

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

The Character Joan Elfsborg is the result of a collaboration with Joan Jacobsen.

The character Aslaug Larsdatter "The Valkyrie" property of Joan Jacobsen and is used by permission

The characters Joe and Annie Latrans property of the Silver Coyote and are used by permission

The character Tigermark 'TM' M'rega property of Tigermark and is used by permission

Any resemblance to persons or furs, either living or dead, real or fictional is purely coincidental.

No reposting without permission permitted.

Copyright © 2007, 2008 Kellan Meig'h & Ray Stankewitz All Rights Reserved.

'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

Copyright 2007, 2008 All Rights Reserved

Chapter 8

“Of Saxony And Bakersfield”

Torvald had been somewhat awake for a span of a few minutes. His abdomen and right leg were hurting 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 see just where in the heck he was. The hurt that he was rewarded with by trying to move made him grunt loudly as he fell back to the bed in intense pain.

“Torvald? Are you awake?” the familiar femme voice asked in his native tongue. He felt the soft touch of her hands against his neck as she helped him to sit up slightly and drink some wine from a wooden cup. “We thought you would not make it” she added as he greedily drank up the refreshment. He opened his eyes to see that he was staring into the face of a blond femme equine that he knew quite dearly. It was his first wife Wilhelmine Andersdatter.

“Children! Your father is awake at last!” she called out as she wiped his muzzle and brow with a damp rag. “You have been feverish since Karl Jenson carried you back from the heath after the battle. You almost died on us.”

As he tried to sit up and see his surroundings once more, the pain hit him again real hard. He laid back down on the sleeping mat and touched his abdomen only to discover he was bandaged up quite heavily around his waist. He also noted that his right leg and arms were bandaged, but not so badly.

“Do not move around so much” she begged of her husband. “You do not wish to begin bleeding again. You have lost much blood as it is” she added as she fed him some more wine to boost his strength.

His children came into the room to gather around their parents. Axel was the tallest equine in the village besides the berserker but he had obviously been crying from his wet muzzle and red eyes. "Father, it is good to see you awake" he said and put out his paw for a Norse pawshake.

"It is good to see you" the huge fur replied as he shook his son's paw weakly. "The fact that I can see you is proof that I am not dead."

"We're glad you are getting better" Gytha said as she squeezed her father's paw. "Dana was worried that you would not live but I told her you were too strong to die."

"I was very scared" Dana told her father. "Gytha helped me to be strong for you."

"Children, please let us be alone now. Your father is tired and he is still trying to regain his strength" Wilhelmine told their offsprings. "Now go! All of you!" she added as she shoed them out of the bedroom.

After Wilhelmine had returned to her husband's side, she looked at him and told him "When you were feverish, you were talking in some strange foreign tongue. I could not understand you except you kept calling out what must have been some fur's name." She looked at him questioningly as she said "You were calling out the name Victoria."

Torvald was still trying to take in all of this. Was he truly back in Saxony? Was he no longer immortal? The pain in his body indicated that he must somehow be quite mortal again. After thinking about it for a few moments, he looked at Wilhelmine and said "It is a name but I do not think you will understand who it belongs to if I told you."

###

The tigress sat bolt upright in her bed, startled awake by that same strange dream that she had been having off and on for the past few months. She looked over to see the sleeping form of her husband Robert, covers half-way off of his trim and fit male cougar form while quietly sleeping next to her, one arm hanging off the bed as usual. Victoria carefully slipped out of bed and went to the family room to sit at her work desk. "Why do I keep having this same dream?" she wondered as she pulled out her sketch pad and began to draw again while the scene was fresh in her mind.

This house was in her mind like she had lived there, minute details of each room crystal-clear. She had sketched out the floorplan and drew several elevations for each room. The one that was puzzling was the family room. There was a display of early chainmaile and armor on one wall that she drew much too large for a normal fur to wear. Dominating the display was a bearded Dane axe that she drew about 6' tall. She had researched the axe after drawing it to be sure she was correct in its details. It would have been the right size for some huge fur about 7 feet tall. She was still unsure why she had drawn it this big.

"Vicky? Are you out here again?" he husband called out from the hallway. "Vicky?" he queried again as she heard him padding down the hall, headed in her direction.

"Rob, I'm in the family room" she replied as she sketched out an elevation for the kitchen. She knew this kitchen as if she had done the design and overseen the remodel

herself. She could even see an alternate design in her mind, like that had been the previous configuration. As she set about sketching that alternate, her mate put his paws on her shoulders and gave her a gentle, loving neck massage.

