



DESTINY
LEGACY OF A
SPELLBINDER
BY
D.A.W.
RAGNAROK
RISING
PART THREE

Synopsis:

The final battle swiftly approaches and it has been given to me to complete a task so monumental that it may be the sole means by which the Jotun can be defeated. All of Midgard and the goddesses themselves depend on me. Am I up to the task, or will I fail and doom the entirety of human existence to total annihilation?



Author's Note:

As this is the third and final story in my Ragnarok Rising trilogy I highly recommend reading 'Incompatible' and the revised version of 'Transfigured' before proceeding further.

I've posted a glossary of terms (including the days/months and their English equivalents) to go along with these stories, it can be found at [Bigcloset Topshelf](#), [Fictionmania](#), & [tgstorytime](#).

Shout outs go to the following people: Beyogi, Maggie Finson, Loki who served as either alpha and/or beta readers, The Rev. Anam Chara who helped edit some of the dialogue (spoken by the characters Hervor, Heime & Gilda) to more accurately reflect Elizabethan era English and last but certainly not least Holly H Hart for her superb editing prowess.

The mythos which was originally posted at the beginning of the story has been moved to the very end. It's a bit dry, but it does provide an overview of the mythology and it may be helpful to read before tackling the story.



PART 1

Well, I should probably start out by introducing myself. My name was Neil back before I become aware of the whole Ragnarok mess. I really don't look much like a Neil these days, but I'll talk more about that in a little while.

Many of you probably have no idea who I am, but you'll be getting to know me pretty well soon enough. Up to now you've heard the tale for the perspective of the Lady Aryanna le Fey, and there's been good reason for that, and to tell the truth she could probably tell my story just fine. We actually discussed it, but she feels that it's my turn to take the reins and tell you peeps what happened. So that's exactly what I'm doing!

A good portion of the story has been lifted directly from my journal, but I've expanded on it and added dialog where I felt it appropriate. That being said, Aryanna will be adding her own two cents here and there mostly to help the reader fill in the gaps.

I didn't actually start writing in my journal until after my first encounter with Hervor, so this first part was written entirely from scratch. It may not seem very relevant at first, but I felt it was necessary to tell of these events to help the reader understand some things mentioned further on in the story. So, let's get this party started, shall we?



The exact date was the twenty-eighth of Hostmander, and a small group of friends and I were just getting out of a telepicture. It was pretty late and there were only a handful of steamcars left in the parking lot. Our friend, Sophie Rolfe was moving away so we'd taken her out as a final goodbye.

We all went to school together and out of the four of us, Leif was the only one that wasn't a complete outcast. Sophie's social standing really had more to do with choice, she dyed her hair electric-blue and had a nose stud and set a of snake bites in her lips. She wanted to be

an outcast, she didn't get along well with her mother and so acted out to piss her Mom off.

Ham, was an outcast because of his attitude. He hated the Spellbinders and frequently went into long tirades about why they were the ultimate evil. Not that I didn't disagree, but Ham would have spared himself a lot of problems if he'd just learned when to shut his mouth.

Now me, I wasn't really liked because of who my mother happened to be.

Like I mentioned before, Leif wasn't a complete outcast, he was athletic, half-way good-looking and was the son of a powerful Spellbinder. That being said, I wouldn't trade places with Leif for all the money in the world, even knowing what I do now. The Aquitaines were hung up on some of the oldest traditions, and they treated the male members of their family like crap. That really wasn't the worst of it either. Many Spellbinder Houses still forced their male sons into arranged marriages in order to maintain the 'purity' of the bloodline.

The men's rights movement had made some huge steps in the last twenty years or so, but the slowest change was coming from within the Spellbinder houses themselves. The government had created laws protecting men from discrimination, and it was becoming more and more common for men to get elected into positions of power. That being said, Spellbinder Houses still had far too much control over the lives and futures of their male descendants, and the greater majority of elected officials were still women.

Sophie, Leif and I had been friends for years. Leif and I really didn't know Ham that well, but Sophie had been dating him, so we'd thought it best to bring him along. Sophie was really very pretty, despite having a nose that was much too large for her face, but the two of us had never been anything more than friends. Leif, on the other hand, had been nursing a secret crush on her for years.

"Well guys, I had fun tonight," Sophie muttered.

"Yeah, me too," I replied back. Leif and Ham chimed in with agreements of their own.

We all offered our goodbyes and Sophie and Ham shared a kiss before we all departed. It was weird saying goodbye to someone that I'd known so long, I always figured we'd be friends for our whole lives. Well, life seldom goes as we plan. Sophie leaving was just a small bump in the road compared to the events that would soon follow.

I was just making my way over to my brand new Hudson Roadster XL7 when there was a loud thud from the hood of a nearby steamcar. My heart leapt up into my throat, but when I looked over to investigate I didn't see anything. Chalking it off to my tired mind playing tricks on me I continued on to my steamcar. When I was just a few feet away from the door, I could have sworn I felt someone's warm breathe on my throat. Then there was loud inhuman wail and the sound of someone or something scurrying away. I didn't know it them, but I came closer to death that night than I ever had up to that point in my life.



Well that really concludes my little introduction, the next part is from Aryanna's journal, then we'll hear from me again.

Freydag 3. Morsugur

I had a dream last night and the implications of that dream terrify me. In the dream wherever I looked there was madness and destruction. I watched as hordes of dark elves, trolls, draugar and other dark creatures swarmed across the land and the last remnant of humanity were squashed out like insects by gigantic Jotun, wielding weapons larger than the people they slaughtered. Even the goddesses were incapable of stemming the onslaught, and they too fell before the giants. Soon nothing remained but the shattered remnants of a once thriving world. I stared out into the crumbling remains of Midgard and wept. How had I failed? What could I have done differently?

