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A Voice From The Past

Epilogue

(Writer's note: No story is ever complete without an epilogue. You have to know what happened to the characters after the story was over.)

"I think Christopher gave me too much gray this time" the berserker commented, looking in the mirror. His entire muzzle was almost all gray now, along with his mane and tail. He was brushing out his coat, trying to look his best. Today, there was a sad duty that his mate and he had to take care of.

"You look fine" Victoria stated, putting on her dress. "At least your coat isn't as faded in color as mine. It makes me look so very old." She was standing beside her husband now, looking at their reflections. They did look like old furs, except that they weren't, physically. Their outward appearances had been altered over time by their agreement with the gods some 71 years ago.

The tigress sat down on the bed and began to sob once more this morning. She looked up at her husband and tried to say something but she was too emotionally torn up to utter a sound. Torvald sat down on the bed beside her and hugged his mate.

"I'm upset, too" the stallion said, trying to keep his emotions in check. "We promised ourselves that we would steel ourselves for this day but I guess you just can't hold back those kinds of feelings." He gave her another hug before he got up and went back to getting dressed.

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The couple had parked his car, a 2064 Anniversary Ford Mustang that had been converted to induction electric, in the parking lot outside their destination. Torvald opened the passenger door for his mate and helped

her out of the car. As they walked along, he held her arm to steady her as they went inside.

Finding their way to the designated room, they walked to the front of it where Conrad's coffin lay. Their son had lived to be 87 years old and he finally died quietly in his sleep of old age.

“He looks so...peaceful...” his mother said before she began to sob all over again. She laid one paw on her deceased son's arm as she tried to staunch the flow of tears that were matting the fur down on her muzzle.

“Mom, come sit down” the Mountain Lioness said, helping her mother-in-law over to one of the front pews. Conrad had married Cathy Hunter after he graduated from UCLA. “One of the grandchildren could have come and gotten you” Cathy offered, giving her a small box of tissues.

Torvald was still in front of his stepson's coffin, holding his pendant as he said a prayer for Conrad in his native tongue.

“I ask of the gods that you watch over his soul and make sure he has plenty of mead and ale to drink. Let him always have a warm fire to keep himself comfortable and a soft bed to sleep in.”

Torvald broke down a little as he said *“We will see again soon, my son.”* The berserker finally went and sat down by his mate, giving her a big hug and leaning his head against hers.

As Victoria looked around it was apparent that his family had brought out all of his memorabilia for the funeral. His jersey when he played at UCLA, his LA Dolphins jersey, the jersey he wore at his first Superbowl win for the Sacramento Giants. There was the last jersey he wore as a quarterback for the Giants along with his jacket as head coach of the Green Bay Packers. A display case sat in front of his coffin holding his 9 Superbowl rings, 4 as head coach of the Packers. Sitting on his coffin, however was his biggest lifetime achievement: His PhD in Theology.

It had been that talk about Heathenism that he had with the stallion that had prompted him to go on to college and study religion. He didn't want to do the god's bidding like his stepfather, he only wanted to study and teach others. He had been a big success at this; he had been a tenured professor at the University of San Francisco for over 20 years.

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Victoria and the stallion were standing under a tree, watching the workers put the last pieces of sod over their son's grave. His wife Cathy was standing with them, trying to hold herself together. The Mountain Lioness had been married to the tiger for over 50 years. They had 2 sons, 3 daughters and numerous grandchildren. It seemed to Cathy like all of their memories had been playing in her head the last few days and she was tired.

"I need some rest" she said, wiping her eyes again. The fur around her eyes and muzzle were matted down from crying. "Would you take me home, Dad?" she asked the berserker.

Torvald looked over at her and swallowed hard. He remembered the first time she had called him that. "Cathy, why don't you come stay with us for a few days. It would be better than being in that empty house by yourself" he suggested to her, taking her paw in his. She looked up at him and nodded as she gave his paw a squeeze.

"They're done now. We can go home" the tigress said, kneeling at Conrad's grave and saying a final goodbye. The lioness and the stallion joined her for a moment before they all turned and left.

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A few days later Torvald was in the back yard, throwing his Franciscas. He was trying to cheer himself up but it wasn't working for him this day. His daughter-in-law was watching him, thinking about when the stallion would spar with his son. They had practiced on and off with the replica swords until Conrad's health began to fail about 10 years ago. That was around the time that the tiger had decided to retire and move them back to So Cal to be near his family.

"Dad, you don't get tired, do you?" the lioness asked, working on a needlepoint in her lap. Cathy had been privy to the two Immortal's secret since right after she married Conrad.

