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'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 13

“Rest, Relaxation and a New Assignment with a Twist”

Torvald and Victoria were sitting on the couch in the family room, enjoying the quiet of the moment. They had finally completed their last assignment after helping the buck preacher Stan Marchese see the errors of his ways and helped to rebuild the Mennonite and Pentecostal churches. The huge fur was still nursing several almost-healed blisters on his paws from running a steam mill, paw-sawing and hammering on the buildings.

“Vacation at last” he said quietly as he leaned his head back against the cushions on the back of the couch and sighed. “I will not forget this mission for some time” he added as he sipped on some fresh lemonade.

“That mission was the worst one we've been on in a while” the tigress stated, shaking her head. She could still see in her mind that weasel trying his best to kill her husband with his last dying breath.

“Could you believe Pastor Marchese actually thought he was in the right?” the huge fur commented. “I still remember the look on his face when you began quoting the bible to him! Then you quoted several other religious texts! You made him look real silly!”

“It's not like he didn't have it coming” she retorted. “Money is not the root of all evil! It's the love of money that is the root of all evil.” She was smiling at the memory of the surprised look on the buck's face when she straightened him out on that passage's true meaning.

“Not to change the subject but when do the kids arrive?” the huge fur asked as he scratched the scar on his abdomen. It still itched as it finished healing up properly.

“I think they should be here this evening” she replied as she leaned her head back against the couch and closed her eyes. She had made some last minute additions to the rooms to make them more suitable for a pair of teens. The final additions were computers for their rooms and a new one for Conrad to replace his aging Pentium III 1Ghz machine. Victoria was getting up to get some more lemonade for herself when Asbeel shimmered in with two other furs.

“Your guests have arrived” the canid angel said with a big smile on his face. “It's good to see you two again.”

“It is good to see you doing something constructive” the berserker said with a smile on his muzzle. “I was sure you would have backed out before we could send you home.”

“Me?” the canid retorted. “Back out? Are you kidding? No, I was completely scared out of my mind until the boss said I could come home! By the way, these are your new charges” he added as he indicated the two furs that had appeared with him.

The two 'guests' were busy looking around at their surrounding with awe. The femme, a -very- tall pale palomino filly, looked at Tor's armor display and practically began to drool at the sight. Her brother, a buff colored feline, had to restrain her to keep her from going over to touch them.

“Wilhelmine! There will be much time to see the armor at length” he said with a thick German accent. “We must meet our new family first.”

“Yes James, you are right” she replied in her heavily accented alto voice. “We must be polite and meet them first.”

The immortals went over to meet their charges and give them welcoming hugs. “I am Wilhelmine Marie” the filly stated as she gave Torvald a warm smile while she hugged Victoria. “Odin said that he liked my given name. He knew you would like that name too.” this caused the huge fur to have to stifle a sob as she reminded him of his first wife in her delicate facial features. That was until she smiled widely at him. This showed off her biological father's contributions to her genetic makeup; her feline fangs. “Oh, I am sorry” she said quickly when she observed the huge fur's surprise, putting her paw over her mouth. “I should have warned you about my teeth. Our father was a lion.”

“No, please don't be embarrassed” the huge fur said quickly. “It is the things like this that make each of us unique. Besides, you have a pretty smile.” This caused Wilhelmine to blush heavily under her beautiful pale palomino coat. Torvald then noticed that she wore her mane in a braid that hung down well past her waist and her tail hairs almost touched the floor.

“I am James William” the feline stated as he gave Torvald a hug and then shook his hand strongly. While barely taller than Torvald's mate, James probably weighed closer to the berserker in weight. It was quite obvious to the casual observer that he worked out from his bulging arm and chest muscles. His mane was quite short, not from being cut that way but most likely genetics from being a equine/feline cross. “I do not know why but I am not tall like my sister” he noted, standing next to her so the immortals could see the difference. When Wilhelmine stood up straight, she was 6' 7 ½" tall and

as the huge fur noted, she was no skinny kid either. Her physical build rivaled the Valkyrie's in all respects.

