

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, Nicholas, Thomas and Anna 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, Constable Roley Blair, Geoff Black, Jared Black, Liam Archer, Terrance 'Terry' Williams, Susan Williams, Margaret Finley, Jens Johanson, Deanna Johanson, Duke Marcus Graves, Coffee-2-Go and Computer Shack are the property of Ray Stankewitz and may not be used without permission The Character Joan Elfsborg is the result of a collaboration with Joan Jacobsen. The character Aslaug Larsdatter "The Valkyrie" property of Joan Jacobsen and is used by permission The characters Joe and Annie Latrans property of the Silver Coyote and are used by permission The character Tigermark 'TM' M'rega property of Tigermark and is used by permission Any resemblance to persons or furs, either living or dead, real or fictional is purely coincidental. No reposting without permission permitted. Copyright © 2007, 2008 Kellan Meigh & Ray Stankewitz All Rights Reserved.

'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 17

“Targeted For Capture”

“Torvald, are you asleep?” the tigress asked softly, giving him a small nudge in the shoulder just in case he really was asleep.

“I am awake” the huge fur replied as he yawned widely. “I don't know if you noticed but our guest snores. I have been up since before sunrise.” The canid was still snoring at an incredible volume level as the immortal couple listened on. The equine rolled over to face the tigress and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “I thought Conrad snored loudly but Jens has him topped by a mile.”

“You know, I think you went just a little overboard with the magic last night” Victoria commented as she sat up in the king sized four-poster bed that the stallion had conjured up. “I will admit it was a nice gesture but don't you think it was a bit much?”

“Jens didn't seem upset by the bed I conjured up for him” the stallion stated as he sat up and stretched his arms. “He seemed very grateful for a real bed to sleep in.”

“OK, funny stallion. Make like a good wizard and conjure up some breakfast” she suggested as she began to put on her clothes. “How about bacon, eggs and pancakes?”

“As you wish, M'Lady” the equine replied as he put on his leggings and slipped his shirt on. “I will have breakfast ready in no time at all.” Torvald stepped out of the tent and stretched again, letting the sun warm his face and chest. It was a nice morning, the quiet disturbed only by the birds and the insects about them.

The huge fur thought for a moment about how to approach this problem, then stretched out his paws like a Saturday morning cartoon wizard. “Table and chairs” he

said softly, making a small table and three chairs appear in front of him. "Bacon, eggs and pancakes breakfast for three" he added, causing the table to be covered in food. He smiled and walked over to the feast laid out before him and tasted the fare, finding it to his likings. Stepping back a few steps, he made a comment as he looked around himself at his surroundings. "This is such a nice place, so green and inviting. I wish the kids could see this." He suddenly realized what he said as Conrad, Willi Marie and James appeared before him.

As the threesome looked around at their surroundings, Conrad was the first to speak up. "Uh, Dad ... Where in the heck are we?" He had a look of total confusion on his muzzle as he scanned the area around him. James was slack jawed as he slowly turned to see that he was no longer in the Svensen's back yard while Willi Marie went over to the huge fur and said in a pensive voice, "Uncle Torvald, am I asleep, dreaming all of this?"

"Torvald, Damn You!" the tigress shouted from inside the tent as she hurriedly put on enough clothes to be modest. "I hear the kids' voices out there! You better not have done what I think you've done!!"

"I'm doomed" the huge fur muttered as he cringed from the thought of what the tigress might do to him for this stunt. "Kids, hide me before Victoria mauls me" he added as he turned to face the music.

"Oh No!" Victoria exclaimed sourly as she came out of the tent to observe that the kids were indeed present and accounted for. She facepawed herself as she shook her head in disbelief over what she saw in front of her. She slowly walked over to the stallion, reached up and grabbed a paw full of his mane and brought him down to her eye level. "Torvald, you have really screwed up now" she said very quietly, so quiet that the children couldn't make out what was said. "You realize it will be at least 36 hours before I can send them home again. That is -if- I can send them home."

"I know" he said very softly. "I have really done a bad one this time." He stood there and fully expected for the tigress to read him the riot act, long version for his indiscretions in thinking out loud.

"Well, you better wish up some horses for the kids and maybe some clothes and armor too" she suggested. "We need to be moving on as soon as we eat breakfast." By this time, Jens had woken from the commotion going on outside his tent.