“Vicky, are you drawing that house again?” he asked as he looked over her shoulder at her sketch pad. “You have been doing that for days now. Come back to bed and get some rest, please?” Robert was extremely worried that his tigress was headed for a nervous breakdown of some kind. She had been upset since the housing market had taken a down turn and her income in real estate sales had been hurt by that fact.

“Let me finish this elevation” she begged as she began to pencil in the fine details. Victoria was adding such details as a blender, a toaster and or some unknown reason she had drawn a jar of blueberry jelly. She could tell that Robert was getting impatient for her to return to bed by his tail swishing about.

“I will be just a few more minutes” she said as she added a few more details. “This I think is the old kitchen and this one is the new” she added, showing her mate the drawings.

“You're sure of that?” he asked cautiously as he examined her work. “You drew that like you -have- been there.” He noted that her drawings made perfect sense to him. Being a General Contractor, he could see the kitchen remodel in his head, every detail dropping into place. He really thought this may have been a house that his mate had sold at one time and it had left an impression on her.

“OK, I'm done for now” she finally said as she put her sketch pad away and stood up. “Come on, Rob. Let's go back to bed” she suggested as she took his paw in hers and lead him back to their bedroom.

###

Several weeks had went by for the huge stallion and he was finally able to get around slowly on his injured leg. The arrows had done extensive damage to several nerves, leaving the outside of his right leg without feeling. The slash wound across his abdomen was healing nicely, the thick scab a reminder of a hard lesson in pain. This wound would surely leave a nasty scar that would be visible to all after it finished healing.

“How are you feeling?” Karl Jenson called out as he observed the huge fur walking carefully across the compound. The gray wolf ambled over to shake paws with his friend and fellow warrior.

“I have felt better” the berserker replied as he leaned against the walking stick he was using for balance. “I am in hopes this leg will recover further” he added, reaching down to scratch the incessant itching around several large scabs from the arrow punctures. “It has not yet regained its full strength.”

“You bled badly when I carried you back” Karl said quietly. “I was sure you would die before we could tend to your wounds.” The muscular wolf looked like he was bothered by something so the huge stallion spoke up.

“Is there something you would like to share with me?” he asked the wolf, squatting down on his good leg so he could sit on the grass in the middle of the compound. “Please rest yourself and talk with me for a while.”

Karl sat down on his haunches and looked at his friend with a reverent look on his face. The wolf reached down and plucked a few sprigs of grass, sniffing them and then began nibbling on them before he spoke. “When we were in battle, I saw you going after the leader of the Germans with your axe. You cleaved him in two right before another enemy soldier ran you through from behind with a broadsword.”

Torvald could still feel that blade skewering him, the horrible sensation of steel scraping against his spine and ribs as the blade cut its destructive path through his body, slowly ending his mortal life right then and there. He remembered the blood welling up in his throat, making it hard for him to even breathe. Just the thought of it made him feel quite nauseous as he sat there with his good friend.

“I went to dispatch the fur that had killed you when he dropped to the ground as if by some force of *sejd* that had struck him.” It was obvious that there was more of this story to come by the look on the wolf’s muzzle.

As I approached you, you disappeared from sight” Karl proffered up. “I took a few more steps and you reappeared but without the fatal wound. You had that wound on your abdomen instead.” The warrior was motioning to the injury just above Torvald’s navel. “I am not telling an untruth to you. This did happen and you can ask Frode Gunnarson. He will tell you the same.”

“He will not have to ask” the voice behind him stated as a muscular solid black equine sat down next to the still-healing berserker. “I will tell him it is true.” Frode reached over and patted Torvald on the shoulder. “You were gone for a few heartbeats before you reappeared. The whole thing had a feeling of great *sejd* to it”

The huge stallion thought this over before he said something. “Some day I would like to tell a story to both of you” he said quietly. “I will do it when I am sure of my facts.” At his request, his two friends helped him to stand and he bid them goodbye as he hobbled back to his home.

Torvald was positive that he didn't dream the events of his life in a fever-driven delirium. He knew he -had- been killed in that battle. Even though he had no scars to indicate it had ever happened, he could still feel every inch of that German sword cut through him, snuffing out his life slowly. He knew he was not meant to be here at all but he should be in the 21st century with his immortal tigress, doing the god's work.

Wilhelmine and their children were out in the fields, gathering vegetables for their meal so their home was empty for now. The huge stallion went into the bedroom and sat down on his sleeping mat, trying to catch his breath. His health had not come back to him thus far as he was still on the mend. “Loke! Loke, where are you?” he called out in hopes that the weasel could still be summoned by him. Within a few moments, the trickster appeared.

“Torvald, I hope this was quite important” Loke said to the huge fur in front of him. “I was about to take Thor's hammer and hide it again. You spoiled my fun and games.”

