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'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 14

"Appearances"

"I am so glad that your honorable Lord and Lady have so graciously come to help us again" the raccoon said with a bow once he had closed the door to his office. "The dragon has not burned any villages that we are aware of but he has carried away a number of cattle, much to our dismay."

The berserker was still wiggling his toes, not used to having more than one digit that could move like this. "We will have to search out the dragon and either reason with him or slay him" the huge fur suggested as he sipped some ale that the constable had provided them out of courtesy.

"The dragon has issued a proclamation of sorts" the constable stated. "We must help him to break his bonds to the wizard or he will continue to eat our cattle." The immortal couple could tell that the constable wasn't kidding by the look on his muzzle.

"How can we find him?" the mare asked as she was smirking at her husband absentmindedly twiddling the end of his striped tail.

"You may find him in two day's time at the clearing near the river" was the raccoon's reply. "He will not harm you if you are unarmed" the law-fur added with a hint of concern in his voice. "I would heed that request by the lizard, if you understand my thinking."

"You are right" the huge tiger said with a smile. "I can deal with it if he tries to cook me" Torvald added, thinking about how he would look as a hairless blackened feline.

"At any rate, we need to secure lodging for the night" the mare stated. "Is our room at the inn still available?" she asked, giving the constable a small polite smile.

“Yes, M’Lady. Your room is always available at a moment’s notice” he replied as he bowed deeply to the blond filly. “I will go ahead of you and inform Geoff that you are coming.”

###

The dragon Mistfeldr sat back down after making a circuit of her domain. The magician was not currently trying to control her thoughts and actions so she was able to fly a bit and stretch out her wings. The mage was controlling her for his own personal gain and Mistfeldr longed to be free of his influence. Targ the wood nymph had told her of a stallion that had once destroyed a lesser male dragon so she thought that same stallion might be tasked to deal with the mage.

A cow tried to leave the makeshift pen that the dragon had constructed so she reached over and shooed the recalcitrant bovine back towards the others in the herd before securing the gate again with a bit of her own minor magic. The dragon didn’t intend to eat the cattle, but merely use them as a pawn in her quest to break the bond between her and the wizard. She was sure that the locals would beseech the stallion and his mate to get their cattle back and in turn Mistfeldr would have him free her. It was an admirable plan that hurt only the evil mage and no others.

She would also protect the stallion and his mate in their quest to break the bonds. It was only fair that she do this for them in exchange for her freedom.

###

“M’Lady and M’Lord, something seems quite amiss” the hamster behind the counter pointed out as he looked at the immortal pair. “You seem to be reversed, as it appears.”

“Yes Geoff, we are not in our correct forms” the mare replied. “If our room is available, we would like to have a quiet evening with no interruptions except for some food brought up to our room.”

“M’Lady, I can arrange that for you” the innkeeper assured them with a bow. “I will have my son Jared bring your meal to you and your mate as soon as possible. Your room will be ready by the time you get there.”

“If you would” the huge tiger queried before they went upstairs, “Please have the town armorer come see us, tonight if possible. We are in need of some armor.”

The immortal pair went up the stairs to find the chambermaid coming out of the room in question. “Your room is ready, M’Lady, M’Lord” the ferret said to them with a deep bow.

“Thank you” the femme equine said as they went into the room and closed the door behind them. “I wish they wouldn’t treat us like royalty” Victoria complained as she sat down and massaged her sore pasterns. “I’m still not used to being called M’Lady if you get my drift.”

“Well, Duke Wortham did knight me Lord Torvald and bestow the title of Lady Victoria on you” the tiger pointed out. “We are part of the upper crust around here. Just look at this room; we stay here for almost nothing when no fur in town can afford to stay here.” The room that they were staying in was larger than some one bedroom apartments on their home world. It had a living area with a fireplace, a spacious bedroom with another fireplace and an indoor chamber pot area that could be cleaned out from the hallway by their room.

“It is a nice room, I will admit” the equine mare agreed. “I just would like to be back in my body, that's all.” She was leaning back in the chair, trying to relax just a little.

“Yeah, I would like the same thing too” the berserker said as he took off his shirt and rubbed his chest. “This fur is much different than my coat” he added, going over to the dresser and picking up a brush. “It is very hard to brush out properly” he commented as the huge feline tried his best to straighten out his chest fur.

“You're doing it all wrong” the mare pointed out as she got back up and walked over to her mate. She made him sit down on a stool and brushed out his hair and fur around his head and shoulders carefully, being cautious to gently remove any tangles. “There, that's how you brush. Not across the lie of the fur but with it” she admonished him and then gave him a kiss on top of his head. About that time, they were interrupted by a knock on the door.

“It is your humble armorer, Squire Liam at your service” the voice said from the hallway. Beyond the door they could hear the clatter of armor being shifted around in a furs' paws. Victoria went to the door and opened it.

