

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, Hilda Reed-Sorenson, Daria Kroft, 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 24

“Valhalla; They Say The Third Time's A Charm!”

Torvald had been somewhat awake for a span of a few minutes. His chest and left leg were hurting him 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 confirm just where in the heck he was. The hurt that he was rewarded with by trying to move about made him grunt loudly as he fell back to the bed, his chest still hurting him to some serious degree.

“Torvald? Are you finally awake?” the familiar femme voice asked in her native tongue. He felt the soft touch of her paws against his neck as she helped him to sit up slightly and drink some delicious ale from a tankard. “We were wondering when you would wake up, sleepyhead” she added as he carefully sipped at his cool refreshment. He opened his eyes to see that he was staring into the face of a familiar femme feline that he knew quite dearly. It was his immortal wife Victoria.

Trying to get comfortable in his bed, he finally asked his mate an important question. “How are the kids?” he queried, finally rolling over onto his side so he could stretch his good leg a bit. His other leg was still in a modern style soft cast while the bone finished mending.

“Conrad is doing fine” she replied and then after a pregnant pause gave him a scowl as she added “Wilhelmine was hurt pretty badly. They were still working on her when I came back to our room, maybe an hour or so ago. Eyr wouldn't let me in the room to be there with the filly while she was being healed.” This news upset the berserker visibly.

“I should have never gotten any of you involved in my work” he said with a sad note in his voice. “She didn't deserve to be hurt by all of this. None of you did.”

“She will be just fine, stallion” Hrist said as she came into the room to see about his leg. “I overheard your conversation so I thought I should let you know I have just been with Wilhelmine and she's sleeping comfortably now, her injuries finally cared for.”

“Thank the Gods” the berserker said loudly as he began to sob. “I would never forgiven myself if she had died.”

“I wanted you to know that my sisters and I felt we had to intervene on your behalf against that demon” the leopard appaloosa colored mare said as she smiled at the huge fur. “It was not right what the Gods did to you and your mate. When I told your friend Joe the facts, he agreed with us. That is why Joe was with us at the battle.”

“Speaking of that issue, I hope Christopher and Odin are up to hearing an ear full” the huge equine stated with an angry look on his muzzle. “I am more than just a little **CENSORED** pissed off by this deal and I plan to tell them just what I **CENSORED** think.” Victoria covered her mouth in surprise at her husband's outburst, especially the vulgar profanity he used in anger.

“Not in those exact words but I agree with you, stallion” Hrist said solemnly. “You were left high and dry, I think is what the mage said to me earlier.”

“We could have all died that day” he pointed out. “I don't care what kind of deal was brokered; when it comes to my family, nobody leaves us hanging out to dry.” About that time, Odin walked into the room, waving a small white flag.

“I believe this is the proper symbol to show I wish to call a truce” he said quietly as he sat down by Torvald's bed. “I can assure you I will never let a deal like that be made again.”

“I can tell you I'm more than a little pissed” the huge fur told his boss. “We were left with our asses hanging out against that demon!” Torvald had to look away from Odin because he was getting mad just thinking about the day in question.

“You were set up by Beoram” the one-eyed wolf stated as he put his paw on Torvald's shoulder. “He had a marker that didn't belong to him that he used without having the *Big Fur* take a look at it first.”

“Well, that will never happen again because Beoram is destroyed now” the berserker stated to Odin. “Hrist, her sisters and Joe finished his sorry ass off. I saw that with my own eyes.”

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“Elin, that really hurts!” Uriel said loudly, grimacing in pain as the Valkyrie massaged and flexed the Archangel's recovering right wing. “Are you sure this will make my wing heal quicker?” he asked, thinking it was just better to let it heal on its own.

“You are weak when it comes to pain, Angel” the lioness said softly as she worked on him. “This will make your wing stronger than it was before” she pointed out as she massaged the base of his wings and then flexed the healing one out again. “Hold your wing out here” she said as she massaged the joints for him. “You can do it, Uriel. Hold it out.” The angel complied but he was beginning to sweat heavily from his 'therapy' by the Valkyrie. She finally showed some mercy and said to him “That is all for today.”

“How much more do I need to endure?” he asked, slowly flexing his wings. His injured wing still did not flex out as far as the good one at the moment.

“You will be well and you can leave here in a few days” Elin stated. “Christopher said that I could ask Eyr to take care of you if you do not like my bedside manners” the lioness suggested with a smile on her muzzle.