“I guess that you two will be staying here as our niece and nephew” Victoria said as she gave James a hug. “Now that we know your first and middle names, what is your last name if we may ask?”

“Our family name is Kurzweil” the filly stated as she handed the tigress a rather thick manila envelope. “Those are the documents and papers that we had amassed from our former schools.” Victoria opened the packet and began to hand the berserker some of the papers, all in German. He was looking at the documents and he had to comment on some things that he noticed as he scanned them.

“You are twins?” he asked with a look of confusion on his muzzle as he turned some pages. “It says here that you're in the 10th grade. Is that right?” he asked, thinking that they were younger than this.

“Yes, we are fraternal twins and we are 16 years of age” James replied. “We will be in grade 10 this fall. It also appears that you can read German” he added as they stood there patiently.

“I can translate German” the huge fur said quickly as Victoria gave him a smirk. “I was taught by a good friend how to do it.”

“I think we should show you around the house and get you two settled into your rooms” the tigress said as she motioned for them to follow her upstairs. “We had the second floor added on to accommodate you two.”

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Summer had turned into a typical warm southern California fall and the two charges of the Svensens had been enrolled in the same local high school that Conrad attended. James had been quickly recruited by the junior varsity baseball coach because of his ability to swing for the fence with uncanny precision. It didn't hurt that he was a southpaw that had played first base at his last school.

The femme's basketball coach took one look at Wilhelmine and practically begged her to play on their sophomore team. At first the young filly was hesitant to play based on her inexperience at the game but with a little coaching she began to play the game with some confidence.

The family members were watching the first home game of basketball against Washington High School from northern California and it was becoming clear that Wilhelmine had become a decent basketball player. She had made almost one-fourth of the baskets scored in the first half of the game, much to the dismay of the Washington Huskies' coach.

The game had barely gotten back underway in the second period when the Huskies' coach called a time out.

“Some femme's scuffing the ball -and- a couple of my players with her claws!” the panther shouted out to the referee, pointing to the ball that his center was holding. The ref went over and examined the ball at length before he decided to call for a claw check.

The teams were lining up for the referee to inspect their claws when Wilhelmine called out “You don't have to look any further. I lost a tip cover somewhere.” She walked over to the referee and expressed her claws on her left paw, using her right index finger to point out the lack of a tip cover on her left ring finger. “I will put another tip covering on right now” she added as she turned and jogged over to the coach, who was wide eyed just like the referee.

“Willi Marie! I had no idea you had claws!” the femme Irish setter coach said, trying not to look freaked out by this little piece of news. Victoria made her way down to the bench with some spare covers and some isocyanate glue for the filly.

“Thank you Aunt Victoria” Wilhelmine said as the tigress quickly glued the cover in place. “I will have to use more adhesive next time” she added as she turned to return to the court.

“You're her aunt?” the canid femme asked as she was still looking at her power forward return to play. “Where did she get the claws from?”

“Her father was a lion” Victoria replied as she sat in an empty seat by the coach. While they were watching, Wilhelmine was leaping up to grab a rebound when she was fouled by an opposing player, causing her to fall.

“Are you gonna call that foul?!?” the panther screamed at the ref who had went to see about the fallen players. Wilhelmine was getting back up to reveal she had fallen on top of the stoat that had fouled her. The panther ran out onto the court to check on his player and to register a complaint.

“She's too big to play with the other femmes!” the coach pointed out, trying to make a moot point. “She's too big and she'll hurt some fur with her size!”

“There's nothing in the rules that says how tall a femme can or can't be to play” the skunk referee said flatly as he got right in the panther's face. “Get off the court right now before I throw you out of the game” he said quietly to the panther, indicating the locker room doors to the gym. The coach reluctantly turned and quietly left the playing floor.

The game got back underway and Wilhelmine scored two more baskets from the three point line to put their team ahead of the Huskies by twenty-two points. That's when the other team began to systematically trip and try to injure the home team.

“Time Out!” the coach yelled as she called all of her players together. “Listen up. They're trying to take us out” Coach MacNaughton told her players. “Keep an eye out for the other team.” Her players nodded and returned to the court.