“Is Lady Victoria here?” the gray tabby asked, looking around at the room and then spying the large male tiger sitting on the stool. “Are -you- Lady Victoria?” he queried with a confused look on his muzzle as he looked over the blond mare carefully.

“Please do come inside, Squire Liam. Quickly” she said quite formally, grabbing the front of his jerkin and almost pulling him into the room. Once the door was shut behind them, she turned to face the armorer, sighed and told him the news. “I am Lady Victoria and that's my hubby Lord Torvald” she stated, motioning to the huge fur seated on a stool. “We have been affected by magic, as you can plainly see.”

“I do see” the feline said as he sat the armor in his paws on a convenient chair. “I feel that the armor you left with me for repair the last time you were here may no longer fit you properly in such case.”

“Liam, we are to battle another dragon” the large tiger said as he got up to cross the room. “We will need your services to be prepared to battle the wurm in 2 days hence.”

“This is not much time Lord Torvald” the wiry tabby commented as he bowed to the tiger. “Let me see how poorly the fit is so I may have all of my staff work to outfit you properly.” The smaller feline went to the door and called in two solid black felines to assist him in fitting the armor. Torvald's armor fit close enough as to not require alterations except for the helm. It needed to be altered to a feline shape.

Victoria's armor was another story altogether. She was substantially taller now and her armor was in need of many alterations to fit her new equine form. One of the assistants was rapidly making sketches and taking measurements that made no sense to either of the immortals. Once they had completed their initial survey, Liam and his assistants quietly left for his shop.

After their meal had been brought to them, a familiar femme skunk shimmered in with a huge armload of clothes.

“Hello again” she said as she sat the clothes down only to stop dead in her tracks as she observed the occupants of the room. “What happened to you two?” she blurted out, looking quite surprised by what she saw before her.

“Is something wrong?” the equine asked, trying to suppress a scowl. “I don't see a thing wrong ... NOT!” The mare was looking quite unhappy about things in general as she went to see what was brought to them.

“You two have just made my day just that much harder” Denise said as she began to sort the clothes out. “I’m not sure what will and won't fit now” she added as she held up a dress to the blond mare. “Yup, it's too short as I suspected. She reached into her skirt pocket and retrieved a notepad and and a tape measure. Victoria removed her blouse and pants and stood on a low stool so the skunkette could measure her properly.

“How long will you need to fit my clothes?” the femme equine asked as she began to get dressed again.

“I'll be back in a few seconds” Denise said and as she had promised, returned in -just- a few seconds. “OK, here's your clothing, fit just for you” she stated as she held up a dress to check its sizing. “Yeah, that's much better” she noted as she checked a few more.

“Did you bring undergarments for my armor?” Victoria asked as she inspected the clothes closer. The mare could tell that some fur had went to great lengths to get the look of the clothes just right. Every stitch was obviously done by hand with great care, looking almost like machine stitching.

“I have your undergarments for you and your mate's armor coming right now” she said as a smallish golden retriever femme shimmered into the room.

“Here's the clothing you asked ... for ...?” the canid cut her statement short as she knew the immortal couple well, having outfitted them on several occasions. “Torvald? Victoria??”

“Yeah, it's a long story, Margaret. I'll tell it to you some other time, OK?” the mare said in a tired voice as she looked at her gambeson and leggings. “Yeah, this will do just fine” she added as she slipped the padded garment over her head and checked the fit.

###

The couple had checked their garments over carefully to see that they were fine for the purpose that they needed to serve. After the two femmes had left them, the couple decided to get some much-needed rest.

“Torvald, are you asleep?” the mare asked, giving him a nudge in the shoulder just in case he was sleeping.

“No, I am awake” the tiger replied, giving a wide feline yawn and curling his tongue.

“This is just too weird for me” she stated as she snuggled up to her hubby. “This whole mission is a mystery, just like the last time we were here.”

“Yeah, it's just too strange even without being in the wrong physical form” the tiger stated. “I wish we could just switch bodies.” Both of them felt a funny tingling sensation wash over them for just a second or two.

“Torvald, I'm gonna kick your sorry equine arse for saying that!” the tiger stated in an angry voice, rolling over to look at the mare with a scowl.

“Sorry, Victoria” the mare replied, looking very sheepish. “I forgot about the magic in this realm and its effect on us.” After a moment of silence, the mare added sheepishly “At least you won't have to learn how to run with hooves.”

“That's not funny” the tiger stated, giving the mare an even stronger glare. “I was really hoping that you wouldn't say those two words together for the duration of this mission!”

The berserker was thinking back to the first time they were in this realm and the wish for a fresh plain old-fashioned donut caused a complete functioning Mitchell's Donut Shop to appear by the road they were traveling on. “Should I try to reverse this mix-up?” the equine asked, giving his mate a pensive smile.

“No, you know it won't work for twelve hours or so” Victoria stated, giving her mate a smirk. “Oh, and by the way, I think I may have been coming into season.”

