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'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 25

“Refreshing The Body And Soul”

“How are you feeling this morning?” Victoria asked the tall filly while she was making breakfast for her family. Willi Marie had wandered downstairs in search of the source of the delicious aromas wafting up to her room.

“I still hurt quite a bit” she admitted as she lifted her sleep shirt up to her waist after making sure there were no males around to watch. “My coat over the wound sites is growing back white. Did yours do that too?” she asked, showing the tigress the white areas where she had taken crossbow bolts to the leg. “I may have to dye the spots on my stomach and legs so I can wear a bikini top and cutoffs this coming summer” she added, putting her t-shirt back down and beginning to eye the pancakes being made with much anticipation.

“Yeah, my fur did kind of the same thing, just not white” the tigress replied as she pulled another pair of pancakes from the griddle. “The fur is a slightly different shade over the wounds so you can see the wound sites when the light strikes my fur just right.” She turned to let the overhead lighting strike her right leg just so, making a long sword injury site show up plainly. “That was from that battle on that planet where these two furs Kellan and Jim were marooned. I cut the sword arm off of that enemy soldier for cutting my leg like that.” Victoria thought back to the time before she had become a warrior, taking considerable care of her fur to keep herself looking perfect for her clients. Now she was seriously entertaining the idea of getting her fur clipped short just to make it look even.

Looking over at the tall filly, she shook her head as she said wistfully, "I wish my fur and your coat looked right again." The pair of them felt a funny feeling wash over their bodies for just a moment or two. The filly looked quickly to see that the white spots were gone now and the tigress' leg no longer had the strange look to her fur. "It must have been a latent wish that hung on or something" Victoria said with a smile. "At least I put it to good use." Wilhelmine gave the tigress a hug just as the huge equine came into the kitchen.

"What are you two up to?" he asked, giving the young filly a smile as he hugged his mate.

"I must have had a wish hanging on somehow" Victoria replied. "I wished my fur and her coat would look normal again and it happened." She held her night shirt up so her mate could see her leg, no funny or odd appearance to her fur. She then had to turn quickly and remove two more pancakes before they burned on her. "You are such a horrible distraction in the kitchen, you know that?" she mused to her husband, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

"Speaking of things like that" Torvald said as he was pouring a cup of coffee, "Willi Marie, are you still able to perform magic?" The filly gave it some thought before she answered.

"I have not tried since we returned" she proffered up to the immortals. "Would you wish for me to try?" She asked as she was looking down at the floor, somewhat embarrassed because she didn't have a direct answer for them.

"Yeah, you should at least find out if you're still a sorceress or not" the tigress replied.

"OK, I will try something small first" she said as she concentrated for more than a few moments. An identical plate of pancakes slowly appeared on the kitchen cabinet next to the original item in question. Victoria reluctantly tasted one to see that it was just as tasty as hers.

"Those aren't bad at all" the tigress commented as she looked at her mate with a concerned look on her muzzle. She then looked at the filly as she asked, "Willi Marie, try to set the table, if you can." The femme equine concentrated real hard only to have a single plate appear. She tried again to have just one more plate appear. Further attempts allowed only one item at a time to appear, if at all. Several of her attempts at setting the table resulted in nothing at all happening.

"This will take all day" she commented as she gave Torvald and Victoria a crooked smile. "I didn't really want to be a sorceress, you know. I didn't really want to be a Valkyrie, either. I just wanted to come home and be myself."

"What did you mean by that statement?" Torvald asked, giving her a strange look.

"Well, I guess I'm just an honorary Valkyrie, Uncle Torvald" she replied sheepishly. "I don't possess any of their powers but I do have a spear to protect myself." She then said rather quietly "I could be a full Valkyrie if I wanted to, I was told by Hrist."

“OK, that's better as long as you're not presently a full Valkyrie” the huge fur commented after he took a deep breath to clear his head. “I was really afraid that you were given full Valkyrie powers when you were given your spear, young filly.”

“Hey! Can't a fur sleep in around here?” Conrad asked, stretching out his arms as he walked into the kitchen. “I got woke up by all of the noise down here” he stated, yawning real wide and curling his tongue. He was joined momentarily by James, doing almost the same stretching motions.

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Torvald and Victoria were sitting with *The Son*, enjoying some of his wine and fruit. He had requested their presence earlier to have a little chat with his warriors. “I have good news for both of you” he said with a smile as he passed the tigress some cantaloupe on a plate. “You are now eligible to review your missions before accepting them. That last mission put your tally above the required amount.”

“Well, just how often would we have to take a mission?” the tigress asked, taking the plate from the lion. The fruit on the plate smelled delicious to her as she took a piece to sample.

