you more often and not being a part of your life."

"Well, we still have the memories of the other timeline" the young tiger commented. "Let's see if we can build on them."

"I guess this is our family's little secret, huh?" the elder tiger asked.

"Yeah, it's our family's secret" the young tiger replied.

###

The collie was looking across his desk at the two feline archangels. He was relieved that they hadn't come to kill him but just to talk over what had happened.

"I'm really glad that you stopped me from throwing that orb" the canid stated, thankful the he had been prevented from making such a huge error in judgment. The angels had briefed him on the disruption of the timeline and the lengths they had to go to put things back right.

"You do understand what we've told you?" Michael asked as they had talked about the repercussions that his actions had on everything around them.

"Yeah, I guess that I should have looked closer before I did something like that" he replied. "I guess that's the reason I'm a fallen mage. I wasn't careful with my magic."

"You're too powerful to -not- be a mage" Gabriel interjected. "You need to carry on with your craft."

"Maybe I will" the canid replied. "If they will have me back, maybe I will."

###

Algernon was facing the dark cloud figure, quaking in his boots with fear. Zagam had summoned him without warning to the underworld to 'discuss' the current situation. The heat and the stench were almost unbearable to him as he tried to stand his ground in front of the demon king.

“I feel you have interfered with my plans, wolf” the demon stated as he circled the canid slowly. “You will have to take care of my needs personally because of that.” With that said, a broadsword appeared in front of Algernon, floating in mid-air. The wolf carefully took the weapon and put the scabbard's belt around his waist, making sure it was sitting just so on his hip.

“I will try not to fail” Algernon said cautiously, making sure to bow in the demon's presence.

“You had better not fail!” Zagam retorted. “I will expect the stallion and his tigress dead by this eve.”

“How will I...” The demon cut off the wolf in mid-sentence.

“I will show you how” he replied as he touched his cloud-paw to Algernon's forehead. As he touched him, the light of reasoning went out in the wolf's eyes. He was for all intents and purposes a dark agent for the demon but not under his own control.

“Now go and do my bidding” the cloud demon said as the wolf disappeared from sight.

###

“It doesn't look bad at all” Torvald commented as he looked at the injury site in the mirror. “I think when my coat grows back it might not show.” The flesh was still pink along the gash site, the hair having been trimmed back to facilitate proper healing. There was a short blond stubble beginning to show, signs that his coat was beginning to regenerate.

“It doesn't matter what it looks like, Torvald. You're just lucky to be alive, my stallion” Victoria stated as she put on her skirt and blouse. They had Odin put them back inside their cottage due to the fact that the Norse style clothing they were wearing in Asgaard would have been out of place here. “And it's not like you don't have other scars on your body” she pointed out, poking at the scar from the German broadsword on his belly.

“Even if it doesn't show, I will still feel it” the huge equine stated as he put on a shirt and began to button it. “Just like all of my other wounds, I will still feel it.” He ran his paw over the wound sites from the 10th century arrows that had pierced the flesh on his leg. He could still feel in his mind every last one of the projectiles impact his body, causing tremendous damage to him that Asgaard's best had labored long and hard to repair.

“I think you should just stay inside and rest some more” the tigress stated as she finished arranging her clothes properly. “You still look tired, my loving stallion.”

“I am still very tired” he replied. “I need to rest up for tomorrow. There's a shipment of goods coming in from Chicago by train that I'll need to sort out.”

"I'll help you when the shipment gets here" the tigress stated. "Right now you need to rest" she added as she forced the berserker to lie down on the bed. The stallion had just laid down and made himself comfortable when some fur knocked on the door. The tigress answered the knock to find the undertaker standing there with a solemn look on his muzzle.

"Good afternoon, I'm Milton Heydeck" the undertaker said as he greeted the tigress. "Deputy Bolton said to come do something with the dead weasel in your yard." The woodchuck was dressed in a white shirt, black suit and tie, holding his hat reverently over his chest with both paws.

Victoria looked over to see the results of her handiwork. The weasel had bled a pool of blood that was almost as big around as he was tall and his clothes were cut to ribbons around his waist area where she had plunged her broadsword into his body over and over. Somehow this didn't seem to bother her as it meant that she had prevented him from taking her stallion away from her.

"His name was Thammuz" she stated, taking the time to spell it for Mr. Heydeck. "Just bury him and send us the bill." While they had talked, the pair had wandered over to where the deceased agent was laying in the grass.

"What happened to the poor feller, if I might ask?" the undertaker queried. "He looks cut to shreds if you ask me."

"Oh, you might say he didn't watch out for his well-being" the tigress replied as she gave him a poke with a stick to make absolutely sure he was dead. A small smile crept across her muzzle as she looked at the dead agent's lifeless body.

"I'll be right back with my wagon" the woodchuck stated as he bowed slightly to the tigress and left.

###

Algernon was walking down Main street, looking more like a zombie than anything else. There was a blank look on his face that gave away the fact he was acting as an unholy automaton for the demon Zagam. It was spooking the other furs he encountered when he would walk by and not even acknowledge their presence. He made a strict bee-line through town straight for the General store.

Once the dark wolf had arrived at the store's front doors, he drew his broadsword and broke one of the windows in the door so he could reach through and unlock them, opening the doors for himself. He went straight through the building and kicked the back door open without stopping. He stepped off the back steps, stopped and called out to the immortal couple in a demon's voice.

*"Stallion...Tigress...Come Meet Your Fate!
I Have Come To Destroy You!"*

Victoria had just closed the front door of their cottage and she was headed for the kitchen to put together a lunch for them when she heard the minion's call outside. This caused her to stop in her tracks with a look of disgust on her face. "Torvald" she called out through the cottage. "Get your broadsword and Dane axe. There's another idiot agent wanting to try and kill us!"

###

Asbeel was sitting with his mentor in the Father's celestial home when he felt something very wrong. Setting his manuscripts down, he motioned for Uriel to feel the vibrations he could sense.

"Something's wrong, old buddy" the elder angel stated as he used his senses to feel the ripples in the fabric of existence.

"Uriel, what do you think?" the canid angel asked as he tried to feel what was going on. "I can't seem to get a fix on it."

"I think it's near where the immortals helped you to return" Uriel stated. "We need to go there." The two angels quickly stood and shimmered out. Once they rematerialized, what they saw shook them up greatly. The black wolf was wielding a dark agent's sword, obviously under the control of a demon. His eyes showed no life to them as he turned to face the two celestial warriors.

"Leave here now or be destroyed, you winged meddlers!"

the wolf shouted as he turned back towards the cottage where the immortal couple had made their appearance. The pair's eyes were already shining with white power as they stepped onto the grass and stood several feet apart in a warrior's stance. The tigress shouted out their reply to his challenge.

"Leave here now and you will not join Thammuz in death!" she shouted with a sinister look on her muzzle. "I have had enough of you minions trying to kill us! Don't make me sent you straight to hell, you damned idiot wolf!"

She took a few steps toward the wolf and stood her ground as she shouted out to him,

"YOU WILL BE DESTROYED IF YOU DON'T LEAVE BEFORE I COUNT TO THREE!"

"1 ... 2 ... "

(Nice cliffhanger, huh?)

Tune in for the next installment of...

"The Price Of Worship"

(cue up the spooky organ music)