

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, 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, 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 6

“Revelations”

“I had hoped that you would talk with me” the canid said as he sat down in a chair opposite Victoria and Torvald. “I feel very out of place asking this of you but I feel it is very important.” It was obvious that he was not comfortable with facing the immortals because he knew quite well that they could feel the darkness in his soul. Mr. Lycaon could feel the white power between them, especially when Victoria took her mate's paw in hers. “My name is Asbeel” he stated cautiously. “Does that ring a bell with either of you?” he asked, looking to see if they knew who he was.

“That is the name of a fallen angel” the tigress pointed out. She remembered her bible lessons covered fallen angels in some detail.

“You are a Third Sphere fallen angel” the berserker said cautiously, finally fully aware of who they were talking with. “You are a dark agent, a corrupter of the righteous and a destroyer of mortals and immortals!” Torvald said tersely as the huge fur reached out and pulled his broadsword from a handy hiding place and readied it. “You will not destroy us, minion!” he added angrily as he stood to strike down the canid. The berserker's eyes began to get that white glow to them as he stepped in front of his tigress to protect her from this evil one.

“Please, I mean no fur harm, especially you two of all furs in this sleepy little burg” the canid said as he held up his paw to stop the immortal stallion's actions. “You cannot kill me until I have told you why I am here.” The canid seemed very nonchalant about the whole thing, as if the possibility of being killed wasn't scaring him one bit in the least.

“Tell us quickly!” the berserker spat out, his eyes now glowing with total whiteness, like two beacons of pure light. “I will strike you dead if you do not start talking right now!”

Asbeel could see the stallion checking his grip on that massive broadsword, his forearm muscles bulging with strength from his power.

“Speak up or die!” Victoria said in a menacing tone as she stepped up beside her husband to face Asbeel. She had pulled out a staff from beside her desk and her eyes were glowing just like the stallion's. Her ears were laid back against her skull and her teeth were showing through the sneer on her muzzle. Her claws were digging into the fire-hardened ash wood shaft of her staff as she readied her grip on her weapon. “I will kill you myself if my stallion does not strike you dead first!”

Asbeel could feel the immense surge of power between the immortals as it built up to a extreme crescendo. This feeling of pure white energy was scaring the living tar out of the canid but he managed -just barely- to show no emotion to them as he sat there and tried to reason with them.

“I do wish for you to strike me dead” the fallen angel said as he tried to get comfortable in his chair. “You must do this for me so I can return to our father's home as a white angel.” That statement had a profound effect on the huge stallion and his mate.

Victoria put one end of her staff on the floor and leaned her weight on it as the power surge between the immortals subsided. She looked rather exhausted as she stood there, holding onto her staff and the edge of the desk for support.

Torvald lowered his sword and blinked as the white power in him faded. The berserker was breathing real heavy, like he had just been running for miles. The huge fur had a look of fatigue wash across his muzzle from the draining effect of the white power being dissipated. As his eyes returned to their normal pale blue color, he asked what seemed to be a pretty stupid question.

“Why do -we- need to strike you down?” he asked, seeming somewhat confused by the situation. “Can't you just return like you are now?”

“No, I cannot just return like this. I must have the two of you run my heart through with my own broadsword” Asbeel stated to them. “I must be willing to give up my existence and die by a sword blessed of evil.” As he made sure that they had heard him correctly he added “It must be done by an agent. Uriel could not do it for me, even though he wants me back. He is a good friend for wanting me to return to the fold.” The canid then began to cry, upset by all of this.

Victoria looked to see that her husband was totally confused by this state of affairs, especially of all things a dark agent crying right in front of them. She gently took his sword from his paws and guided him back to his chair. She then turned and told the dark angel “We must think about this. Give us a few days, please?”

Asbeel got up to leave, stopping to say “Thank you” to the immortals before he left the office. After he had left, the tigress looked to see that her husband was still stunned.

“Are you OK?” she asked of her mate. He slowly turned his head to look at her as he snapped out of his daze.

“I am fine, I think” the stallion said quietly. “I will need to talk with Christopher about this” he added as he got up to take the sign off of the front doors.

###

The dapple gray equine and the skunk were scouting the Mennonite church again, looking to see how hard it would be to just blow it up. They hoped that blowing up the church wouldn't seem so suspicious to the other furs.

“We could just throw a stick of dynamite inside” the equine stated to his friend. “That would take care of the problem.”

“I don't know” Roger replied to the stallion. “It would seem kinda fishy if we did that. How often do buildings just blow up?” He was sure that he had made his point when Melvin spoke up.

