

*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, 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 4

#### "A Small Mistake"

The huge immortal fur had spent the better part of the morning trying to get the shelves stocked again but he was continually interrupted by the need to take care of the customers requests. He was taking care of one of the ever-present Cerruti clan when a familiar appearing tall, blond filly walked into the store. She stood off to the side, examining some bolts of cloth while he finished with his current charges. As the badgers left the General store, she walked up to him and smiled slightly.

*"Good morning, Aslaug. It is good to see you"* the berserker said to her in his native tongue. The filly cocked her head and looked at the huge fur strangely.

*"Are you here to help us with this mission?"* he continued as he put some cans away on the shelves behind him. The filly had a real confused look on her muzzle and she was looking at the floor while she mulled over this one-sided conversation in her mind.

The berserker could sense something was quite wrong so he went to stand in front of her and said to her in modern English "Are you all right, Shieldmaiden?"

The filly's paw shot up quickly and grabbed a paw-full of his mane. She pulled him down to her eye level as she spat out "What did you just call me?" He could see the fire in her sapphire blue eyes from this up close and personal viewpoint.

"I called you Shieldmaiden, Aslaug" he replied. "You cannot deny you were a Shieldmaiden before you received Valkyrie status."

"I am not a Shieldmaiden nor am I a Valkyrie" the blond filly said to him quite tersely as she tugged at his mane for emphasis. "My name is not Aslaug, either." She looked him square in the eyes and told him "I am well educated and I have traveled to Europe

many times. I am knowledgeable of these Norse mythology figures you speak of but I am certainly -not- who you think I am.” She then let go of his mane.

“Oh boy, I made a mistake” the huge fur said as he stood up and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Yes, you -have- made a mistake. I am Joan Elfsborg, for your information” the filly stated as she straightened out the front of her blouse. “I oversee the restaurant for the Chevarez brothers.”

“I am -very- sorry Miss Elfsborg” Torvald said as he prepared to eat a large helping of humble pie. “It's just that you bear more than just a passing resemblance to another filly I know.” He was trying not to look totally embarrassed as he stood there, taking in his lesson learned the hard way. “Except for no accent, you even sound like her.”

The filly was looking at the huge fur with some confusion still. “Your native dialect; Are you Faroan or Icelandic?” she asked out of curiosity.

“Faroan?” the huge fur repeated. “What's a Faroan?” It was clear that the filly had stumped the huge equine with this piece of information.

“A Faroan is from the Faroe Islands” she said casually, as if the huge fur in front of her should have known this fact already.

Torvald almost said that he was *hedni* but then quickly realized that the reference would most likely be lost on Miss Elfsborg. “No, I am originally from the Jutland Peninsula of Denmark, near Gerding” he replied to her with a sheepish smile. “Why do you ask?”

“I was curious, that's all” she stated. “I speak many languages, Danish being one of them. When you were speaking to me in your native tongue, I could catch small words here and there that seemed Icelandic in nature but I didn't understand the concept of what you said to me at all.” She thought about it for a while and said “You must have left Denmark at a very early age to have learned to speak your native tongue so fluently. I do not hear even a hint of Danish inflections in your speech.”

Torvald was trying to figure out a way of explaining himself away when the tigress came out to see what the ruckus was all about.

“Torvald?” she queried. “What's going on out here?” The tigress then observed the filly standing there with a confused look on her muzzle.

“Victoria, this is Joan Elfsborg” the berserker quickly chimed in. “She runs the restaurant for the Chevarez brothers.” He hoped that this would keep his mate from making the same mistakes he had just made.

“Nice to meet you Miss Elfsborg. I'm Victoria Svensen, Torvald's wife” the tigress said as she smiled at the filly. “I have to tell you that you do bear an uncanny resemblance to another filly we know dearly.”

“I have been told this already by your huge stallion” she said to the tigress, nodding her head towards the berserker. “This other filly must be extraordinary in some way for you to think I was she.”

“She is -very- special, that's for sure” the stallion commented as he rubbed his mane some more.