“I've got it” the equine femme shouted as she began to drive down the court once more with the ball. She stopped and not seeing another player open, jumped and shot for two

more points. As she came down from her shot, she was fouled once again, causing her to fall very hard to the floor.

“Are you going to call that foul against that oversize filly?” the panther shouted as he almost stepped out on the floor again.

“Your player fouled Miss Kurzweil” the ref shouted back and charged the whitetail deer with an intentional foul for her indiscretion. Meanwhile, the tall filly had limped off the floor to sit down and massage her injured right knee.

“How's your knee?” the coach asked as she got out an icepack to put on Willi Marie's knee.

“I will be fine” she replied, looking very determined to return to the fray. “Just give me a minute for the pain to subside.” The filly sat for a few moments and massaged her knee before being put back in the game. Once back on the floor she made almost the same play again, much to the opposing player's surprise. Instead of getting knocked down this time, she mowed the other player down.

“You better damned well call that foul!” the panther coach said loudly as he walked out on the floor. His look of determination turned into a look of surprise when the referee just pointed at the locker room door.

“Are you all right?” Wilhelmine asked the ferret that she had bowled over as she helped the small femme to stand back up.

“Uh, I think so” was the reply as she began to walk to the wrong bench only to be turned around by one of her team mates.

After the ferret had left the floor, the game resumed to finish 103 to 87, favor of the home team. As per standard family procedures after a winning game, it was a trip to the pizza parlor for fine pizza, fizzy soda pop and good company.

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“I am tired, Uncle Torvald” the filly stated as she plopped down on the couch in the family room. “Would you help me get these sole covers unglued? I feel like my stomach will pop from too much pizza if I try to bend over.” Willi Marie had chosen to use the glued on urethane soles instead of lace-on hoof covers for traction on the basketball court.

“Sure Willi, I'll give you a helping paw with that” the huge fur said as he sat down on the floor in front of her and began to apply some de-bonding agent to the soles to loosen them. As he worked on her hooves, he made a comment. “In the tenth century, you would have most likely been a Shieldmaiden because of your size and speed.”

“James could never outrun me when we were children” she pointed out as she relaxed on the couch with a slight smile on her muzzle from being tended to by the berserker. “I would like to train with you, if you do not mind” she added which caused the huge fur to look at her strangely.

“After your parents were killed, I didn't think you would be interested in doing any training in combat techniques” Torvald interjected.

“I wish to be able to defend myself” she said bluntly, giving the huge fur a serious look. “You have trained Aunt Victoria and Conrad to defend themselves. How am I different?” The way she said that reminded Torvald of the Valkyrie and her brusque manner when she wanted to make a point.

“You are not different” Torvald replied with a smile. “If you want to train with me, then I will give you my best instruction to make sure you can defend yourself.”

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The next day, Victoria was sitting with her ex-husband in the local Coffee 2 Go[®] coffee house, discussing their son's visitation arrangements. Conrad's biological father had not shown a real interest in Conrad's upbringing until now. “You're doing what?” the tigress blurted out as she looked at her ex-husband in shock. “John, you'll have to say that one more time” she said as she tried to comprehend his statement.

“You heard me right” he replied to his ex. “I'm taking a dispatcher's job here in town with Ahern moving and storage. That way I'll be close to Conrad and I can spend more time with him.”

“John Parks, you had better not be messing with my mind” Victoria said cautiously as she evaluated his sincerity. “I swear, I'll get even with you if you're just screwing around with Conrad and myself.”

“No, listen to me, please” he begged as he tried to make her understand. “I still remember what went on in that other timeline. I should have tried to be a better influence on our son and I realize that I should have been a part of his life all along.”

OK John, if you're sincere, I'll make sure that you can see your son at every opportunity” Victoria stated. “Just do -not- betray any trust that you build in our son.”

“I won't, trust me” the male tiger retorted with a serious look on his muzzle. “I know that I screwed up and I need to fix it if I can.”