“I think they have a shed on the other side of the building” he said as he motioned to the house of worship. “We could put several sticks in there to get the whole thing.”

“Well, that will have to do” Roger commented as they slipped away from the church grounds. “We'll come back later.” Melvin just nodded in agreement with his brethren.

###

Torvald was standing in a alpine meadow that was alive with flowers in bloom everywhere. He was waiting for Christopher to show up any second as the god was currently finishing up with a celestial meeting of some kind. As he looked around himself again, the lion made his appearance, fishing pole in paw.

“Torvald! So good to see you again!” Christopher said as he motioned for the stallion to sit down with him. “And how is Victoria? Is she enjoying this mission?” the lion added as the berserker sipped on his wine just a little just to find it was an outstanding vintage of Gamay Beaujolais.

“Victoria is fine” the stallion said to the lion. “she isn't having fun on this mission, however. The stove is too hard for her to cook on.” He was looking to make sure *The Son* had understood him correctly.

“I'm sorry to hear that” Christopher replied. “Let's see now...1897...mid-west...” he muttered as he referred to a PDA he took from his pocket. “Ah, you have white gas available to you” he said, smiling at the huge fur.

“I sell it in the General store” Torvald agreed, still confused by this information.

“I will have a white gas-fueled stove delivered for you” the lion said as he tapped on the PDA. “It's like an overgrown camping stove in a way. She will like it much better than that wood stove and it will have a water heater built right into it.”

“I think she will like that but that's not why I wanted to speak with you” the stallion stated. “We have a problem. It's a big problem and we need your advice.”

The lion seemed at a loss for words over that statement. He liked the immortal couple because they usually worked out whatever problems they had on a mission through careful feline reasoning or sheer equine might. To hear the stallion asking him for help was totally out of character for him.

“We have been approached by Asbeel” the huge fur said quietly. “He wishes for us to kill him so he can return here.” He looked up to see that Christopher was shaken up by that little piece of news.

“Asbeel” the lion said cautiously as he nodded his head in thought. “I had high hopes for him when he was here. Has he really asked to return?” the god questioned with a strange look on his muzzle.

“He knows we are immortal, that we are agents and he wants us to strike him dead with his own sword” the equine replied.

“Torvald, you know that we usually don't do this” the lion said as he looked over to make sure the equine was listening. “Your mission is -not- Asbeel. The real mission is to eliminate Zagam's influence over that town.” the god was rubbing his forehead from the thought of all of this. “This happens from time to time. In some cases we have to disclose certain information to our younger agents so they can complete their missions properly.”

“But Asbeel has asked us to help him” the stallion retorted. “Are we to just ignore him?”

“You may help him if you wish” Christopher replied. “We would like to have all of our fallen angels back in the fold. I have to warn you though, this is very dangerous and you may get injured by handling that sword he carries.” He made sure that the stallion was listening carefully as he said “You and your mate can be injured and possibly killed in a rather permanent manner by that sword. If you do help him, put the sword in a forge and melt it down or destroy it to kill the evil blessing to the metal afterwards.”

“I'm glad you shared that with me and not to change the subject, but I need to know something” the stallion requested of his 'employer'. “Victoria asked me to talk to you about something that's very important to her.”

“Go ahead, what is it she wants to know?” the lion asked as he picked up a piece of sliced peach to sample.

“Have you given thought to our being something other than 'agents' for the gods?” Torvald asked in a very serious tone. “Victoria was greatly upset by that last 14th century emergency mission. Those poor furs weren't just burned, Christopher, they were practically incinerated by that dragon!” he added for his wife's sake. “We couldn't even tell what species some of them had been after it was all over with.”

“Torvald, every mission you and your mate go on has a 'weight' to it that tallies up” the lion stated as he put the piece of fruit down. “When you complete each mission, your tally increases. Very soon you will be able for the most part to choose to accept each mission, being knowledgeable of the facts before you take it or pass it on to another agent.”

“How much 'weight' do we need to tally up to be more than just 'agents'?” the huge fur asked.

“If you are referring to being earthly guides” the lion said with a smile; “You will reach that level in time. When you and your mate have reached that plateau, you will have several options to choose from. You will be able to be guides, mentors to new agents or even 'retire' to your chosen destination. You know that Asgaard is a very nice place to retire to as is my home.”

“How long does it take an 'agent' to reach that level?” he asked of the lion with a questioning look on his muzzle.