“You need to take maybe two per year as a guideline and they will be mild missions, too” *The Son* replied, giving her that disarming smile of his. “Since you're now earthly guides full time with the children, we will not be asking you to take the tough missions if it can be helped.”

“That is good news” the huge fur commented, trying an apple that he had never seen before. “I will look forward to spending some time with my family.” It was clear that the berserker was pleased with this turn of events.

“I do want you two to know, we do listen all the time” the lion pointed out to them. “I think a vacation in the snow would be just perfect for your family. I know the berserker could ski fairly decent some years ago” he added, giving the huge fur a knowing smile. “I'll talk with the old femme buffalo herself to make sure you have decent weather for your vacation.”

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Willi Marie was sitting in her bedroom, looking at her Valkyrie's spear and trying to decide what to do next. She picked it up, feeling the heft of the polished wood shaft in her paws. The point, made of highly honed steel, glinted in the light coming from the window. Something Hrist had said to her in Valhalla was still bothering her so she decided to see if what she thought was true.

“Hrist?” she said cautiously, looking at the ceiling. “Hrist, if you can hear me, I need to talk with you.” Momentarily the huge femme equine shimmered into the room.

“What is it you wish to talk about?” the Valkyrie asked, sitting down on the bed next to the palomino colored equine.

“I’m afraid I might have been made a full Valkyrie” Willi Marie confessed, looking to the huge femme fur for direction.

“Do not worry, Wilhelmine. You are not a full Valkyrie” Hrist replied, putting her arm around the young filly. “You do have one minor ability given you by Eyr, the power of being able to call your sister Valkyries for help or protection but you do not possess the essential powers for claiming souls and such other Valkyrie duties. You were only given that power so Eyr could heal you.”

“Why is that? Why didn’t I get full powers?” Willi asked, looking somewhat confused.

“You have not died yet, my young equine friend” was the short reply from the very tall mare. “You were very close to death but you did not pass over before you were healed. You must die and travel to Fólkvangr to become a full Valkyrie. With very few exceptions, it is the only place that full powers may be granted to you. That will be a long time away but we will all be waiting for you.”

“What if I don’t want to be a Valkyrie?” the young filly asked.

“Then you don’t have to become a Valkyrie. *That* would never be forced upon you.” Hrist gave her a hug before she stood and said “I will always be listening for you.” She then smiled at Willi Marie and shimmered out of sight.

###

“Torvald, are you going to lay there all day?” Victoria asked, looking down at her husband laying in the snow. “The kids have went back to the top of the mountain again since you crashed out right there.”

“I’m getting up” he replied, kicking off his one remaining ski and standing up. His mate was smirking as he rounded up the other ski and put them back on, getting his poles back in his paws. Torvald pushed off, heading for the lift at Heavenly, intent on making at least one run without falling down.

While they were riding back up, the lift stopped. “Well, maybe I’ll get one more run” he commented, looking to see if he could see what the holdup was. He noted that there seemed to be a problem at the base of the lift, the paramedics going to see about a fallen skier.

“Tor, honey, would it be too much to ask our employers to make us mortal again?” the tigress asked, giving her hubby a crooked smile. “I’m not cut out for this and you know it. I just want to sell real estate and be plain old Victoria again.”

“What brought this on?” the huge fur asked, looking at his mate with curiosity.

“Willi Marie told them she didn’t want to be a Valkyrie and they went along with her wishes” the tigress replied. “I was thinking that I might ask to be mortal again and get out of the business, so to speak.”

“That’s all we can do is ask” he suggested. “All they can say is ‘no’ to our request.”

The lift finally started running again and within a few moments they were at the top of the run. The teens were still waiting, munching on some snacks in the meantime. There was an additional teen with them, a mountain lioness named Cathy Hunter. She was Conrad's friend from school that had come with them at Conrad's insistence.

“Are you going to fall on that steep section again?” Conrad asked, giving his father a smile and a wink. He knew that Torvald was trying his best to get just one clean run in before the mountain closed for the evening.

“You just watch” the huge fur said as he smiled and headed off towards the run in question.

“Does your dad always do this?” Cathy asked, smiling at her male friend. “You know, just go for broke?”

“Yeah, that's his style” the young tiger explained. “Running into battle with his axe held high, screaming out a war cry at the top of his lungs.” The teens and the tigress followed behind, looking for the spot where Torvald crashed out this time.

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Victoria and her son were waiting for the rest of the group to turn in their skis, boots and poles for the evening since they didn't own their own equipment. The two felines did ski enough that it warranted owning their own gear which made it easy for them to get on and off the mountain.