“Oh No! Don't tell me that!” Torvald blurted out. “I was just thinking about how much I wanted you to make mad, passionate love to me! I'm really screwed now!”

“No, you aren't screwed yet” the tiger pointed out. “Give me a few minutes to sort this out in my brain, OK? Then we'll deal with your needs.”

“That is not funny!” the mare said, crossing his arms across his bosom. “I am real sorry that I said that wish out loud, OK? I forgot, that's all.”

“It's too late to do anything about it now” Victoria pointed out. “We'll just have to deal with it as best as we can.” The tiger reached out and pulled the mare close to her and gave the equine a kiss. “I have to confess” the tiger said softly. “I'm feeling strongly towards you too.”

“Well, let's see what we can do about it then” the mare stated, blowing out the candle on the stand beside their bed.

###

Morning had come and Victoria was awake, lying next to her mate. The mare had slept like a rock, snoring loudly as he had always done as a stallion.

“Torvald, are you awake?” she asked quietly, gently poking the mare in the shoulder just in case her hubby was still asleep.

“Are we home? Is the mission over?” he queried, oblivious to his surroundings as he rolled over to face the tiger and give his mate a small kiss on the muzzle. “Give me five more minutes, hon. I don't need to be at work until nine or so” he said sleepily. He then began to snore loudly again as he slipped back off to sleep.

“Torvald, sweetheart. We're on a mission” the tiger stated as she shook the mare vigorously. “You don't have an alarm clock in the 14th century.”

“OK, I am awake now” he said, looking over at his mate as he blinked his eyes to clear them. “I'm not dreaming this, am I?” he asked, looking at his paws and then his breasts, carefully touching them to see if they were real or not.

“No, you're awake” Victoria confirmed. “This is just -*waay*- too weird for me. I wish we were back in our proper bodies.” They both felt a tingling sensation wash over them for a second or two.

“Why didn't you say that before now?” the huge fur commented.

“Torvald, I feel really stupid all of the sudden” the tigress said sheepishly. “I could have done that last night, for crying out loud! If I had said it, it might have circumvented the 12 hour rule. Now I feel stupid.”

“No, last night was ... interesting, to say the least” the huge equine stated with a smile as he kissed his wife. “I can understand your needs a lot better now. As soon as we get up, we need to get Liam back up here to straighten out our armor issues and Denise needs to fix your clothes -again-.”

###

The immortal couple were sitting at a table in the dining hall, enjoying a morning repast of cold meats, fruits and cooked cereals. They were trying to play off the fact that they were now in their proper forms, looking to all the world as they should.

“M'Lady, M'Lord. I have come as you had summoned” the gray tabby said with a bow. “I had overheard that you were as normal again” he added, still somewhat puzzled about how this had happened.

“Will this cause a problem?” the tigress asked as she sliced off some meat from a shank of beef.

“No, I had the forethought to begin to construct new armor” he replied. “Your original armor will fit you just fine.”

“That is good” the huge equine stated. “Once we obtain weapons, we will be set.”

“Your weapons are still in my shop” Liam said with a smile. “I just couldn't bring myself to sell them, especially your axe, M'Lord. It's such an imposing weapon that no other fur could wield like you can.”

“Good. We seem to be prepared” the tigress commented. “Please bring our weapons when you bring our armor to our room.”

“I will take care of all the arrangements” the tabby said as he bowed and left the room.

###

“Master Conrad, did you have to say my name?” the weasel complained, standing in the middle of the Svensen's family room with Thor's hammer in paw. “You realize that the thunder god has probably surmised by now that I have his weapon.” Loke looked somewhat miffed at being summoned by the young tiger. That was until he observed the -tall- palomino colored equine femme standing ominously behind him.

“So this is the great and powerful Loke” the femme stated in a sarcastic tone, giving him the evil eye as she advanced towards him slowly. “He doesn't seem so tough to me” she added, cracking her knuckles and giving him a feral grin that showed off her wicked looking feline teeth.

“Yikes!” the weasel spit out as he took a step back away from the filly. “Conrad, if she hurts me...” he said in a high pitch as he backed up against the coffee table. This caused Wilhelmine to start laughing at the demi-god.

“Wow! You were correct!” the buff colored male feline commented. “He jumped a foot when Willi Marie smiled at him!”

“This is not funny” Loke said sourly. “She scared the tar out of me! I have never seen such an imposing filly since I first met Aslaug!”

“I am sorry” the filly said to the weasel quietly, sounding somewhat embarrassed by her actions. “I was just going along with Conrad and his practical joke.” This statement caused Loke to turn and stare in disbelief at the young tiger with an open mouth.

“You, my young friend” the trickster stated as a smile came to his muzzle, “Are beginning to learn the fine art of practical jokes!”

“Thank you, kind Sir” the tiger said, giving the weasel a deep bow. “I have been learning from the best.”