The berserker looked over at her as he replied. "No, I am only tired of missing my son right now" he stated, turning to throw an axe. He threw the two Franciscas and wandered over to the target. He had to lay the target down and stand on it to remove the axes because of how hard he had thrown them. He then went and sat down beside his daughter-in-law.

"I have been on this planet since 1891, and 26 years more in my home world, daughter. I have seen many things change but one thing never

changes. Furs everywhere grow old and die.” he said, sounding very weary this afternoon.

“If I wasn't doing the god's work, I would have gone insane from just being here” he said, holding out his paws and motioning to the surroundings. “It has been a long time but Victoria and I have made do. We try to keep active, traveling as much as possible.”

“What was your old life like, when you were a Berserker?” Cathy asked, looking at the sad stallion sitting by her. “You have never really told me much.” She reached out and took his paw and held it.

“I was born in Denmark, on the Jutland peninsula, the oldest son of a warrior” he said, staring off into space. The lioness could begin to see his village around them. She could smell the air; it was cold, crisp and clean. There were furs all around them, going about their business. “I grew up in Denmark and took a mate from our village before we went south to settle Saxony which my people, the *Hedni* had taken by conquest.” She looked over to see that Torvald was smiling now as he told her his story.

“We traveled to Saxony and started a settlement near a river. The fishing was good and the ground fertile. We even let the Germans settle among our people.” She looked to see the past stallion with his family, preparing grapes for fermenting. “This part you may not want to see” the stallion said, the images seeming to stand still for a moment. “This is when I was killed in battle.”

Cathy thought for a moment before she said “Maybe you are right. Not today, please. Perhaps we could do that some other day.” With that, the scenery faded, bringing them back to the present.

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The lioness had been staying with them for a week now and her spirits were getting better. The berserker and his daughter-in-law were in the family room and she had been listening to the story of how Victoria had become immortal.

“...and Aslaug had torn their wings off and beat the hell out of both of them with their own wings!” Torvald said, a grin crossing his muzzle. “I saw Gabriel about a month later and his wings still hadn't healed. I understand that Michael still has trouble with his left wing. It hurts in cold climates now” the stallion added, looking over at his daughter-in-law.

“If the gods gave Mom immortality, why couldn't they just take it back?” Cathy asked, a confused look on her face.

“When they gave her immortality, it was at a cost. It was the only way to keep her from being destroyed in Surt's realm. Victoria and I can *never* be mortal again. It is a law of the gods, I am told.” Torvald swallowed hard before he said “If we could have, we would have given it up in a heartbeat. No fur should live this long.”

“You talked about the Archangels. Why did they interfere?” The lioness asked, laying her needlepoint down and turning in her chair to face the giant fur.

“We don't know, daughter” the stallion replied, looking off into space. “That wasn't the first time the archangels have interfered here on earth. The angels believed that I needed to face Surt by myself. Surt was just the catalyst, not the objective. The objective was my fear of losing Victoria. She was never meant to be there in his realm. Gabriel's interference caused my mate to be pulled into my quest because of her love for me. The gods had to save her in any way possible so the gods decided to make her immortal and give her back some lost warrior instincts from her past.”

“But both of you could have been destroyed by Surt” Cathy said, grimacing at the thought.

“That is true, that is true” the berserker commented, looking her in the eyes with a serious look on his muzzle. “When we left Surt's realm, we're still not sure by what means or by whose powers we left by.”

“What of Mom's instincts being messed with?” the lioness asked.

“She still seems to me to be the same” Torvald answered, “except that she is deadly with a longstaff now. I can't win against her any longer. She took on Aslaug once and it was a draw after 90 minutes.”

“I have to admit that I was panting rather hard afterwards” Victoria added, sitting down beside her husband. “I really surprised the filly. She just couldn't believe how fearsome this real-estate salesfur could be.”

“That's how she makes her sales. She pins them to the floor until they sign a contract” Torvald stated, smiling at his wife. The tigress punched him in the arm rather hard.

“I do not! I pin them up against a wall! Get it right, will you?” she joked, handing her husband and daughter-in-law a sandwich apiece.

“So...what is Aslaug doing now? I haven't seen her in a long time” Cathy asked. “I guess it was your 50th wedding anniversary when she was here last.”

Torvald smiled as he replied “She didn't have the gods age her appearance so she moves around a lot. She lived in San Francisco but you knew that. I think she likes the northern climates better. I have to be honest with you, I do too. It gets too darn hot here in the summer.”

The stallion took a bite of his sandwich before he continued. “She's up in Chicago right now. I think she's trying to get a coaching job with the Chicago Bears. You know that Conrad tried to get her to coach with him when he was at Green Bay. She said she couldn't coach for a bunch of cheese heads.” The berserker was looking a little wistful now.