The berserker reached down and scratched his healing wounds on his leg and that brought the situation to the weasel's attention.

“You are injured!” he blurted out, reaching out to touch the scab on the berserker's stomach. “You are also no longer immortal!” he added as the realization slowly sank in.

“I am also -not- on a mission” Torvald decided to point out, much to the weasel's surprise. “I have been here for several weeks, recovering from a battle where I should have died.”

This is Saxony, isn't it?” Loke asked as he looked around the room. “This is your home, before you began to do the god's work” he added as he sat on a stool to face the huge fur. “This has the feeling of great *sejd* to it.”

“You are correct” Torvald replied. “This had to be done by a powerful *sejdmager* to make me mortal again. This is truly no longer my home but I am torn between staying here with my Wilhelmine or returning to my Victoria. I love them both equally but I know I cannot have them both. In any case, I need help from the gods.”

“I will contact Odin and WhiteChrist for you” the weasel said as he shimmered out of sight.

###

Victoria woke up from that recurring horrible nightmare that she had began to dream some days ago, screaming that name again. “TORVALD!” she screamed out loudly again and then caught herself, realizing that she was awake in her bed at home, sitting up next to her husband Robert.

“Vicky, are you having that nightmare again?” her husband asked as he turned on a light and rolled over to see his wife. “You really need to see our doctor, sweetheart. You're beginning to scare me!” He took her in his arms and held her closely, realizing that she was shaking like a leaf.

“Rob, I need to talk to you about this” she said quietly. “I had more of that dream than before. I keep seeing a cottage, decorated in turn-of-the-century furnishings. There is a picture on the wall, an old fashioned tintype, maybe.” She took a moment to get a drink of water from the glass on her night stand. “That picture is of me and a positively huge pale furred equine. I think he is named Torvald but I can't tell you why I think that.” She swallowed hard before she added “I see that huge fur and he is calling my name right as a huge flash of light goes off between us.”

“Vicky, you're still scaring me” he said cautiously. “I think We need to go to the hospital right now so you can get some professional help.”

“No! I will not go until I have told you the whole story!” she said excitedly. “I have also been seeing several other faces that have names to them” she stated as she got her pillow bunched up to lean on it. “I see a coyote that I feel his name is Jose or Joe Latrans. I have even seen his street address in my dreams. I have also seen what I believe to be a white tiger that is named Tigermark M'rega. I sense he is very powerful

in some way or another.” She got another drink from the glass on her night stand and then continued her story. “Lastly I have seen a blond equine filly named Aslaug.”

“Aslaug...” the cougar repeated as he thought about it. “I think the high school that beat our football team has a coach named Aslaug. Hold on a minute while I go get something” he asked as he went to get the newspaper. Returning with the sports section from the Bakersfield Californian newspaper, he opened it up to the school section. The local high schools always reported their wins and losses and the paper was more than glad to run the stories. The lead story showed the team from out of town that had won a few days before. Being carried on the shoulders of her team was a blond filly that was identified by the reporter as being Coach Aslaug, no last name given by the equine.

“That’s her!” the tigress exclaimed as she took the paper and read it herself. “I’m serious, Rob. This -is- the filly from my dreams! See, she has that hammer pendant that I plainly see her wearing in my dreams!!” she added as she pointed out the distinct pendant around the filly’s neck. “That huge stallion has one just like it.” She swallowed before she told her mate about some research she had done when she first became aware of the pendant in her dreams. “That pendant means that the two of them are Asetro, followers of the Old Ways. I think they might worship the old Norse Gods.’

Victoria thought for a minute before she told her husband “I must follow my instincts and chase this one. I will never know what these dreams mean unless I go searching.”

“OK, I will let you investigate them for a while” Robert said cautiously. “But you will have to stop when I think you have gone too far.”

“Thank you” was all that Victoria said as she got snuggled back down in the bed.

Even though Robert had gone back to sleep, the tigress was lying in bed, wide awake. Who was this Torvald and what connection did she have with him? Was he just a figment of her imagination or did he really exist? She got curious about the other names so she quietly crept out to her work desk and began to scan the various phone books she had collected for a Joe Latrans. Eventually she found a J. O. Latrans that lived down in the Orange county area of Southern California. It scared her badly when she observed the address. It was the one she had seen in her dreams.

Taking a minute to pull herself back together, she decided that she had to go see this Joe Latrans to find out what the connection was. Victoria knew she had to do this or she would go insane.

###

It had been several years since sustaining his injuries and it was clear that the huge fur could no longer be a berserker. Even though he still had his massive upper body strength, he was unable to run very far on his bad right leg. The archer’s arrows had damaged the nerves too heavily for him to consider going back into battle again. He would just end up being a liability instead of an asset to his brethren.