###

The Svensen household were in their back yard along with the two femme lovers. They were all enjoying the nice fall afternoon weather and a good round of combat training. Everyone was currently laughing at the huge fur while he rubbed his cheek with a look of surprise on his muzzle.

“I'm very sorry” the tall femme said to Torvald, lowering her staff. “I didn't mean to hit you so hard” she added, looking quite embarrassed by her actions.

“It's OK, Willi Marie” he said as he rubbed his cheek. “I should have blocked your staff a little faster” he stated as she smiled at her. “Besides, it's not like you could really hurt me” he added as he walked over to her and gave her a hug.

“Torvald, that's two femmes that can best you at the staff!” his mate shouted out as she began to laugh harder. “You're in big trouble now, stallion!” The berserker was just shaking his head at the thought of being beat by a pair of femmes.

“It must be her feline reflexes” he stated as he sipped some lemonade. “I cannot move fast enough to stay out of her reach.” While everyone finally settled back down, a voice rang out around them.

“Torvald and Victoria, it is time. Prepare yourselves”

“I did not think our next mission was to start so soon” the huge fur said as he stood and helped his mate up. “We must find out what's going on.” As they stood there, the world went white around them...

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...As the whiteness turned back into scenery, they looked around to see that they were in that 14th century Celtic village where they had started another mission some time back that involved a dragon. While they stood there, Victoria suddenly without warning lost her balance and fell down hard on the ground. Torvald noticed this happen, tried to help stop her from falling but tripped over his tail and fell down beside his mate.

“Loki! I'll kill you when I find you!” Victoria screamed out as she looked at her forearms, covered in a blond coat. From her vantage point, she could see that she had hooves instead of feet.

“Victoria?” the huge fur asked, not sure if he was looking at his mate or not. “Are you my mate Victoria?” he asked again because the equine lying by him was still looking at her figure and appendages. He then looked to see that he was a ruddy orange and white color along with black striping. He ran his tongue around his mouth the see that he had fangs. Long feline fangs.

“Yeah, it's me” she replied flatly to Torvald's query as she sat up and assessed the situation. She looked over to observe that her mate, whom she had recognized by his voice was a tiger. A -very- large tiger. “So tell me, am I a pretty equine mare?” she asked in a sarcastic tone, putting her hands on her hips and giving her husband a small pout.

Torvald, however was not paying attention to his mate. “How do I make them retract?” he asked as he looked at his paws with their long, black claws expressed out to their fullest.

“Relax, silly” she replied. “If you're tensed up, you can't retract them at all.” As she watched, her hubby closed his eyes, rolled his head on his shoulders and took a few deep breaths. His claws momentarily slid out of view. “That's better” she added as she patted him on the shoulder. “Now help me stand up.”

Torvald got back to his feet and reaching down, helped his mate to stand quite shakily. "How do you even stand up on hooves?" she asked as she held on to her mate firmly. They were interrupted by the appearance of a familiar fur, the town constable Roley Blair.

"Lord Torvald, Lady Victoria. So nice to see..." The raccoon's voice tapered off as he assessed what he was seeing. "Aren't you supposed to be..." He was pointing alternately at each one of them as he tried not to go into visual and mental overload.

"Yeah, this isn't right" the blond mare stated. "We got switched somehow by some form of magic." She had to grab Torvald's arm as she almost fell again. "This is messed up! How can I fight if I can't even stand?" she stated as she looked at her mate for some direction.

"I can stand and run just fine on hooves" he said and then looked at his new feet. "Well, I may have trouble too. This just doesn't feel right" he added as he took a few tentative steps, wiggling his toes. "I may have to get used to this" he mused as he looked at his mate.

"If I may so boldly interrupt, I believe you might want to discuss this matter in private" the constable suggested, looking around at the furs that were beginning to gather about. "You may use my office, if that would be suitable."

"That is a very good suggestion" the blond mare said as she looked up at her tiger husband. "Carry me, please?" she asked with a pleading look on her muzzle.

"OK, just this once" he replied as he deftly picked her up and headed towards the constable's building.