“It is hard to put a time frame on it but you will reach that level in due time” Christopher replied to the stallion. “I ask you to be patient because you and your mate are becoming very adept at performing your missions with swift precision.” Christopher gave the berserker that disarming smile and continued. “We are still in great need of your services for some time to come as we have very few husband and wife teams.” The lion picked the piece of peach back up as he added “You know there are less than one hundred and fifty agents total, with only sixteen of them being husband and wife. We need every agent we have right now.”

“Can't a male and a femme agent just pretend to be married?” Torvald asked their boss with all seriousness.

“It just doesn't work like that” he replied to the stallion. “You and Victoria are at ease around one another and the furs you interact with can sense your love for one another. These are the little things that help your cover story on a mission to be so believable.”

“Well, OK. Maybe Victoria will be more comfortable with the knowledge we are working towards a goal” the berserker said as he thought about it. “She will just have to understand.”

“You, my friend need to get back to the mission at paw” Christopher said as he stood and prepared to send the huge fur back.

“Thank you for the information and the advice, Christopher. We will try to finish our mission quickly” the stallion said as he stood up to leave. Before Christopher sent him back, he made sure to have a plate of sliced cantaloupe ready for the tigress.

“Please take great care if you do help Asbeel” the lion said as Torvald shimmered out of sight, plate of fruit in paw.

###

“Melvin, you're walking strange” the skunk said as they walked down a street parallel to Main street. They were headed from Roger's house towards the Mennonite church.

“You would walk funny too if you had a half-ounce bottle of nitroglycerin in your shirt pocket” the equine retorted. “I don't want to jar it and go 'Boom' all of the sudden.” The skunk could see that his brethren was sweating very heavily even though it was a nice cool day.

“That is true. You don't want to blow yourself up” Roger said as they got near enough to see the church. They casually walked around to the side with the shed and opened the door to slip inside. As they had suspected, the side wall of the church made up the back wall of the smaller building.

“Give me the bottle” the skunk said as he took out a fourth of a stick of dynamite to jar the nitroglycerin into exploding. He carefully placed the fuse cord into the core of the dynamite, then he tied the stick to the bottle. Setting it on a handy shelf, he turned to the equine and nodded.

“We'll have about 5 minutes to get away before the fuse burns down” the skunk commented as he struck a match and lit the fuse. They observed to their horror that the fuse was burning about five times too fast.

“Run!” Melvin yelled out as he began to beat hooves away from the shed. Roger was hot on his tail, making tracks in an attempt to pass the equine. They had made it to the perimeter of the church yard when the deafening explosion from the nitroglycerin knocked them to the ground.

The equine was lying in a heap in a rose bush with a horrible pain radiating up from his right thigh. “Roger?” he queried as he tried to stand. That injured limb wouldn't carry his weight at all so he looked back to find a rather large shard of wood embedded in his leg.

“Roger, I need help!” he hollered out in an effort to call his friend. The skunk got up from his resting place on the lawn and hobbled over to the equine.

“Let's hide over there” he said, helping the equine back to his hooves. They made it to a nearby shed and took refuge inside, hoping to avoid discovery until the coming darkness would cover their escape. They could hear furs running around, trying to put out the small fires that burned in the remains of the church.

“Roger, I'm hurt bad” the dapple gray fur stated as he felt the wood protruding from his leg. “I'll need to see Doc Bischer with this injury.” It was clear that Mr. Platt was badly injured and he needed medical assistance right now.

Roger looked outside to see that a great portion of the town's furs had shown up to see the carnage. This didn't look good for them at all. It would be hours before they could leave this hideout and seek aid.

“Melvin, I think we just made a bad mistake” was the skunk's candid observation.

###

Victoria was munching on that exquisite melon while the immortal pair were looking at a particular entry in the ledger. This entry was just a complete mystery even to the berserker. He was trying to look at it from a different angle when an explosion rattled the entire General store. “What was that?” the tigress exclaimed after she got back out from under the counter. “It wasn't an earthquake, was it?” she asked as she straightened out her blouse and skirt.

“I think it was an explosion of some sort” the huge fur replied as he went to look outside. He observed a cloud rolling up in the air from the general direction of the Mennonite church. “This doesn't look good” he commented as he took off his apron. “I will be back as soon as I see what has happened.”

“Be careful” his mate called out to him as he walked out the front doors of the store.

The huge fur walked at a fast pace to get to the scene of the carnage as quickly as possible. As he turned the corner, it was apparent that the church -had- been blown up. The wood fragments had been thrown more than half a block away from the blast and the building was no longer there, the foundation being the only large thing left.

The neighbors were putting out the remaining fires here and there while a contingency gave aid to the injured Pastor Maclachlan that had been just a few yards away from from the blast. It was a small miracle that he survived the explosion at all.