Torvald was given the task by the elders of training the young in the fine art of battle. He had found this quite satisfying but he still longed in some ways to return to his tigress. Loke could no longer be summoned by him and he just couldn’t see why this

would be so. Had the gods forsaken their holy warrior? And what of his tigress? Did she even exist except in his mind? Maybe he -had- dreamed it all up in a fever-driven delirium.

###

The tigress was sitting on her front porch, talking with her son. He had come to his mother this afternoon to ask a favor of her. Conrad had that sheepish look on his face as he asked, "Mom, could Candace and I borrow \$500 from you for rent until the 10th? We won't get paid until then."

Conrad had dropped out of school when he turned 17 just a year ago and gotten himself a job with the local Computer Shack[®] chain store. He was doing fairly good for himself until he moved out on his own from his father's house and then married a nice femme bobcat named Candace. Now they were struggling along on both of their meager incomes in an apartment that would soon be too small for them and their offspring that was on the way.

"I wished that you would have at least finished High school" she said as she wrote out a check to Conrad & Candace Parks. "If you had lived with me instead of your father, I think you would have finished your education."

"Mom! Do we have to have this lecture every time I borrow money?" he asked as he lit up a cigarette and took a long drag off of it. The tigress was watching him do this and this jarred some déjà vu memory in her head of some fur smoking very leisurely like that. Somehow she felt that the fur in question had wings for some crazy reason.

"I wish you would stop smoking" Victoria told her child as she handed him the check. "You know lung cancer killed your grandfather Parks. I don't want to lose you too."

"Grandfather Parks was a coal miner when he lived in Kentucky, too" he reminded his mom. "He may have died from Black Lung disease for all we know." As they sat there in silence, Conrad brought up something.

"Robert says you have been drawing a home from your dreams" he stated very noncommittally. "He's worried about you and he wanted me to talk to you about it."

"Let me show the drawings to you and you can tell me what you think" she said as she got up to go inside. She returned shortly with her sketch book and opened it up to the drawings she had done.

The tiger looked over his mother's sketches very carefully before he handed them back to her. He looked off into space and took another drag off of his smoke as he pondered what to say. He then turned to her and said quietly "I -have- dreamed of that house too. I feel like we have lived there at one time or another."

###

Several days had passed and Victoria had decided to go see this Joe Latrans from her dreams. His face kept haunting her dreams along with that huge fur that she was so sure his name was Torvald. The day before her trip, she had her trusty and quite rusty

1982 Ford Econoline E-150 window van serviced so she wouldn't have any problems on the drive down and back.

She took the 99 Highway south that eventually merged into Interstate 5 south. That huge stallion was almost haunting her as she drove along, a deep resonant voice with a Scandinavian accent calling her name. The closer she got to the southeastern part of Orange county, the worse these feelings were getting that she had lived here before. She found the exit and began to follow the directions she had printed out from her street mapping program. As she grew nearer to her destination, she sat the map on the passenger seat, no longer needing it to know where she was going. Just this fact was scaring her, the thought that she knew she had never been this way before but she knew just where to go. Victoria now knew to follow her instincts the final few miles as she was sure of her destination.

She turned the corner and stopped across the street from a house that she felt was the one. Looking at the address posted out front, it was indeed the correct house. The tigress sat in her van for a few more moments before she got up her courage and walked across the street and up the sidewalk to the front door. She has the overwhelming feeling that she -had- been here before as she made her way to the door. The tigress stopped and ran her paw over the house numbers of the front of the garage, causing another déjà vu feeling to wash over her. Her mind's eye could see the stallion and the coyote putting the numbers up, joking and laughing with one another. Walking to the front door, she rang the doorbell and waited anxiously for some fur to answer it.

There was some sounds coming from inside the home followed by the front door opening. A femme red fox that had opened the door smiled at her in a welcoming way as she said "Hello, Victoria. What brings you here?"

This shocked the tigress so badly that the vixen had known her name that she almost passed out right there, finally sitting down on the steps to wait for her head to stop spinning. She heard the vixen call out "Joe! Come here quick! Something's wrong with Victoria!!" There was the sounds of feet running through the house followed by a voice that sounded very familiar to her.

"Annie, hold the door while I get her inside!" the male voice said as she felt two paws pick her up and carry her into the house. She could hear him muttering something in Spanish as he gently carried her along. She was deposited carefully on the couch where she laid for a moment or two before she opened her eyes and saw the coyote standing there.

"Joe?" she asked, being sure and at the same time not quite sure of herself right now. "Are you Joe Latrans?"