“I am sorry if I caused you discomfort, Mr. Svensen” the filly said as she pulled out her list of goods. “I was caught off-guard by your statements that you made to me.”

“That's all right” Torvald replied to her as he continued to rub his sore mane. “I had that coming for not asking your name first.”

“My original intent was to come here to purchase supplies for the restaurant” Joan said as she stood there and gave the huge fur a small smile. “Here is my list for you to put together. You may deliver the order to the kitchen area at any time.”

“Let me go over this real quick” the huge berserker said as he read off the list. “Bacon, eggs, flour, coffee...I think we have this. Would you like me to see about the lettuce too?” This request caused the filly's eyes to get wide.

“How did you know I wanted some lettuce? I wrote that in Latin as a note to myself!” she blurted out, taking the list and looking at it again just to be sure.

“I was taught various languages in school” he quickly stated. “I do think I have some lettuce that just came in from a local farm.”

“Very well, then” Joan replied. “It was nice meeting the two of you. I order once a week on this day. I will see you again next week.”

As Miss Elfsborg left the store, Victoria turned to her mate and smiled. “She roughed you up, didn't she?” the tigress asked with a smirk on her muzzle.

“That she did” Torvald replied. “I took it at face value that she was Aslaug.”

“She is the spitting image of the filly” the tigress commented as she smiled at her husband. “And you -do- still have that reading ability, as I had suspected.” The huge fur just nodded at that statement. “Good, I'll bring the books home tonight so you can help me decipher them” she said as she turned to go back to the office.

###

Theodore and Walter Chevarez were eating some lunch that their wives had brought for them in the small office for the hotel. The brothers usually went home for lunch but today they were just too busy for such things.

“I don't know about our cook” Theodore said as he munched on an apple. “She called me an '#\$%^&\*Ω∞ Esel' this morning.” His brother almost choked on his coffee at that piece of information.

“You don't want to know what that means” the younger donkey said as he finally quit choking. “We can't replace her, though. She is just too good of a cook to let go.”

“You -do- know that Joan is getting fed up with being sworn at” Theodore stated. “I'll tell you what, the other day she actually threatened to quit!”

“If that happens, we will have to look for another day manager” the younger donkey commented as he sipped his coffee.

“If I had my choice” the older equine stated, “I would rather let Catarina go and suffer the consequences.”

“Would Joan take her place?” Walter asked his brother. “I heard she was a good cook.”

“All we can do is talk with her” the older donkey said as he picked up another piece of fruit.

###

Sister-in-laws Catherine and Laura Chevez were sitting in Maurine Merriweather's parlor along with Lisa Aranow. They were talking about the state of affairs concerning their church and their immediate concerns.

“This is getting bad” Catherine stated as she sipped her tea. “Where will we worship now that the Pentecostal church has been destroyed?” The zebra was shaking her head at the thought of no place to gather and worship their lord.

“Maybe we can start a home study” her sister-in-law suggested. “The Lutheran members are doing that right now.” It was clear that the bay colored Shetland mare was not happy with the situation either. “What will they do...burn down our homes next? I just can't believe that would happen.”

Maurine had her own views of this situation. “We should pull together and build another church” she stated as she was pouring some more tea for the other femmes. “We need to do this for the community's sake.” The mongoose had lived here all of her life and she wasn't about to let this turn of events run her off from her town.

“Do you think we can?” The zebra asked in a cautious tone. “What would keep them from burning it down again?”

“I don't know” the spotted feline femme said to her friends. “I hate to see the Lord's house go up in flames again.”

“I think we should get our husbands involved with this” Maurine suggested. The other femmes nodded their approval.

###

Torvald had gathered the order for the restaurant and he was delivering the items to the kitchen area. He sat the goods on a bench outside the door and went to see if some fur was there.

“I am from the General store” he called out through the open back door to the kitchen. “I have your order...” he was cut off by a string of German obscenities headed his way.