The stallion then smiled as he added “The University of Wisconsin Badgers football team wants to pick her up as head coach I heard. All it took was seeing her throw that perfect spiral that I taught her *one time* and they tried to hire her right on the spot.”

Victoria had gotten up and put on some 1970's southern rock for them to listen to. It was always Conrad's favorite style of music and it seemed appropriate to listen to it while they ate. As they were finishing their meal, a voice boomed out in the room;

“Torvald Svensen, it is time. Prepare yourself.”

“Looks like I have to leave” Torvald said, getting up from the couch. He gave the two femmes a hug and stepped back a few steps. He then shimmered and disappeared.

“I have never gotten used to that” the tigress commented, picking up the dirty plates and heading to the kitchen.

###

A few years had passed and the stallion and tigress were finally moving on. They were currently driving on Interstate 40 in Arizona, headed towards their new home in Wisconsin.

"I'm glad that little Conrad the 3rd bought our house" Victoria commented as she watched the scenery go by. "His 5 little ones make good use of that large back yard."

"You know that he's not little anymore" the stallion remarked. "He's almost as tall as I am and I'm sure he weighs at least 240 pounds. He was a great football player before he decided to settle down."

"I know, Torvald. Or should I call you Thomas now?" She smiled at her husband as she continued. "Who's idea was it for you to be a Thomas, anyway?"

"It was Odin's idea. I don't know...it's OK, I guess" he responded, trying to stretch his legs as he drove.

"At least I used my old middle name, Angela" she stated, trying to find some music on the radio. "Is that our stop up there?" she asked, spotting a combination fueling station and restaurant near an offramp.

"Seligman exit, just as he said it would be" the berserker said, turning off the freeway. There was a little lurch as the vehicle went from ac induction coil over to battery power. "I'll have to get that looked at soon" he commented, pulling into the station.

The stallion parked over to the side, not needing to fuel their electric car. The two of them got out of their red 2064 Anniversary Mustang and walked over to the restaurant, that was curiously empty except for a waiter on duty. Once seated in a corner booth, they were joined by Christopher and Odin.

"I heard you have your new home purchased already" the lion said, sipping his ice water. "I hope you are going to be happy there" he added, patting the tigress' paw.

"We had the filly go take some pictures of things we couldn't see on-line so we feel like we have seen it in person" the stallion commented. "That's not why you wanted to meet us here, though."

"We wanted to meet you here because Odin and I were going to do some scouting for a new squad member" Christopher replied. The lion was smiling that disarming smile at them.

"Now that you're going to be Thomas and Angela Mikkelsen, you need to look different" Odin said, smiling a little smile. "Good choice on last

names, I must say. That was your father's last name." The stallion smiled at that thought. Mikkelsen had been his first choice that came to mind.

"Well, first let's get rid of the aging" the lion said, gesturing at the couple. They now looked as they did some 71 years ago. "Tigress, what is your choice? Lioness? Cougar? Leopardess?"

"I would like to be a White Siberian tigress, I think" she replied, smiling at her husband. She took his paw and squeezed it as she looked at him.

"OK, here goes nothing" the lion stated, gesturing at her with his eyes closed. Christopher had to concentrate to get it just right for her as per their agreement. As he opened his eyes, he smiled. Sitting across from him was a beautiful White Siberian Tigress. She opened her eyes to reveal that they were now a pale ice blue color.

"Now that is *one pretty femme*" the stallion said, giving his wife a kiss. "She is more beautiful now than I could have imagined" he added, giving her another kiss.

"OK you two, we have to take care of the berserker, here" the one-eyed wolf reminded them. "Stallion, what is your choice?" Odin asked, smiling widely by now as it was his turn to take care of business.

The stallion cleared his throat and said "I think I would like to be a red chestnut bay color with a white blaze down my muzzle."

The wolf concentrated as he caused the coloration on the equine's body to change. After a few moments, the stallion was now a red chestnut bay as he had asked. He opened his eyes to reveal that they were still blue.

"That I will not change" Odin said, smiling again. "I sensed that he wanted to keep his blue eye coloration." The new Thomas was smiling as he checked out his new look.

"Thank you for helping us move on with our lives" Angela said, reaching out and touching their paws. "I guess we need to be going now" she added as they got up from the table.

The lion and the wolf walked with them out to their car and Odin held the door while the tigress got inside. The two of them stood there as the new Mr. And Mrs. Mikkelsen drove off and returned to the highway.

Christopher turned to Odin and asked "Are you ready to go scouting?"

“I'm ready when you are. Who do you have in mind?” the wolf asked.

“In the year 2005, there's this coyote/shepherd mix that lives up in Columbus. He has a really nice femme for a girlfriend. She's a tiger striped skunk...”