

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 Chevez, 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, Constable Roley Blair, Geoff Black, Jared Black, Liam Archer, Terrance 'Terry' Williams, Susan Williams, Margaret Finley, Jens Johanson, Deanna Johanson, Duke Marcus Graves, Daniel and John Wolfe, Mordred Reed, 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 20

“A Funny Thing Happened”

“I thought I saw my mom open her eyes for a moment” the young tiger commented to Merlin, who concurred with Conrad's careful observation of the situation.

“Yes, I observed that too” the Ubermage said as he kneaded two balls of the goo, keeping them soft even though the material had turned to a clear color from the heat of his hands. “These balls will seal the holes left when I remove the breathing tubes from their mouths. We must do that or they will risk lung damage.”

“So what's with that yellow liquid?” James asked Merlin as they waited for the proper moment to proceed.

“It has been told to me by those two femme squirrels” he stated, “that it does two things. At first it sticks things together, such as their fur when the immortal ones were being prepared.” He motioned for James to put some on his finger and rub it against his thumb. “As it dries, it becomes very slick, breaking any bond to it. That keeps the encasement from sticking to their fur. The fruit that it is made from is very bad for your system, I have been told.” The feline noted that at first, it was extremely sticky, like carpenter's glue. Once it set up, it became as slick as silicone grease.

###

“Are you ready to return to your original size?” the tall filly asked Mistfeldr as they watched the immortal pair's head coverings cure.

“I am ready” she said wistfully as she looked over at Willi Marie. “It has been ... fun to be this size. I had never seen the insides a dwelling that wasn't flattened or burned.” About that time, Terrance walked over to talk with them.

“Mistfeldr, where's your amulet?” the pseudo-mage asked, knowing that it couldn't be removed by her at all.

“The filly removed it for me” she replied as she smiled at the constructed mage. This caused Terrance to look at the tall equine femme with surprise.

“Would you try to remove this amulet?” he asked of her, pointing to the larger of the two devices hanging around his neck. Wilhelmine reached out and gently removed the amulet, passing it back to him afterwards. The mage stood there, dumbstruck for just a moment before he hugged the filly real hard and began to sob on her shoulder.

“Are you all right?” she asked, thinking she had done something wrong to him.

“I am more than all right now” the mage said as he let go of her and stood back a few steps. He was now back to his original form, a 6' 3” jaguar. “That amulet kept certain types of spells from working for me. I suspected that it was keeping me in that human form but I wasn't sure.”

###

Conrad, James, Jens and Deanna had filled all of the water buckets, pots and any other vessel that would hold water. The group had set them in a circle around the pedestal, being sure to give the dragon enough room to work. A rope had been wound around the base in preparation to spin the couple, making it easier for Mistfeldr to heat them evenly.

“We need something for the base to sit on that will allow them to rotate” Merlin said as he thought about the problem. Wilhelmine had overheard his comment and walked over by him, making a huge Lazy Susan appear before them and giving it a spin with her paw to show off how it worked. “That will do fine, young sorceress” he said as he smiled at her. He then made the device slowly move under the pedestal that he levitated momentarily. It was then that he heard the stallion making some noises so he removed the tube, allowing Torvald to speak.

“Are we ready yet?” the equine asked carefully through the breathing hole so they could understand him. “My nose itches real bad.” Hearing his voice resonate through the encasement, Victoria made a few noises to get their attention. Conrad removed her tube and she immediately asked her question.

“What did he say?” she asked. “I couldn't make out what he said.”

“He is impatient to complete the procedure” Jens shouted by the tigress' head in hopes she could hear him.

“Tell him to keep his pants on” she said carefully as she opened her eyes just a crack. It was very hard for her to speak because she couldn't move her jaw but ever so slightly. “I want out of this stuff too but we have to do it correctly. Is this stuff cured yet?” She

noted that it was fully transparent now around her eyes, making it easy to see out of her encasement.