“It's about @%&\$%# time you got here!” the black feline spat out at the berserker as she came face to face with him. “I've been waiting all \$^%\*&@# morning for the #\$\$%\$ coffee!”

“I am sorry” he said quickly, picking up the order and setting the goods on a nearby counter. “Miss Elfsborg did not give me a time to deliver by.”

“I wouldn't have ordered it if I didn't \$%&\*# need it!” the femme spat out at Torvald. “Be %^&% prompt next time!” With that, the femme turned her back and went back to what she was doing.

The huge fur turned to head back to the store when he almost ran into the filly. “I'm sorry” he said sheepishly. “I did not see you standing there.” He could see that the blond femme had a smirk on her muzzle.

“I see you have met our cook” Joan stated, smiling at the huge fur. “Please pay no attention to her outburst. We do not run out of goods as she might try to let on.”

“She is...salty, isn't she?” he asked, looking back towards the doorway and the obscenities coming through it. “Does she ever stop swearing?”

“I surmise only when she sleeps” the filly replied. “I have to listen to this every day.”

“I could not take it” the giant equine stated as he smiled at the thought of it. “You are very strong to endure that.”

“It is a learned talent” she stated. “I must be going now.” Miss Elfsborg nodded and went inside.

###

With their second day of work completed, the immortal couple went to see what the mission staff had done for them. Stepping inside the cottage, they were greeted by Denise Berger.

“Good evening” she said as she motioned them inside. “We wanted to make sure that everything was taken care of properly. This may be a long mission for you two.”

The couple looked around to see that the inside of the cottage was redone to look homey and inviting. Their furniture was now set up for them and a quick wander through the dwelling proved that it had been refurbished nicely. There was even running water and an indoor bathroom.

“This is more like it” Torvald said as he surveyed the cottage. “The team has done a good job.”

“I am glad you approve” the femme skunk said as she stepped a few steps away from them. “It was nice seeing you two again.” She then shimmered out of sight.

“Well, I guess I better retrieve our things from the hotel” he commented as he started to head that way. The tigress put the books on the table and sat down to enjoy their cottage while her husband took care of their belongings.

###

“You look silly in that hood” Roger Woodall commented to the equine. “I still say they will know who we are.” The skunk was shaking his head at the thought of having to burn this church too. He really wished that there was some other way to accomplish this job.

“They will not recognize us” Melvin retorted. “We rubbed this coal dust onto our arms and tails and the hoods will be enough.” They waited until the appropriate time to enter the building and confront the pastor.

Seamus Maclachlan was sitting in the first pew of his house of worship, studying the bible to formulate a sermon. He was presently holding his well-worn bible to his chest as he silently prayed for divine inspiration. The Scottish-born beaver was startled by the front doors being opened with great force, causing them to swing open and strike the walls.

“You must leave this den of inequity, this unholy house!” the equine spat out in a rough voice. “You must leave this town right now or we will burn this church!”

“You cannae force me oot o' my kirk!” the burly beaver said in a loud voice as he turned his head to look at them. “I have th' Lord as my strength!” he added, holding the bible with a death grip in both paws. He got up and walked into the aisle as he sized up the two hooded furs in front of him. “Yen dinnae have th' power tae force oot ma congregation! Leave here, minions o' th' devil!” he shouted at them as he carefully laid down the bible and began to roll up his sleeves. The beaver was getting a murderous look on his face as he shouted out “Leave here now or I'll whale th' tar oot a yens, ya pair of unholy gits! Nae will yens force me oot!”

“I'm leaving” the skunk said as he turned to leave hurriedly. “He looks like he means business.” the equine turned to see that he was now sadly standing alone, facing a very angry beaver.

“Yer voice sounds vera' familiar” the pastor said as he drew nearer to the equine. “Is that you, Melvin Platt?” he asked.

“Not me” the equine replied as he turned and started running out of the Mennonite church.

###

Torvald had returned with their belongings from the hotel and he was now helping his wife to read the books. “That is a purchase of blasting powder for the natural gas plant”

he pointed out on one poorly written line. “It looks like \$106.35 to me.” Even the berserker was having trouble with the gray wolf’s writing.