“No, you will do just fine” the winged feline replied. “I have heard of your healer and I am sure she would not be gentle with me, I fear. You will do just fine.”

###

“Mom? Dad? Are you awake in there?” Conrad called out as he stood outside their door, trying to get their attention. Momentarily, he heard his mother reply.

“Conrad, if it's just you outside, come in” she called out. He opened the door and walked in only to find his parents still in bed with the covers pulled up to hide their presumed naked bodies. The stallion and the tigress both had very embarrassed looks on their muzzles.

“Uh, I guess you haven't been to see Willi Marie, then” he said, more of a statement than anything else. He suddenly felt ... very ... awkward at the moment, standing there.

“We were going to see her in a little while” his mother said with a sheepish look on her muzzle while his father tried desperately to play his embarrassment off. “Why don't you wait outside while your father and I get dressed and we'll all go see her together.”

The young tiger went outside and momentarily his parents made their appearance. The stallion's mane and tail were quite disheveled and his mother's fur was still somewhat askew. They made their way to the young filly's room to find her sleeping soundly, holding a spear across her chest. Victoria stopped, gasped and then got a very mad look on her muzzle. She reached out and tried to touch the weapon, getting shocked just slightly by the spear in question.

“I knew it!” she exclaimed, looking at her husband with a scowl. “Where's Odin? He's got a shit-load of explaining to do to me right frigging now!” Torvald knew the tigress was extremely upset by her use of 'her' version of the 'F' word.

“Victoria, what's wr ...” his mate cut him off with an angry stare as she held up her hand to stop him.

“They've made her immortal!” the tigress exclaimed loudly, pointing at the filly sleeping quietly in her bed. “Those bastards have went and made Willi Marie an immortal!! Look at that spear, Torvald; it's a Valkyrie's spear!!!” Victoria was fit to be

tied over this turn of events concerning the young filly. Torvald tested the spear himself just to see that it did appear to be a Valkyrie's weapon, since he did receive a slight shock from it too.

The tigress turned and headed towards the door in search of the one-eyed wolf only to come muzzle to muzzle with Freya. She didn't give the Goddess the slightest chance to say a word before she laid into the vixen full force.

“What gives you the right to make her immortal!?!?” the tigress shouted as she got right up in Freya's face, still angry over the whole thing. “You know that Torvald, Aslaug and I have all three longed to be mortal again but NOOOO..., you have to go and make her immortal!! You probably didn't ask her first, did you?!? Well? WELL?!? DID YOU?!?”

The vixen was starting to back away from Victoria, afraid that the tigress might just try to maul her. She could see Victoria's long, sharp claws were expressed fully and she was flexing her paws in anger as she shouted. Freya could plainly see the fire in the tigress' eyes as Victoria 'lectured' her at full feline volume.

Victoria didn't give Freya even the slimmest chance to reply to her questions before she continued her diatribe towards the Goddess. “You've made her immortal and now she's looking forward to an *extremely* long lifetime of being kicked around, hit, hurt, thrown about, cut, scratched, stabbed, ran through, shot at by firearms, bows and cross bows and roasted by a dragon's breath, just to name a few of the things that have happened to me here recently!! And all of this punishment is for the good of all furkind?? I've got so many scars on me right now that it would take a week to point them all out!!” Finally, in complete frustration the tigress shouted out at the top of her lungs, “SHE DID NOT DESERVE THIS KIND OF TREATMENT, DAMMIT!!!” Victoria then dropped to her knees, sat down on her heels and broke down crying uncontrollably with her face buried in her paws.

“I had no idea she felt this way about being immortal” the vixen said to the berserker as she knelt and held the sobbing form of the tigress close to her, trying to comfort her. “I didn't know ...” The vixen was visibly upset by this information that she was unaware of; she thought that the femme feline was happy to still be alive and she no longer had a problem with being immortal. She put her muzzle next to Victoria's ear and said very quietly to her, “Please, please listen to me. Willi Marie is not immortal, Victoria. That spear was a gift from Hrist so she could protect herself.” Even though she had heard Freya tell her this, the tigress didn't stop sobbing from this information. She couldn't stop sobbing, she was so worked up at the moment.