“A few more minutes should do it” the canid shouted back, noting that she blinked at him to show that she understood him.

###

Mistfeldr stood off to the side, obviously concentrating on something. Her eyes were closed and she was saying something so quiet that she was not heard by the others.

“Are you OK?” James asked as he walked up to her and touched her on the shoulder. She opened her eyes and regarded him before she spoke.

“I am calling one of my siblings” she replied. “We need to heat them quickly and I cannot do this alone.” Within a few moments, another dragon flared out and landed in the clearing.

“Mistfeldr, where are you?” the pearlescent midnight blue dragon asked as he looked around for his little sister.

“I am here, Jarrod” the femme dragon replied as she walked up to him. Her brother began to laugh at his sister's diminutive size as she drew nearer to him.

“I thought I told you to stay away from magicians” he admonished as he sized the situation up.

“I have been inside a dwelling that was intact” she said with a smile as she stood by her elder brother.

“What have you called me here for?” he asked her quietly. “Do you wish me to roast and eat some of these furs for you?”

“NO!” she said loudly as she got a shocked look on her muzzle. “The tall one over there” she said as she gestured toward Wilhelmine, “She released me from the mage's control and then she released the mage from his controller.” she went on to tell her brother about the problem and their plans to release the immortals. He gave it some thought but in the end he finally agreed to help them out.

###

“I believe we are ready” Merlin said as he checked some samples that he has set out to cure. Based on his observations, the goo had fully cured by this time and become hard as stone. He gathered the furs up, getting everyone to know their positions before the dragons would supply the heat necessary. Mistfeldr and Jarrod took up their places after Wilhelmine restored the femme dragon to the right shape and size.

“Do not quench them until I give the command” the dragoness said and nodded at her brother who smiled back at her.

Merlin went to the immortals and said rather loudly “I will rap on your prison twice. You will take a deep breath and I will put a plug into the breathing hole.” The two immortals carefully told the mage that they understood what was to happen next. “Here we go” the mage said, rapping twice on the encasement. He waited a few seconds and plugged the breathing holes and then quickly looked at the dragons, ensuring they were ready. Jens then began pulling on the rope, making the pedestal slowly turn.

Both dragons then let forth with almost matching gouts of fire, almost blocking the immortals from view as the flames licked over them. Their encasement first turned a straw color, then multiple shades of deepening blue. As they watched on, the material quickly turned purple, then gray and finally turned to appear like polished metal after only 10 seconds of heating.

“NOW!” Mistfeldr shouted as the group splashed a large amount of water on the encasement, causing steam to go everywhere. Once the steam cleared, Torvald and Victoria still stood there on the pedestal, looking more like a chromed metal sculpture than anything else.

“NO!” Conrad screamed out when he observed that nothing had happened to the encasement. He started to approach the pedestal when Merlin stopped him.

“Do not approach just yet” he said as a small cracking noise was heard. There was a another small sound, and another. As the seconds ticked by, more and more cracks appeared before a flurry of cracking ensued. After about 20 seconds, the encasement turned into pea gravel sized pieces as it shattered, falling away from the immortal couple. Torvald and Victoria were still holding one another as they smiled and began to kiss one another passionately.

“We should wait until later to talk to them” Terrance commented. “It looks like they are glad to get out of that mess.” The mage thought for a minute before he added “I think some fur should bring them some clothes before long.”

###

“OK, I think that's the way it's going to be for a while” Victoria commented as she dried her fur off from her second bath of the day. She was shaking her head as she looked at her mate across the room. He was busy looking at himself in the mirror with a wistful look on his muzzle.

“At least we're matching colors” he said as he turned to look at his mate, now a solid black feline. “It must have been that yellow stuff plus the heat that did it.” He went over to her and gave her a kiss as he held her in his arms, happy for them to be out of that form fit prison.

“Yeah, you're probably right” she commented. “You look like you've been painted black, sweetheart. There is no variation in color like a normal black equine would have. Thankfully it's a glossy black and not a flat color like when your fur was scorched off that last time.”