“What I wouldn’t give for a calculator right about now” she muttered as she worked out the numbers longpaw on some scratch paper. “These books are a mess” she added, shaking her head. She laid her pencil down and rubbed her eyes. “This whole thing is tiring. What are we supposed to find?”

“I don’t know” the huge stallion replied as he sat there, rubbing his eyes too. “This is the most puzzling mission we have been on. The only things we know are that two churches have burnt down and we feel a presence around that black wolf.”

“Maybe that wolf is our mission” Victoria commented as she sipped some water. “We did feel something around him.”

“That fur that the cook cursed out was in the store today” Torvald pointed out. “He was looking for a natural washita whetstone. I was surprised that we even had one.” As the tigress thought about it, her husband added another snippet about the stranger. “I felt a dark power around him.”

“We will have to watch him too” Victoria commented. “Let’s get these books finished so we can go to bed.”

###

Aslaug was standing in the middle of a clearing, surrounded by numerous dead furs. She had reluctantly taken this particular emergency mission at the insistence of Odin himself as a ‘favor’. The filly had helped to defend a small Christian village from attack by a horde that believed their version of holiness constituted a license to kill those that did not worship their graven images. She shook her head at the fact that the warriors had been given the choice by her to move on or die. They had chosen the latter, calling her sinful and without religion because she would not bow to their images. That had set her off, fueling her desire to kill them if they dared try to fight her.

As she wiped the blood off of her spear and Dane axe with the banner of the defeated warriors, she looked around to see that she had not been taken home. “Is this mission not done?” she shouted out to any fur that might be listening. She waited for a few minutes to see there still came no indication that she was being transported back to her home. “This is no work for a Valkyrie!” she spat out in disgust as she threw the blood-soaked flag on the ground. Looking around at the carnage at her hooves, she knew in her heart that this gorefest wasn’t necessary if the other furs had just turned and left. “I must have Odin remind WhiteChrist I am no longer an agent for these kinds of missions” she thought out loud as she checked her belt to make sure her Franciscas were holstered.

She became badly disoriented as the world around her without warning suddenly went white....

###

As the whiteness faded back into scenery, the Valkyrie realized that she was not in her home at all but somewhere else altogether. From all outward appearances, this looked to her like it might be Torvald and Victoria's family room. She looked over to see that the berserker's armor and weapons were not hanging on their display hooks, most likely due to the immortal couple being on a mission.

She looked up at the ceiling and shouted out “Wrong House, Rookie!” to the femme that had sent her on the mission in the first place. The filly was just shaking her head in disgust at the situation. This happened almost every time Peter took a vacation and put “her” in charge.

*“I am very sorry Miss Aslaug”*

the femme voice said to her. This set the filly off again. “That is Coach or Aslaug or even Valkyrie! Don't you -ever- call me Miss Aslaug again!!” she shouted out as she shook her fist at the ceiling.

*“My bad, Aslaug. I will send you home now...”*

The filly cut the femme voice off in mid-sentence. “Never mind, I'll just walk home from here!” About that time, Barbara and Valerie came into the family room to see Aslaug standing there, covered in blood.

“What happened to you?” the tigress asked the filly. “You look like you were in a serious bloodbath.”

“I would rather not talk about it” Aslaug replied in a somber tone as she scowled slightly and looked at the floor. “I do not relish killing those who are ignorant warriors.” As she composed herself and headed for the front door, the ocelot got her attention.

“Where are you going with that blood all over you?” Barbara asked.

“I am walking home” the filly replied rather bluntly.

“Uh...would you rather clean up here first?” she queried. “I would feel better about it if you weren't walking around in broad daylight covered from head to hoof in blood.”

“Maybe you are right” Aslaug replied after she thought about it for a few moments. “That would be better” she added as she touched her forearm where a large patch of blood was. “ Besides, this blood is beginning to get sticky.”