“How long do you think Mom will cry this time?” Conrad asked Torvald as the two males leaned against the wall off to the side, watching the whole thing with great trepidation. They were both quite afraid that the tigress might possibly attack the Goddess so they had stayed in the room for now, just to make sure she didn't do so.

“I just don't know, Son. It could be a while” the huge fur replied as he shook his head. “She sounds like she's pretty upset, if you ask me.” He was testing his injured leg, seeing if it could hold all of his weight. From the pain he received in return, it apparently wasn't quite ready for prime time yet. About that time, Conrad observed the tall filly stir in her bed.

“What's going on?” Willi Marie asked, sitting up and blinking her eyes to clear them so she could observe the ruckus going on in her room. It was obvious from the pained look on her muzzle that she was still mending, since she certainly was not immortal after all. “What's wrong with Aunt Victoria? Why is she crying?” she queried, seeing the tigress kneeling on the floor, sobbing.

“Mom thought they made you an immortal” Conrad answered back, pointing at her spear. The filly smiled as she ran her paw down the shaft, feeling its highly polished wood under her fingers.

“They did ask me if I wanted to be a Valkyrie” she pointed out. “I told them I just wanted to go home and be myself instead.” She made herself comfortable in her bed before she told them “That huge mare Hrist gave me this spear” she pointed out with a smile. “It is a gift from her and her sisters to use for my personal protection.”

“That was a smart choice on your part. You don't want to be immortal” the huge fur commented as he went to his mate and helped her to stand up. “Victoria will be fine as soon as she gets this crying fit out of her system” he said to everyone as he guided his sobbing mate back to their room, still using one crutch for support.

Once back at their room the huge fur had put his mate on their bed, making sure she was comfortable before he returned to the front stoop of the building to sit with his son. The young tiger looked at his father as he asked him a question.

“Dad, do you still have your Buck knife on you?” he queried, waiting for an answer in return.

“Yeah, here it is” he replied, passing it to Conrad. The tiger opened it and carefully cut the edge of his thumb just enough to bleed. They both watched it drip for a while, Conrad squeezing it slightly when the flow of blood seemed to slow. The cut began to bleed profusely again.

“Well, what do you think?” the young tiger asked the stallion with a note of trepidation in his voice.

“I think you're not immortal, if that was what you were worried about” Torvald replied, giving Conrad a smile.

“Good” the tiger said softly, shaking his head. “I got worried after I thought about it for a while. You know, I was in pretty bad shape myself when they brought us here.”

###

Beoram looked around himself to see that he was no longer on the battlefield but he might possibly be lying on the floor in Lucifer's realm. He stood up, stretching his arms and back to get the kinks out as he looked around himself further. Just as he thought about finding something to eat, he heard a familiar voice behind him speak up.

“How are you doing, buddy?” the winged Hyena asked as he smiled his malevolent smile at the whippet. “Did you have a nice rest?” he queried, pulling out a cigar and lighting it with his favorite Zippo lighter.

“I feel very rested, thank you” Beoram replied as he flexed his arms again. “Well, I need to get back to my plans to take over the mortal world, if you don't mind” he said as he looked around for a way out of the room.

“Ah, but I do mind, my misguided friend” the Prince of Lies said as he grinned widely. “You aren't going to go back to where you think you should” he pointed out. “I suppose I must point out the fact that your soul belongs to Surt now, you stupid f**k-up of a demon!” Lou snapped his fingers, making the whippet disappear from sight.

Once the whippet got his bearings back, he found himself bound both paw and foot with chains, the ends attached securely to a wall in a torture chamber. The heat was incredible, the humidity was making the air quite heavy and the stench was almost unbearable, even for a demon. The bands around his wrists and ankles were superheated, singeing the fur and flesh deeply. The chains to his wrists were preventing him from sitting down or even reaching any other part of his body. Momentarily, a cloaked fur-less canid turned to look at him with a red-hot brand in his paw.

“Beoram, so good of you to drop by and be a guest of Surt” the fur greeted him as he tested the brand on a piece of wood, causing it to catch fire immediately. “Since you are such a screw-up for trying to use *his* marker that you *stole* from him, Surt has instructed me to give you the works, my very best treatment.” The canid held the brand up to the demons' muzzle, looking to see how to use it to it's greatest effect. “Please understand that you asked for it by stealing from my employer and now you're going to get it for stealing from my employer” he informed the whippet as he began to methodically 'work' on him, the canid demon screaming out in horrible pain.

