

Chapter 2

The two feline femme lovers had gone home after the main meal, leaving just the Svensen family and Aslaug. They had left, most likely, to tend to Barbara's numerous striking bruises from the Shieldmaiden.

"I know it doesn't really matter to you equines, but I feel better about the two of you using replica weapons to practice with." Victoria stated, putting dessert on the table.

"Maybe so, but it isn't the same." the Shieldmaiden replied. Victoria could see that the filly was serious by the look on her muzzle. "There is a *feel* when you cut into flesh that isn't there when you use wooden practice arms." the filly added, eyeing the cakes that were put on the table.

"Please! Not at the dinner table!" Conrad complained, giving Aslaug a look of disgust. "Do you want me to hurl?" The young tiger was trying to keep his dinner down right now, looking slightly green around the edges from various mental images.

"Why would you want to pick up something and throw it? The filly asked, causing the others at the table to chuckle.

"No, Aslaug. Hurl is slang for ..." Tor didn't finish his sentence due to his wife glaring at him. "I'll explain it to you later, then." the huge stallion said, pouring some ice water in his glass. Victoria was trying to keep from smiling but it wasn't working.

"I baked an apple-carrot cake for the warriors and a spice cake for the felines." the tigress stated, putting some cake in front of their guest. "I hope you like it. I know that Torvald really favors that combination."

The filly slowly sat her fork on the table and stared at the stallion, jaw hanging open. After a few moments, she spoke in a hushed tone. "You are Torvald?" the Shieldmaiden queried, her eyes getting wider.

The stallion nodded as he said "Yes, Torvald is my full given name." He was looking at the filly, who appeared to be in shock. "Aslaug, are you OK?" he asked, getting up to see about the Shieldmaiden.

As he reached the filly, she stood up and faced him, still wide eyed. She reached out and put her paws on his massive forearms as she said, "I know who you are now. You are Torvald the Giant! You were a legend when I was a young filly. We told of your battles around the evening fire."

"I cannot deny who I am, Shieldmaiden." the giant equine said, sitting in a chair by her. "Sometime you must tell me what was told of my bravery on the battlefield." he added. The stallion had a sad look on his muzzle now and a tear slipped from his eye.

"What's wrong, my love?" Victoria asked, getting up to see about her husband. She went to him and kneeled down in front of him, taking his paws in hers. She could see that he was very upset, beginning to cry by now.

"I miss my old life, no matter how hard it was." he finally said as he wiped his eyes. "I felt alive and I had purpose then." he stated, letting his head hang. "Ever since *that* day, I feel like I have been left with no direction to my life. I am doomed to wander this planet for eternity." he choked out as he began to cry in earnest now.

The tigress pulled her husband close to her and tried to console him. The berserker cried his soul out, letting a floodgate of tears flow from his eyes. "Tor, it's OK. We're all here for you." his wife said, still holding the sobbing giant in front of her. The stallion slowly reached up and held his mate in a fierce hug.

"Maybe I should leave." the Shieldmaiden said, starting to head for the front door. The filly felt that maybe it was her presence that had caused the giant stallion to be upset.

Tor reached out and grabbed her wrist as he said, "Do not leave. I'm just being childish, crying about something that I can never recover." He looked at the filly, then at his paw. He then slowly released his grip on her and smiled sheepishly. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have grabbed you like that."

"I will stay because you have asked me to." the filly said, sitting back down. The group returned to their respective places as Victoria finished distributing the dessert.

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The cake had been consumed and the foursome had retired to the family room to sip after dinner tea and visit. The filly was inspecting Tor's broadsword and axe hanging on the wall.

"Go ahead and feel free to hold them." the stallion said, putting some sugar into his tea. "I'll have to warn you, though. They're surgically sharp."

Aslaug took the huge axe down and felt the heft of its mass. "This is much heavier than my own." she commented as she adjusted her grip for best balance. "Now I see why you were a legend." she commented, looking over at Tor with a wicked smile. "What you lacked in speed you made up for with sheer power." As she inspected it, the filly noted that the wood was not modern wood at all.