“You look the same way” he retorted to her. “Well, at least we're out of that stuff” he added as he gave her another kiss.

“Mom? Dad? Are you decent? We want to talk to you about something” the young tiger called out from the other side of the door.

“Give us a minute” Victoria replied as they hurriedly put on some clothes. Once decent, they called out to Conrad and the others to enter. The three teens entered, stopped short and all of them smiled at the immortals.

“So you two really are solid black now?” Conrad asked as he sat down on a chair and made himself comfortable.

“It looks that way” his mother replied. “It will -not- wash off, either.”

“Well, are you going to send us home now?” Wilhelmine asked as she sat down on a bench next to her brother.

“That's a good idea” the tigress said as she stood and looked at her charges. “OK, everyone stand up” she directed as she stood up and faced them. She smiled and said loudly “I wish the children were back home,” fully expecting them to vanish immediately. Unfortunately, they did not.

“What happened?” Conrad asked as he observed they had not left the room.

“There is something wrong here; they should have been sent home” the berserker stated as he thought for a moment. He looked skyward and cleared his mind as he said loudly “Christopher, Hey Christopher, we need to talk with you! We have a problem!” The stallion suddenly shimmered and disappeared from sight.

###

Once the shimmering effect ceased, Torvald could see he was not in *The Son's* celestial home at all but it appeared that he might be in Asgaard, somewhere near the main gates by the looks of it.

“Hello? Christopher? Odin? Anyone?” Torvald asked loudly, looking around at the profound lack of celestial furs present. After a few moments, Hrist the Valkyrie appeared, looking somewhat upset by something.

“I am sorry I was late in my arrival, Torvald” the leopard appaloosa colored equine femme said to him in their native tongue. *“The Gods wished me to convey the bad news to you.”*

“What bad news do you have for me, Hrist?” the huge fur asked the equally tall equine femme while they stood there.

“I have been instructed to inform you that you cannot wish the children back home” she replied. *“Wilhelmine's sorceress powers have changed the balance of the wish. You must have a mage transport them now.”* The beautiful equine looked at the ground for a moment and then back at the huge fur. She then stated with a scowl on her muzzle *“We cannot transport them ourselves due to the circumstances and I am sure you will*

understand. There is no death or fatal injury involved for my sisters to be of help to you."

Once the huge filly had said that, Torvald suddenly found himself back in the keep.

"That didn't take very long" Victoria commented as her hubby came over and sat down by her. She could tell by the look on his muzzle that something was wrong. His brow was furrowed and he was biting on his bottom lip as he pursed his mouth. This was a sign that he was genuinely upset by something.

"I did not see Christopher" he said quietly as he looked at the floor, shaking his head in disbelief. "I was told by Hrist that Willi Marie's powers made wishing them back impossible. A mage must send them back now."

"Oh Great!" the tigress exclaimed as she quickly got up and looked at her mate in disbelief. "I can't believe that Christopher or Odin would leave the kids here in harm's way and not transport them home!" she exclaimed. "I'll talk with him myself and straighten this out" she said as she looked up and said loudly "Christopher! I want to talk to you right now, do you hear me!?" The tigress suddenly disappeared from view with a very loud POP!

###

Once she became reoriented to her surroundings, the tigress could see that she was somewhere she hoped never to be again. She looked around to see the old hothead himself, sitting by a table just inside the brass doors. He was visibly straining to keep the temperature in his realm at a reasonable level for her comfort and he even used a normal sounding voice to converse with her.

"Please sit down with me" he said to her as he made another chair appear. "I brought you here because I knew you wouldn't get the answer you wanted from the Gods or Lucifer." The tigress cautiously made her way to the chair, touching it to see if it was cool enough to sit down in.