“Where are th' gits thot destroyed ma kirk?!?” he shouted out as the mayor's wife Maurine tried to keep him still.

“Pastor, stay still until Doc Bischer gets here” the femme mongoose asked. “You're badly cut up from the glass that shattered everywhere.” The beaver's face and arms still had glass shards protruding from various wound sites.

“The gits tried tae run me oot o' ma kirk” he said to the femme mongoose. “I thought I ran the numpties off but they came back tae finish th' job.”

“We will get the sheriff to look into this” Laura Chevarez said as she helped Maurine with the injured beaver. “Walter was afraid this would happen. I just can't believe it myself.” The Shetland mare was genuinely upset even though this church wasn't hers. “I can't stand to see things like this happen.”

The berserker had stopped at the perimeter of the church fence and he was taking in the scene. He was looking to see any sign of foul play and it soon stood out to him on the ground. There was a trail of blood going out of the church yard and into another nearby yard. He followed the blood to a shed where he quickly pulled the door open.

“What is going on here?” he asked as he looked a hole through the occupants of the shed. He then noticed the injury to the smaller equine. “All right, both of you get out there right now!” the berserker ordered rather tersely. Roger assisted Melvin with standing up and supported him so they could get out of the shed.

“I'm badly injured” the dapple gray equine said as the huge fur got a hold of his arm.

“You need to be seen by the doctor -and- the sheriff if I have guessed right” Torvald told him as they walked in the general direction of the brown bear.

###

Not far away, Asbeel had heard the explosion and he surmised that Zagam had something to do with it. He was still thinking about his meeting with the immortal

couple earlier. The pure white energy that flowed between them had been just incredible. His head still hurt from trying to mentally deflect all of that energy away. He was, however still in hopes that they would decide to help him.

He thought back to that fateful day when he followed Lucifer out of their celestial home. Uriel's words were still fresh in his mind even after all of this time. "Don't leave! You're making a grave mistake, old buddy! You're on a road to ruin if you follow him!!" were his exact words that he had shouted out to him. His mentor had begged him not to leave and he clearly remembered the tears that fell from his old friend's eyes as he said goodbye. If he had just listened to him. Asbeel felt like such an idiot at this moment. If he had just listened.

###

Algernon was sitting with Pastor Marchese, still feeling the endorphin high from the earlier explosion. "Things are going well" the dark wolf commented as they sipped some fresh coffee. "Your elders have done well for the needs of the church."

"We need to start inviting the others to services this Sunday" the pastor mentioned. "We don't want for the town's furs to think we aren't hospitable, now do we?"

"That would be good" Algernon agreed. "We need to grow the flock."

###

The huge fur had locked up the General store for the evening and he went around back to see about the horses. As usual, they were doing just fine. He fed them, mucked out their stalls and put water out for them before he retired to the cottage and a home-cooked meal. He went through the back door to find his mate cooking up some sausage and eggs.

"This is much better" she commented as she checked the sausage again and adjusted the burner. "I can finally cook for us properly" she added as she gave her husband a hug.

"You should thank Christopher" the huge fur pointed out as he detected another smell in the kitchen. "Is that...apple-carrot cake I smell?" He was already tasting it as he stole a peek into the oven. "Mmm...home made cake!" he added as he smiled at his mate.

"I don't mind this stove at all" she told her husband. "You have to light the burners but it cooks great. I even have hot water" she added, showing the stallion the faucet that would give hot water from the tank on the stove. "Thank You!" she said as she looked up at the ceiling.

Christopher says You are welcome!

The perky femme voice said to the tigress.

"Things are getting better" she commented as she pulled the sausage from the pan and began to cook their eggs.

###

Later that evening, the immortal couple were lying in bed, cuddled up against one another. "This had been a strange mission" the stallion commented as he thought about the day that they had just experienced. "What will we do about Asbeel?" he asked of his mate.

"I think we should help him" she replied to her husband. "He seems sincere with his desire to die just so he can be a white angel again."

"Christopher warned me that his sword was dangerous for us to even handle" the berserker said as he stretched out his legs. "I must build a forge that will melt steel so I can destroy the sword afterwards."

"Can you do that?" she asked as she turned over to face her mate.

"The blacksmith has some parts that I can use to create a forge" he proffered up. "I have obtained his permission to use them."

"I guess you will have to let Asbeel know we will help him" his mate commented through a wide yawn. She then dropped a bombshell on her mate. "We have been invited to the Bible Reform Church for services tomorrow morning."

Torvald was quiet for several minutes before he finally said "We must go to services then to avoid undue suspicion."