



... And A Dream Of Iron

A beautiful falcon landed on a barren, mountain. Its summit was already narrow, sharp and unforgiving as the edge of a sword and it was further grind to sharpness by the howling icy winds that plummeted the falcon, knocking it away from its destination several times until the bird of prey could make a landing in the cover of a jagged rock.

The back of the falcon split apart, a cascade of golden light emanated from it and out of the light stepped Freya with her falcon cloak draped over her shoulders.

Today she had left behind her armour, her trappings of power. Aside from the falcon cloak that had brought her here Freya wore simple woolen robes more befitting of a peasant woman, thick robes of earth brown and leaf-green colour. Not a touch of gold had she brought along, no weapons, not even shoes despite the freezing cold up here on the mountain. Just a huge leather pouch hung from her sturdy belt.

This was not the time or place to flaunt the wealth or power of Asgard. Up here was one of the gateways that led to Joetunheim, the land of the giants where Freya wanted to travel.

The giants had never liked the Aesir and Aesignur in their high towers and lavish halls but it was different for Freya who was a daughter of the Vanir, more bound to the solid earth than the sky gods and a former enemy of Odin's Get herself. It was different as long as she showed respect and humbleness.

Before her she saw an arc of pale green light like one strand of colour had been taken away from the Bifrost Bridge and placed here where air, stone and ice were locked in an everlasting struggle for supremacy.

Freya quickly approached the arc and as she passed through all of a sudden the buffeting winds and the cold were gone. There were still mountains all around and the air was chill but still warmer than before and no icy winds whipped against the goddess.

Her intention had taken Freya to the place where she wanted to be in Joetunheim. Right before her the ground had cracked open untold times ago and formed a huge chasm, a canyon that cut through the mountains so deep the ground below could not be seen.

The bridge that crossed this chasm was made of iron chains, each chain link the size of a Viking longboat. The chains had been tied and intertwined and woven into each other like linen or wool with more chains to hold them, all of them together forming a bridge about one-hundred feet wide.

On this side of the canyon the bridge was anchored in the cliffs with nails as high as towers. On the other side it flanked the gates of a castle that was also made completely of iron.

Freya stepped onto the strange chain bridge and walked over it, sometimes balancing carefully on the slippery metal as the heavy chains swung from side to side under her feet. Just as she was about to reach the other side of the chasm the castle's gate opened and two looming figures brandishing enormous swords stepped out to cross their blades and block the path of the goddess. These guardians of the castle were huge armour clad figures twice the size and more of a tall mortal man. Freya knew that there was no living flesh inside the dull grey and black armor. These two were masterpieces of smithery, empty shells animated only by the will of their creator yet still as deadly as any of Odin's berserkers.

Two pairs of orbs of molten red metal where the eyes of a mortal would have been looked down on Freya.

She cleared her throat, looked up to the guards and said, "Tell Verrumwir that Freya, daughter of Njord and Skadi, Freya of the Vanir asks for an audience."

For a moment the suits of living armour remained stock still. Then the one to the left withdrew his sword and lumbered back into the castle while the other one still block Freya's advance with his huge blade.

Minutes passed and his companion did not return. Instead the master of the castle came out to meet Freya.

Verrumwir was a giant of iron. At first glance he seemed to be made of stone until it became obvious that the stone was just a coating on strands and layers of iron ore that made up the gigantic humanoid form he had chosen to house his spirit for the time being. With every step his body made gnashing and gravelly sounds as iron bones turned in stony joints. His hair and beard appeared to be blades, long thin and sharp but still soft and flowing. From inside that mass of edged hair his eyes shone in blue and silver.

"What brings you here Freya?" Verrumwir's voice rattled like a hundred clashing swords.

Who had ever accused giants of subtlety or flowery long-winded speech?

"I came here to renew the ties that bind the Vanir and the denizens of Joetunheim together, the ties that existed since the elements were made, since we were made."

“We have not much love for the gods of Asgard or for the Treeborn that they call their children.”
Verrumwir replied sourly.