“What happened with Candace?” she asked her son. “I thought you two were an item.”

“Mom, you remember what happened in that other time line” Conrad replied. “We weren't meant for one another. We were fighting all the time over money.” He tugged at his coat, zipping it up against the cold. “Cathy is different in that way. We don't fight at all and she's willing to wait until we both graduate college before we get serious.”

“So you're thinking about college again?” his mother asked, zipping her coat up tighter. The temperature was falling as they stood there in wait for the rest of the family.

“Yeah, I think I would like to get a degree in theology” the young tiger replied. “Dad really enjoys his job from what I can see. I think I would like to help others or be an instructor.”

“As long as you stay out of 'the business' if you know what I mean by that” Victoria pointed out.

“Yeah, You can bet I'll stay out of the business” he said quietly. “Asgaard is very pretty but I don't want to risk my life like you and dad do.” He shifted his stance and looked around to see that no furs were near them before he continued quietly. “I realize that you and dad are immortal but a dark agent can still kill you. It just seems too risky to me. I had a long talk with Freya about being a warrior and she said that it's not for everyone.”

“How about Cathy? What does she want to do?” the tigress asked, curious about her son's friend.

“She said that she wanted to get a degree in business management” Conrad stated. “I think she wants to take over her family's business. They own a small chain of auto parts stores up in the San Fernando Valley.” About that time, the rest of the family came into view. They all jammed into their rented van and headed for dinner.

###

Daria was trying to hide inside the hidden compartment within the box where Terrance would make her disappear from on stage. It was not very big inside and she just didn't fit it properly. “Terry, it's really small in here” she stated, trying to get comfortable. “Can't you just use real magic to transport me off the stage?”

The jaguar just shook his head at her suggestion. “I would do that if I could perform arcane magic. This world doesn't have arcane magic, Daria.”

“You can't do this?” she asked, muttering an incantation under her breath. She disappeared from sight only to return through the side door that led to the dressing rooms.

“No, as much as I would like to, I can't do that” he replied to the vixen. She had done many feats of magic since she decided to return to the 21st century with the jaguar. “We both know I was a construct in that century. I have no true magic of my own.”

“Then I will do the magic and you can do the slight of hand” she said, giving her husband-to-be a kiss. She knew that this century was going to be hard for her to become accustomed to but it was preferable over staying where she had no family or friends.

###

Beoram was still breathing hard, trying to catch his breath from the last round of punishment he had endured. His fur was trying to grow back again after being singed off numerous times by those hairless canids. His rest was interrupted by the appearance of the old hot-head himself.

“YOU HAVE CAUSED ME TO LOSE A MARKER THAT WAS VERY COSTLY TO OBTAIN” the fire demon stated as he shook the whippet's chains, opening several wounds around his wrists. “I WILL NOT KILL YOU BUT I WILL TORMENT YOU FOR ALL ETERNITY, YOU SORRY EXCUSE FOR A DEMON.”

“I will get you another marker” Beoram suggested, hoping to buy some time from Surt.

“YOU FOOL! THERE ARE NO MORE TO BE HAD!!” Surt screamed out at the canid, making the temperature in the room to become totally unbearable from his anger. “I HAD TO HELP OUT TORVALD AND VICTORIA JUST TO OBTAIN YOUR SORRY SOUL! THAT LEFT A SOUR TASTE IN MY MOUTH TO HAVE TO BE NICE AND NOT DESTROY THEM!!” The fire demon thought about it for a moment before he added “I SHOULD LET ASLAUG GET A HOLD OF YOU! YOU WOULD SUFFER GREATLY AT HER

PAWS.” He then turned and left the room, summoning the hairless canids back to continue their work.

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“Honey, what do you think of Cathy?” Victoria asked, looking at two mission files that had been brought to them. One was a simple tracking job of a type that they had done before. The other was an emergency mission that seemed to have more importance to it.

“She is very polite” Torvald replied, somewhat distracted by his current caseload for the police department. One of his charges has skipped the state without leaving word where they were going. He was looking through that file in search of a possible relative that they might be staying with.

“Torvald, would you pay attention!” his wife admonished. “What do you think about Conrad and Cathy?” He looked over to see that he had irritated her with his non-attention.

“she seems like she has a firm grasp of what she wants” he commented. “She wants to get her degree before she gets married.”

“Maybe they would make a good couple” the tigress thought out loud, handing her hubby the emergency mission to look at. “Look at this one to see if we want to take it” she asked, giving him a kiss on the side of the muzzle. “This mission seems tame to me.”