"Do we have company this morning?" the canid asked as he came out of his tent and stretched. "I usually don't sleep so late in the morning but that bed was very comfortable. I thank you kind Sir, for conjuring up such a decent bed." He then bowed with a flourish to the stallion. As he stood up, he noticed that something was amiss. "Is there a problem?" he asked the immortal pair.

"Torvald wished the children here from our home" she stated flatly.

"I see" the canid commented. "They are dressed very strangely indeed. They must have come from very far away." the kids were wearing their workout sweats and the young males were wearing tennis shoes on their feet.

“You wouldn't believe me if I told you just how far away they came from” the tigress said to Jens as she shook her head some more. She grabbed Torvald's mane again and pulled him back down to her eye level once more. “You had better hope nothing happens to these kids!” she said very tersely. “I'll make a gelding out of you myself if anything -at all- happens to any one of them!!”

“I will -not- let anything happen to the children” the huge fur said quietly. “Now will you please let go of my mane?” he begged, putting his paw on hers that held a huge paw full of his mane.

The group sat down to eat once the stallion had conjured up another table, a few more chairs and some more food. As they consumed their morning fare, the berserker asked his mate a serious question.

“You really wouldn't make me a gelding, would you?” he asked, looking at his wife with trepidation

“Try me” was her short reply as she shot the stallion an evil stare.

###

The mage paced back and forth across the polished marble flooring in his reception room. The pair that he had sent for had not arrived at the appointed time and this bothered him. It was hard to find good help in the 14th century. He stood and looked out over the valley before him, thinking how some modern furs would give everything to be able to develop this pristine landscape. A wistful smile crossed his lips as he remembered buying his property in Wyoming and building his getaway ranch.

His former wife Susan thought little of the ranch until she decided to divorce him for another younger jaguar. Once that legal matter was set in motion, she decided to take the ranch away from him just for spite to the magician. He recalled the years he spent in court just to save his 250 acres from her clutches. Now it probably belonged to the state for non-payment of property taxes. Once he returned to the proper time and place, he knew he would get another ranch just to have a place to retreat to.

“M'Lord, the brothers are here” the raccoon said formally, snapping the mage back to the present. “Shall I show them in?”

“Yes, please do show them in” he replied as he sat down at his desk along one side of the room. Once the two wolves had been shown in, he motioned for them to sit across from him.

“What do you need us to do” the taller wolf asked.

“It has been reported to me that a huge blond stallion and a striped femme feline are headed this way from the south” he stated as he made sure they were listening to him. “I want you two to go and intercept them. Bring them to me but do not harm them in any way. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, M'Lord” the smaller wolf said as they rose and left the room.

“One of them will tell me how to get home” he said in a conspiratorial tone as he watched the wolves ride out of the compound from his hall window.

###

“Valerie? Are you still out there?” the femme ocelot called out from the kitchen window. “If you are, call the kids in for lunch.” Barbara brought the plate of sandwiches and the potato salad out and sat them on the kitchen table. She heard the sliding glass door open then close right away. The tigress came into the dining room slowly, scratching her head with a look of confusion on her muzzle.

“Did the kids come through here?” she asked as she sat down at the table. “I thought they were outside practicing with the staffs but they're not there. The staffs are laying in the grass like they were just dropped and forgotten.” Valerie sipped on some water she had retrieved from the faucet filter as she gave thought as to what to do next.

“You know” the ocelot pointed out. “Now that you mention it, I haven't heard them out there for a while now. You don't think something has happened to them, do you?”

“I hope not” the tigress replied. “Maybe they went for a walk or something” she added as she got just a little uneasy about the whole thing. “I'm going to drive around the neighborhood and see if I can find them.”

“OK, I'll wrap up these sandwiches real quick and go with you” the ocelot said as she got up and headed for the kitchen with the food.

###

“Uncle Torvald, this armor is heavy” Willi Marie complained, trying to adjust her breastplate again. “It is still pinching me right here” she said as she pointed to the source of the problem at her waist.

“Let me loosen the straps for the waist one notch” the tigress said as she adjusted the tall filly's armor for her. “You've never worn armor before, have you?” she asked as she made a few more adjustments.

“No, we have never had this happen to us so we have never worn armor” the palomino colored equine stated as Conrad helped James to adjust his. “This seems like a lot of weight for such little metal.”