“I know. But what connects the Vanir and the giants goes back further than the slaying of Ymir and the creation of humanity and Midgard. Ymir’s death was a great loss for all of us, yet his demise brought forth so much. And whatever you hold against Odin, does it really have to cut the band between my kine and yours? I came here to pay new respect to you and through you to all giants who are old friends of my father. Please accept this gift if you are willing to extent your hospitality to the daughter of Njord and Skadi, the daughter of the earth.”

The giant remained silent for a long moment before he nodded.

“My hospitality you shall have as long as you show me the respect that I am due.”

Verrumwir grunted and his guardian pulled back the sword, allowing Freya free passage. She followed Verrumwir who led her into the castle to a long hall in the middle of the otherwise empty grounds, a hall again made completely of iron except for the bright copper hinges that held the double door of the entrance. The door opened all by itself as Verrumwir approached it while his body shrunk down to human size.

Inside the hall Freya found long empty tables and empty chairs

Verrumwir took his seat on a black iron throne at the head of the last table and motioned Freya to sit to his right as his guest of honor.

From all sides women appeared now. They looked like sisters, all of them had similar beautiful features, blueish skin and copper hair. They brought two iron drinking horns and kegs full of met – a lot of kegs and plates of fruit and meat to go with it.

As they sat down to eat and drink Freya began to ask Verrumwir about the guards outside, about the castle itself the giant had built and about the women who served them. Verrumwir spoke proudly of all those things and soon he and Freya were engaged in a lively conversation about everything between the serpent below and the eagle above.

“I promised you my respect as it is only proper for a guest but I think I can do better than just respect. “ Freya proposed.

She opened her pouch and brought forth a little white linen purse that started to grow in her hands until it had reached the size of a sack of grain like those traded only the market places of Midgard. She tore it open, reached inside and showed Verrumwir its contents – a pale yellow powder that smelled sweet and tantalizing.

“Yeast, “ Frey said, “ I think to remember you like it.”

Verrumwir’s eyes it up and his nose sniffed the aroma of the yeast.

“You remember right, Freya. Let us share this wonderful and mix it with the met.”

He filled the drinking horns and again and Freya poured yeast into both of them before they drank deeply many times.

Freya rose from her chair, still steady despite all the met.

“Allow me to entertain you Verrumwir with tales untold s far from all over the nine worlds. Let me sing for you Verrumwir. Let me sing for you of life itself.”

Again she reached inside her pouch and this time she fetched a little harp with a small delicate frame made of gold and with strings made of silver. Freya sung while she played the harp. A fiery Fehu rune formed around the instrument, swirling dancing as Freya voice filled the room, Verrumwir’s ears and finally his heart.

First Freya sung of battle and glory, of love and sorrow, of joy and pain and of all the wisdom and follies that moved the nine worlds. When she started to sing the simple but joyful songs that the peasants used to sing when the end of a good summer promised a plentiful harvest Verrumwir’s body began t o sway from side to side ever so slightly, the a little more and a little more. He rose to his feet and began to dance, clumsy steps at first but then faster and faster as his iron form remembered the light-hearted of festivities long gone.

As Verrumwir danced faster and faster, lost in the ecstasy of the moment, he began to sweat and his sweat dripped to the ground where it dried again into solid lumps of pure iron.

Freya kept singing and Verrumwir kept dancing until finally he was exhausted. He slumped back unto his throne and let out a long rattling breath that became a snort. And then another. And another. The copper-haired women stood still like statues. Like the guards, they were no giants or even really alive. They were just physical extensions of Verrumwir’s will, created in his forge deep down in the belly of the castle and without his will they were empty.

Verrumwir was soundly asleep. It would have taken the thunder of Thor to wake him up now. Yeast had funny effects on giants.

So Freya began to clean the room like a good wife or bondswomen would have done. She scrubbed the tables, washed out the drinking horns, set the Yeats aside in a corner and while she did all this Freya also collected Verrumwir’s petrified sweat and let the nodules of iron one but one disappear in her belt pouch.

When she finally left quietly and unobserved as Verrumwir still slept deeply, Freya left behind a token of friendship and appreciation. She hoped Verrumwir would like the little golden harp. Now she had to take his gifts to one of the few who could surpass even Verrumwir’s magic skill with hammer and anvil.