"Victoria, I could just destroy you and your family right now and be done with it but I'm trying to be helpful for a change" Surt said as he made some lemonade appear on the table. "I'm helping you and your stallion because ultimately I have a big stake in this mission you're on. As far as the children being returned to your home, you would not be happy with what Odin or WhiteChrist would tell you right now and I know you will not listen to Beelzebub."

"How do you know these things?" she asked, sampling the drink to see that it was not bad at all. It actually tasted like it might have some sugar in it to sweeten it a bit.

"I urge you to listen to me carefully. Wilhelmine has shifted the balance of your stallion's wish with her new powers" he replied. "She cannot go back to your home unless a mage transports her there. Torvald has already been told this by Hrist and now I am telling you this. What they didn't tell your stallion was that you could send Conrad and James back home now without Wilhelmine, finding a way home for her later."

There was a loud popping noise and Victoria suddenly found herself back in the keep, lemonade in paw.

“You will never guess where I was” she said to her mate as she sat down beside him, shaking just a little from shock. “I was with the old hothead himself.” Torvald got a look of complete astonishment on his muzzle as he looked at his mate.

“No Way!” he exclaimed as he looked to see that she wasn't kidding one bit. “You aren't joking around with me, are you?” he asked, smelling the tell-tale aroma of sulfur on her fur.

“He said that I could send Conrad and James back but not Wilhelmine” she stated as she sipped the lemonade some more. “He said a mage must return her.”

“Why did he tell you these things?” the huge fur asked, looking rather confused by this turn of events.

“He said that he has a big stake in our mission” she pointed out. Victoria was still somewhat shook up as she asked her husband, “What do we do now?”

“This mission is getting out of paw if you ask me” the huge fur commented. “We seem to be in the middle of something started by others that we are being forced to clean up.” He looked at his mate with a crooked smile as he said “For our own safety, we need to finish this mission as quickly as possible.”

“What are you saying?” she asked. “Do you think we're on our own?”

“If we're on our own” the stallion commented, “We may be in deep trouble. There is something big at stake here.”

“OK, so how do we get the kids home?” she asked as she gave the problem some thought. Surt had told her she could send the males home by themselves but did she want to keep the filly in this realm while they found a way home for her? She looked at her mate as she said “I can send the boys home for sure. Should I do it?”

“Yeah, we should do it” the huge fur replied. He thought for a moment before he said “Maybe Merlin could send Wilhelmine home. It wouldn't hurt to ask.”

###

Mistfeldr and Jarrod had roamed the keep at length in a reduced size courtesy of Wilhelmine, the male dragon being overwhelmed by being inside a dwelling and not on top of its flattened remains. “This is very pretty” he commented as he ran his paw along the polished wood table in the main dining hall. “I feel bad for all of the homes I have destroyed now. Some fur worked hard to build it and I have burned it without remorse.”

“I will never burn another home again” Mistfeldr stated as she turned to look at her brother. “I have learned much by being this size, such as we are so big that we can do whatever we want without reproach. That is not right, I have been told by Merlin.”

“You could have something there” her brother agreed as he nodded his head. “Maybe I will stay this size for a while to see what I can learn. You have always said that I needed to learn about things and not be as stupid as a satchel full of wooden mallets.”

“Do you wish to travel northward with these furs?” she asked, hoping he would say yes to her question. “We are going to take on an evil mage that was controlling another.”

“Will we be able to be made our normal size when we are to battle the mage?” he asked as Jarrod thought over the possibilities.

“I think that is the plan” she replied with a smile on her muzzle.

###

Merlin was sitting with the immortal couple in the main greeting hall, thinking about the things he had been told concerning Wilhelmine and the males. “This Surt that you speak of, is he a God or a Demon?” the mage asked as he pondered this problem.

“Surt is destruction personified” the tigress replied. “He cannot be destroyed and he is ... necessary, I've been told.”

“I will be honest with you” the Ubermage said firmly, “I am not sure I can send her home as I do not know where her home is.”

About that time, the tall filly came into the room and said loudly, “You all need to see what I have found!” as she motioned for everyone to follow her.