



A Pocket Full Of Moonlight...

It was in those days when the lords and ladies of Asgard slowly became accustomed to the reality that Baldur The Bright, Baldur The White was no longer with them and would only return after the end of days when the final battle of Ragnarok had been fought.

Freya sat on her throne in her hall called Sessrúmnir, her head resting on her hand as she was lost deep in thought, much deeper than a common might have expected it from the goddess who ruled over physical love and the bliss it could bring.

But love was not on Freya's mind these days at least not the kind mortals associated with her.

With a sigh Freya finally rose from her throne. Her handmaidens quickly gathered around her and followed her into her private chambers in the back of the hall.

But Freya had no need for them now. She was on a mission now, one she had to undertake alone.

The goddess donned her golden battle armor, a golden helmet adorned with the silver wings of an eagle and crowned by an emerald serpent and a white thick cloak made of ermine. When she was done Freya sparkled and shone like the sun itself, radiating light like only Baldur had before the mistletoe had brought him down.

The chariot was white like bone with wheels of glittering silver and pulled by two white horses with silvery eyes.

Holding the reins of the chariot was a boy or so he looked. His curly hair and his skin were white as milk and although he looked so young - no older than perhaps fourteen or fifteen summers - his eyes were those of a man who had seen lifetimes come and go. They were of a silvery pale-blue colour but despite their ageless knowledge they were neither old nor weary. These eyes had seen it all yet they were still full of curiosity and full of care for all the events that transpired down in the realm of Midgard. It were the eyes of the father, the grandfather and the child full of the never ending, never tiring love one felt for one's family.

Thor was the protector of Midgard but Manni was its caregiver.

Above his head and shoulders shone the pure white halo of the full moon. Hatti the moon dog was far away tonight which served Freya's purpose well.

"Manni." She greeted the charioteer, guiding her own winged steed to run in unison with the moon's horses beside the chariot.

“Freya,” he replied and for a moment a hint of knowing, a spark of understanding danced in his pupils. There was the goddess of love and sorcery who carried the grief for a lover lost deep in her heart but not deep enough for Manni not to feel the echo of the pain.

“You are as beautiful as ever, Freya.”

“The same could be said of you.”

Freya looked at the bright shimmering orb that Manni carried across the sky every night, constant only in its constant change. Tonight the moon shone in all its glory.

No, not glory. That was not the right word. Glory was the quality of the sun, the day, the victory of the battlefield. The power of the moon was different, shifting, changing, yet soothing ephemeral but true.

It was the power of deepest feeling, the tide that created the ebb and flow not only of the oceans but also of human life. It was the wisdom that filled Manni’s eyes too. He was not just the charioteer. He was the moon.

“You come here with a weight on your shoulders,” Manni observed, “How can I help you to lift that burden?”

“Is it so obvious?” Freya asked back, I hoped to be more of a riddle.”

Manni lowered his head, smiling, “Forgive me Freya. This is not the place to keep secrets of the heart. That is not the way of the moon. It is not the way of the goddess of love either but then you are here not as a lover but as a warriorress.”

“Yes, I have seen battles to come and deeds that need to be done. So I came here to ask for a favor.”

Once again Manni looked at her. His eyes met hers and they shared a divine moment. By surrendering himself, by giving in to the presence of the goddess without condition, without fear he could reach out to her and understand what did not need to be spoken. He understood and nodded, ending the moment of oneness before it became too uncomfortable for the proud queen of the swan maidens.

“I see what you need and I hope I can give it to you. For the sake of the one will lost and the one we might save.”

Manni raised his right hand and silently asked Nott the night herself to assist him and Freya. And from the very fabric of the night Manni drew a tine piece of inly blackness and formed it in his hands, weaved it with his fingers and his intention until there was a little of midnight black.

And then Manni reached inside himself, reached deep into his heart and soul where the grief and the mourning for Baldur’s passing had taken root and hidden themselves behind a wall of forgetfulness, acceptance and routine.

Manni tapped deep into the grief and he cried. He cried silvery tears and as he sobbed and the pain shook his body the tears fell into the pouch of midnight black and changed to become the most beautiful, white and silver light, sparkling with tiny stars.

Manni closed the pouch and tied it up before the light could escape again. He handed the full pouch to Freya. His eyes were clear again and his lips showed a genuine warm smile.

“This will help your cause. Freya.”

The golden Valkyrie took the pouch and hid it inside her ermine cloak. Then she looked at Manni.

Their eyes met again for a moment that lasted a second and an eternity.

“You will be repaid for this Manni I swear. Whenever you need me, call on me.”

“It is all good Freya,” Manni replied, “Your prize was my relief. I needed to do this for a very long time. You see, although I’m not counted among the Aesir I loved Baldur too. We must protect what we still have.”

And Freya pulled hard on the reigns of her winged steed, leading her away from the chariot of the moon back to the rainbow bridge, back to Asgard that she called her home now.

As she rode and Manni continued his journey through the night sky, Freya thought for a moment she could hear a faint angry howl from a raging beast somewhere in the dark.

Not tonight Hatti, she thought, *Or any other night if I can help it.*



... 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 difeferent 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 extend 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,” Freya said, “I think to remember you like it.”

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

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

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 mead.

“Allow me to entertain you Verrumwir with tales untold so 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 sang while she played the harp. A fiery Fehu rune formed around the instrument, swirling dancing as Freya’s voice filled the room, Verrumwir’s ears and finally his heart.

First Freya sang 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 to sway from side to side ever so slightly, then 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-heartedness 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 onto 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 Yeasts aside in a corner and while she did all this Freya also collected Verrumwir’s petrified sweat and let the nodules of iron one by 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.