“I wanted to make sure you all get home safely so that armor is a heavy weight thickness for your own protection” the huge fur said as he checked Conrad's armor over for a second time. “Victoria will skin me alive if any one of you gets hurt.”

“Tell me how it this whole wish-time thing works” the buff-colored feline requested of the berserker as he tried his gauntlets on, test flexing the fingers.

“Let's say if I wish for something inanimate, like an apple” Torvald replied to James as he fastened his greaves around his legs, “Victoria can wish it away instantly. If I wish for something animate, We have to wait at least 12 hours for Victoria to wish it away. That time is multiplied by the number of objects, in your case 3.”

“I will wish all three of you home tomorrow afternoon” the tigress pointed out to James. “Until then, I want each one of you to stay alert to your surroundings.” She then walked over to Torvald and got his attention. “And you, my love, had better be extra alert of the children's sake. I don't want to have to explain to Christopher what happened to any one of them on this mission. I want all of them home safely tomorrow night. Do you understand me?”

“I will be on my highest alert of the kids' sake” the huge fur replied as they all got into the saddle and began to travel.

Once they had gotten moving, the canid rode up next to Torvald. “Your mate seems rather anxious for the children to return home” Jens commented as he adjusted his grip on his horse's reins.

“I can't say that I blame her” the huge berserker replied with a shrug of his shoulders. “I really made a bad mistake with that wish.”

###

Deanna looked up from her resting spot on the couch to see that the mage Terrance had come into her room, carrying a book in his hand. He nodded to acknowledge her as he pulled a chair over near her and sat down. He was dressed rather casually this afternoon, just wearing a tunic and leggings of a strange kind she had never seen before. They were a variegated dark blue color cloth with an orange colored stitching to them. They appeared to have some strange manner of fastening system to them rather than being belted on.

“Here is the book I told you about” he said rather quietly as he handed the tome to her. “Would you try to read this for me, please? I cannot accurately translate the text in question.” She took the book in her paws and looked it over carefully before she opened it.

“It is mostly in Aramaic” she commented as she scanned the first few pages. “There is some old Greek that seems to have been inserted into it at a later date.” As she scanned it, it suddenly became clear that this text was old indeed, maybe over 1,600 years old, before the time when the one known as Jesus Christ walked the earth. That was a time when magic rather than religion was strongest.

“Can you read it?” the mage asked hesitantly as he watched her examine the text in question.

“I can read it without undue problems” the collie replied. “It is knowing what this really means that is the hard part. This book makes references to other texts and it -is- arcane magic no less. Did you read from this when you changed yourself?”

“I had memorized his shape-shifting incantation that came from that book” he replied as he thought about the unlucky wizard Dalmore. “I just changed the part about what to change and how to change it.”

“Point out the incantation” she said as she handed him the book. “Do not say anything out loud, just turn the text to that page and pass it back to me.” The mage obliged her and did as she asked. Once back in her paws, she carefully read the incantation and pondered its meaning, scratching her chin as she mulled over the implications of the incantation.

“What does it really say?” the mage asked as he waited patiently for her to speak.

“It is an interesting spell, to say the least” she replied as she continued to study it. “I think it is controlling elemental particles and manipulating them. She looked at him as she asked, “Give me that empty goblet, please? I need to try something.”

As the mage handed the vessel to her he made a pointed comment. “That collar you wear prevents you from doing magical harm to me.”

“Do not worry, the magic is for the goblet, not you” she said as she sat it on the low table in front of her. She closed her eyes and recited the incantation, making the appropriate adjustments to the phrases. The goblet suddenly became a tankard full of ale. She sipped it and smiled at the intricate flavors she tasted.

“What does that prove?” Terrance asked in an annoyed tone to the collie. “That you can conjure up refreshments?”

“Please be patient” she said as she thought for a second. “I will speak the incantation to reverse the spell” she said, concentrating as she spoke the correct sequence of words. Nothing happened.

Why didn't it change back?” the mage asked excitedly.

“I have said to you before that this is arcane magic” Mrs. Johanson pointed out again. “There are many rules that govern the use of arcane magic. An arcane rulebook would tell us what's wrong with my reversal spell.”

“There must be one in my study” he said as he beckoned for her to follow him. They went to his den where he pointed out his extensive collection of manuscripts and books that he had inherited from the late mage Dalmore.