She slowly turned and looked straight at the stallion. "This is not a ... a copy, is it?" she questioned, looking back down at the shaft again.

"No, it's not a copy or as we should say, a reproduction." Tor replied.

"That was the word I was searching for ... reproduction." the Shieldmaiden said, nodding her head. "If it is not a reproduction, then what is it?"

"It's my axe, Aslaug. And that is my shield and broadsword, too." Tor stated. "That is also my helmet, although I have added modern padding inside." he added, setting his teacup on the table.

"How..?" The filly's voice trailed off as she looked back at the berserker, a confused look on her muzzle. Tor had not admitted to having any dealings with the one known as WhiteChrist.

"As I had told you a few weeks ago, my landlady found me outside, shivering from the cold." Tor began. "A neatly dressed weasel had come to her front door to tell her there was some huge fur outside her rental cottage, freezing. When she helped me back inside, my things were neatly displayed on the wall."

"Loke!" the Shieldmaiden blurted out as she nodded her head. "He brought them to you!"

"Yes, I had suspected all along that it was Loke that had returned them to me. He also saved me from dying in the cold. I wasn't thinking very straight at that time and I would have frozen had it not been for him." the stallion stated, getting up off the couch. "Would anybody like some more tea?"

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"Dad, I'm having trouble with all of this. You're trying to tell me you're from the 10th century?" the young tiger asked. Conrad had a confused look on his face and his whiskers were twitching.

The huge stallion sat back down after pouring everyone another round of tea. "Son, just think for a minute or two. How many blond equines do you know of? And I mean true blonds, not bleach blonds."

Conrad thought for a few moments before he replied. "I personally know only two, and that's you and the coach." His father was nodding his head in agreement.

"There are *maybe* a few more in the hills of Virginia, I suspect. Those would be my grand and great grandchildren from my first wife." Tor stated. Pointing at Aslaug, he continued. "Our kind didn't survive the black plague with the exception of the Percherons, Arabs and the Native American Mustangs."

"What about that movie 'Witchhammer'? I watched it at my friend's house and there was a blond equine in that movie." Conrad stated, and then turned red with embarrassment over what he had just said.

"Son, you weren't supposed to be watching that movie! Besides, I can assure you that Miss Gabrielle Ryder was dyed for that film. She's normally a bay color with a white blaze down her muzzle." Tor replied. Now it was his turn to be embarrassed as his wife gave him the evil eye.

"Sweetheart, would you care to tell me how you know what Miss Ryder's real coloration is? Hhmmm?" the tigress questioned, setting her tea down and crossing her arms. Victoria was staring a hole through her mate, ears laid back slightly.

"Um...Err...I saw the other big flick from ZZ Studios at a bachelor party. It was called 'Amat Victoria Curam.' Miss Ryder starred in that one too. It was set in Rome before the Coliseum was built." Tor was terribly embarrassed by now and all he could do was look at the floor as he continued. "We watched 'Witchhammer' that same night. Her comments about being dyed blond were in the outtakes."

"Amat what where?" Conrad queried with a puzzled look on his face.

"Amat Victoria Curam, son. It means 'Victory favors those who take pains', the literal translation is Victory loves care." the stallion replied. "There was a note on the cover of the DVD case that gave that information."

"Are you sure you don't own that DVD?" Tor's mate asked. She was still giving him the evil eye, lips pursed and one eyebrow raised.

“Honest! I don't own that DVD!” the equine replied, holding his paws up in mock surrender. “I saw it when my friend from work had his bachelor's party! Honest!”

“OK, I believe you.” his mate told him, finally smiling at him.

“So ... Who is Loke?” the young tiger asked. It was obvious that he was having a hard time wrapping his head around all of this information.