###

Freya was sitting with Odin and his mate Frigg, sipping on some wine and trying her best to enjoy a light meal with them. She was still thinking about her encounter with the tigress earlier in the day and she didn't know just where to start.

“I have never heard such ... such anger from her like I did earlier” she related to the others. “I thought she was fine with being immortal but I was completely wrong.” She looked at her companions as she said softly “I was actually afraid that she might ... maul me, she was that angry.” Odin was looking at the vixen with total disbelief, as if he didn't believe his ears.

“She was that mad?” Frigg asked, still not sure if she heard the vixen right either. “What was she mad about?”

“Uh, well, she thought we had made Wilhelmine immortal” was Freya's short reply. Her mind's eye could still see the fire in the tigress' eyes as she sat there, unable to properly relate her experience to the others.

“I for one would not have done that” the femme wolf stated as she sipped some wine. “We wouldn't do that after what happened with Victoria. I knew she was mad once the whole thing sank in with her but I had no clue she was still upset about it. I thought she had finally come to grips with being immortal.”

“Have either of you seen the list of missions they have been on recently?” Freya asked her fellow deities. “They have been given the roughest missions out there that have 'It's possible that we're not coming back' written all over them! You know that's not right, considering they have a child of their own plus two charges now.”

“You know those missions are assigned by the Counsel of Elders” Odin pointed out. “There is no preference given by the Counsel except that Torvald and his mate are to be assigned the missions meant for couples.”

“I knew that much” the vixen said in an irritated tone. “It just seems like those missions are the toughest ones. It's just not fair to them.”

“Well, maybe we could retire Victoria” the one-eyed wolf mused only to get cuffed quite roughly in the back of the head by his mate.

“Don't you even think that!” the femme wolf exclaimed. “Where would that leave Torvald, Conrad, Wilhelmine and James? Minus one tigress, that's where! How would you feel if I were suddenly not around?” she asked her mate, giving him the evil eye while he thought about it.

“OK, I see your point. I will speak to Christopher and the Counsel in their behalf” the one-eyed wolf stated as he gave it more thought. “I will see if I can get their mission load lightened for them.”

“Thank you” Freya said quietly. “I'm sure they will appreciate your help.”

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Mordred stood there in the Svensen's kitchen, staring down the toaster. He waved his paws over it with a very determined look on his muzzle, followed by an extended look down into the slots. He noted that Valerie had joined him in the room, standing off to the side with her arms crossed in front of her.

“I seem to have damaged this cooking device” the palomino colored stallion stated as he tried to perform magic on it again. The toaster just stared back blankly in return.

“What's it not doing?” the tigress asked, giving him a slight smile.

“I am afraid it will not issue forth toast for reasons unknown to me” the equine replied. “It had been fed several pieces of bread so I am at a loss as to what to do next.” Valerie went over to the toaster and plugged it in for the mage.

“It needs electricity to operate” she pointed out, giving the stallion a kiss on the cheek. “What are we going to do with you?” she mused as she poured herself a cup of coffee, still smirking at Mordred.

###

Victoria was sitting across from Freya, trying to keep her composure. The tigress felt really bad about chewing out the vixen for nothing, wishing she hadn't done such a stupid thing in the first place.

“Freya, I'm really, really sorry about reading you the riot act” she said softly, looking to see if the Goddess had caught on to her embarrassment. It further embarrassed Victoria to think that she had even considered mauling the vixen, she had been -that- mad.

After a moment to regain her composure, she continued her meal of humble pie. “I saw the spear in Willi Marie's paws and took it at face value she had been made immortal” the tigress conveyed to Freya. “I didn't let you speak in your defense and I made a first class jerk out of myself in the process.”

“I will admit that you jumped to conclusions” the vixen commented. “But I think it shows just how much you love your son and your charges.”

“I didn't want anything to happen to them” the tigress pointed out. “I really thought that she had been made immortal to keep her from dying. She was in a really bad way when we left that planet.” Just the thought of it caused Victoria to sob just slightly.

“I have seen far worse than that live again” the vixen said softly as she looked down at the table. “Eyr has done many things that truly amaze me, even when it was my broken, damaged body she was working on. There were several times when I was sure I wouldn't make it and I was literally put back together by our healer.” That information made the tigress shudder just from the thought of it. The vixen then put her paw on the back of Victoria's paw as she said softly “I accept your apology.”