“This might be a rulebook” the collie femme said as she took a rather thick, heavy book from the shelf and opened it up, sending dust everywhere. “Yes, this is the rulebook for arcane magic.” She began to reference the needed rules and after an extensive search made a rather amusing discovery. “That spell needs dual magic to work the reversal spell. You need either a virgin Wizardess or you must have a mate that loves you with no reservations at all to recite the incantation and reverse the spell. There may be other ways of doing it but these are the obvious.”

“Now what do I do?” the mage pondered, knowing now that her help was no longer needed. “I do thank you for your assistance in this matter and I ask you to forgive me for taking you as I did” he said as he walked over to her. He reached up, touched the gems on the front of her collar in a particular order to spring the latch and removed it from around her neck. “There, you are free to go, Deanna Johanson. I have no further need for you to stay here as you have told me what I needed to know. Please see my

assistant and he will arrange monetary compensation and passage for you back to your husband.”

The mage stood there and watched Deanna leave the room, wondering what to possibly do next. While he stood there pondering the situation, the second medallion around his neck began to glow an evil red color, summoning him to act on the behalf of the Duke Marcus Graves.

###

The two femme lovers had driven around the neighborhood for several hours in search of the kids to no avail. It was bothering both of them greatly that they had lost track of their charges and now they were gone.

“Should we call the police?” Valerie asked as she shut off the engine of her 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner, shifted the 4 speed transmission into reverse and set the parking brake.

“I’m not sure you can do that just yet” the ocelot replied as they got out of the car. “they have to be gone for so many hours before they’re considered missing.”

“Well, if I could call Loke, we could ask him to give us some help” Valerie stated as they went inside and made a sweep of the house again. The tigress sat down on the couch in the family room and visualized the weasel, calling his name a few times. After a moment, the trickster shimmered into sight.

“I thought I had heard something quite faint” he said as he sat down with the tigress. “Where is my favorite immortal couple, anyway?” he asked after realizing that they weren’t present in the room.

“They are on a mission” Valerie pointed out. “I called you because the kids have gone missing and we can’t find them.”

“I can tell you are upset by this turn of events” the weasel stated as he stood up and stepped away from the tigress. “I will try to find them for you.” He concentrated for a moment to detect the kid’s life forces and shimmered out of sight.

###

The group traveling northward to confront the wizard had taken a break to eat some lunch and rest their bodies. They were busy enjoying the last of the fare served up by Torvald’s magic when Loke shimmered into view. He quickly scanned about to see the teens sitting by the adults, apparently none the worse for wear.

“Valerie called me to look for the kids” he stated as the immortal tigress spotted him standing there by her. He could tell that Victoria was upset with that issue by the look on her face.

“Torvald wished the kids here” she pointed out. “I cannot wish them back until tomorrow evening.” She handed the weasel a piece of meat, which he took and thanked her for it.

“Can I have Freya come and try to pull them back home?” the trickster asked as he nibbled on the snack in his paw.

“You can try but I think she will not be able to” the tigress commented. “This is arcane magic, after all.”

“I see your point” Loke said as he finished his snack. “I will tell your sister and her lover that the children will be home tomorrow night.” He stood and quickly shimmered out of sight.

“Just who was that?” Jens asked as he almost dropped his mug of ale. “He was there and then he was gone!” The Vallhund was pointing to the spot that the weasel had been occupying with an open mouth.

“That was Loke” the tigress said quite noncommittally. “He came to help out with the children.”

“This has been one interesting trip, indeed” the canid commented as he sipped his ale some more.

“Anytime you add Loke into the mix” the berserker stated, “Things tend to get interesting in a hurry. You never know what that weasel is up to.”

###

The two wolves were resting their mounts who were tired after being pushed hard all afternoon. The taller one looked over at his brother and smiled. “I know what that mage is up to. The stallion and the tigress are said to be immortal. I heard that in the village to the south of us.”

“What does that have to do with us” the smaller one asked as they slowly ambled along, leading the horses behind them. “We are supposed to deliver them unharmed to Terrance for our payment.”

“You do know that the Duke will pay us dearly for them” the taller one pointed out to his sibling. “Why not make a few extra gold coins when we can?”

“I don't know” the smaller one said quietly. “You have gotten us in trouble before just like this. No, we will keep up our end of the bargain.”

“Give it some thought before you make up your mind” his brother said as they began to climb back into the saddle to travel further on.