“Loke is the trickster, son. A nuisance at times but he can have compassion, too.” the stallion said. “If he hadn't sent my landlady after me, I would have frozen to death right there by the wood pile.” Tor sat for a moment before he spoke again. “I still wonder *if* I had frozen to death, would I have come back to life when they brought me indoors to prepare me for burial?”

“Torvald! Don't even talk about that!” Victoria exclaimed. “That's just too morbid for me!” She was looking at her mate in shock, jaw hanging open.

“He wouldn't have frozen to death but it would have been hard to explain away.” the voice by the patio door said in a nonchalant tone. Tor looked up to see a weasel wearing a nicely fitted 3 piece dark blue suit. The fur was standing by the patio door, smiling at them.

“Loke! Who invited you here?” the filly exclaimed, headed towards the weasel with Tor's axe in hand. “You had better only be visiting!” she hissed, checking her grip on the weapon in hand.

“Now, now Aslaug, no need to get angry. I only wanted to visit with the stallion, since he did say my name.” Loke said, holding up his paws. “I mean no fur harm.” he added, sitting down on the arm of the couch. He looked at Victoria as he said, “I'm sorry for barging in like this, fair maid. Torvald seemed like he needed to talk with someone earlier.”

“I'm keeping my eye on you, Trickster!” the Shieldmaiden said, sitting down with the axe lying across her lap.

Loke looked at Tor and got a serious look on his face. “The gods have not forgotten you, my friend. You are doing their work as we speak.”

It was apparent that the huge stallion was very confused by all of this. “What do you mean; I'm doing their work right now? I'm just putting in time at work for a paycheck that supports my family. That's *all* I'm doing now.” Tor was pursing his lips and shaking his head at the weasel.

“You *are* doing their work, you just don't know it.” Loke retorted. “Every time you put a young, troubled teen back on the straight path, you have done their work. Throughout the years, you have helped other furs. You have been doing their work all along.”

The huge stallion was looking at the weasel with astonishment, mouth hung open. Tor even blinked his eyes a few times as he comprehended what the Trickster had said.

“You have studied many of the religions, have you not?” the Trickster said, a smile on his lips. He motioned with his paw towards Tor's extensive collection of religious tomes in the floor to ceiling bookcase along one wall. “What have you learned?”

The stallion nodded as he said, “Once you strip them down, they're all pretty much alike. Be a good person, tell the truth, love your family and help your neighbor.”

“And aren't you helping your neighbor?” Loke asked. Tor just nodded in agreement as Loke added, “By the way, you haven't thanked me properly for getting your weapons back.”

“Thank you.” was all the stallion could say. The big equine was looking like he was deep in thought, stroking his chin with his paw.

“Well, you could have offered me a piece of this delicious spice cake.” the weasel said, pointing to the plate of dessert he was now holding. “I haven't had something so delectable as this in ... I don't know how long.” Loke had a look of ecstasy on his face as he savored the intricate flavors. “This beats Greek ambrosia hands down.” he added, taking another bite and savoring it.

“Well, I ... Thank you ...” was all that the tigress could say. She didn't know what to make of Loke at this time and her confusion was obvious by the look on her muzzle.

“Please don't stop visiting with one another on my account!” the weasel said, making a mug of ale appear in his paw and taking a sip. “I thank you for the hospitality but I must leave now.” he stated, setting the mug and plate on the coffee table. With a shimmer, the weasel vanished.

Victoria was still looking at the spot where the weasel had been sitting on the couch. The arm cushion was slowly returning to its normal state, as if somebody had been there. The mug and plate with fork were still sitting on the coffee table.

“He leaves things lying around just like a child.” Aslaug commented, putting Tor's axe back on its display hooks. Everyone looked at the filly as she turned back towards them. “Err...?” the filly said, looking quite puzzled.

“Loke was really here in our house?” Conrad mused, looking confused as all heck. He sat his teacup back on the coffee table and looked at his father for some direction.

“I don't think it will go over very well at school if you go around telling that.” his mother said. She noticed that Conrad was agreeing with her.

“Yeah, you're right.” was all that the young tiger said.