In the dream, everyone I loved and cared about was gone. I was alone. What cruel fate would have spared me when everything else had been destroyed? Anger welled up inside me at the unfairness of it all. Why after everything I had done must I live to see the destruction of everything that I held dear? I screamed in rage and anguish and felt despair overtake me.

Suddenly, everything faded away and I found herself within a black expanse of nothingness. There was nothing save the darkness in any direction. "Aryanna Morgana le Fey," a soft voice said and a woman with flowing black hair and a serene smile on her face appeared. Despite the darkness that surrounded me the woman was clearly visible as if she were standing out in the brightest sunlight.

"What you have been shown has not yet come to pass and should we be successful, it will not."

"What is this place? Why have you brought me here? Who are you?" I asked.

The woman smiled, "I am the Goddess Nyorun. This is my domain, the world of dreams, and I have brought you here to speak with Frigg."

I shook my head, "Why?"

"It is for Frigg to tell you her reasons. Please follow me," she said with a dreamy smile, then swirled around and began to walk away without waiting to see if I followed.

I leapt after her and followed on her tail as the darkness fell away and was replaced with the brightest of white light. I put my hand over my eyes to guard against its glare, but it did no good. The light was so bright that it shone through my hand. I let my hand drop back to my side and noticed for the first time that Nyorun had disappeared. I spun around and found myself alone within the light.

"Be at ease, Aryanna," a soothing voice said from my side.

"Frigg," I muttered and turned to face her.

"The time is almost upon us," Frigg said smiling sadly. "The final battle looms ever more close. In just over four months the Jotun will come and descend upon Midgard."

"The final battle? Ragnarok cannot be so close. There is still too much for me to do," I said with a shake of my head.

"There is a task that must be completed before it is too late. One which grows more urgent as Naglfar grows nearer to breaking from its moorings.

"What would you have me do?" I said staring at the goddess with wide eyes.

Frigg smiled. "It is not you that must complete this task, mortal."

"Who then?" I asked.

The goddess's smile widened further as she spoke and told me what must be done. A sense of dread filled me and I awoke...



"Elska," the soft voice of Daniella said speaking softly into my ear. "What is wrong?"

I gasped and locked eyes with my partner of almost twenty years. Absently I traced my fingers across Daniella's soft cheek. "The final battle is coming," I muttered. "Oh goddesses, it is coming."

Daniella smiled reassuringly, "It was just a dream, my love. Go back to sleep. The final battle has waited this long. It won't be coming tonight."

I shuddered and kissed Daniella's hand. "It wasn't just any dream. There is a person I must find or all will be lost. Frigg has shown me what must be done."

Daniella frowned, "Who are you to find? How are you to find them?"

"She didn't say. She said only that this person's awakening would be marked by the touch of an elf," I said, quickly getting out of bed, "and that I would know them."

Daniella followed me out of bed, came to stand facing me then wrapped her arms around my waist, "What can you expect to do at this hour?"

I frowned staring at Daniella's glorious naked chest then lightly kissed her on the lips, "I'm going to find some answers."



My search for answers this morning proved to be fruitless. I spent much of the early morning hours searching for Brokk and a couple of my other sources to no avail. After returning home for some much needed sleep, I left the estates once again. It was getting dark at the time, but I knew Brokk's shop would still be open.

"By the beard of Dvalinn, you filthy little..." the clean-shaven dwarf said, trailing off.

"Oh, " he muttered a smile slowly forming on his face upon seeing me. "Sorry 'bout that. Filthy little beggar just wouldn't take no for an answer. I thought maybe he'd come back. What can I do for yeh Lady Aryanna?"

I smiled a weary tired smile. "Is your brother around? I was wondering if I might speak with him."

Eitri was probably the only cheerful dwarf I had ever met. Most dwarves had a gruffness about them that Eitri seemed to lack. He had an almost grandfatherly air about him. "No, sorry lass. Brokk hasn't been about in days. The conclave has got him busy runnin' all over the place. Yeh don't be needed more weapons do yeh?"

I shook my head, "No, probably not. You haven't heard anything concerning Nyorun or Frigg have you?"

Eitri's face cracked into a big frown, "Nothin' spercifically about the goddess o' dreams or the Allmother, but word amongst the conclave is that the goddesses are on the move. Some are even whisperin' that the final battle between them Jotun and the Aesir is comin' round the corner. O' course, I'm sure yeh would know about that wouldn't yeh? Being Frigg's champion and all."

"You would think so. Wouldn't you?" I muttered noncommittally. "What about the light elves?" I asked suddenly.

Eitri scratched his face, "As a matter o' fact, that there light elf Queen Hervor is in town. Saw her meself just a few hours ago."

"Really? That's interesting," I said remembering what Nyorun had said about the touch of an elf. "Any idea what she's up too?"

"Now that little piece o' information will cost yeh," Eitri said with a greedy conniving grin on his face. Greed was a favorite past-time of the dvergar that Eitri, it seemed, was all too happy to participate in.

I smiled and shook my head. "How much?"

"A hunderd gold trigguts, and I gives yeh one more weapon," he said.

I eyed the dwarf curiously, "Another weapon? What exactly do I need another weapon for?"

"It's the only offer yeh'r going to get. Take it or leave it."

"Very well, looks like I have little choice. I'll send someone with the payment along later provided your information is correct."

"Deal," the dwarf smiled. "Rumor is the Elf Queen is lookin' fer a half-elf."

My face drained of all color. "A half-elf? Goddesses! Neil!" I muttered then disappeared with a great gust of wind.



Freydag, the third of Morsugur

Oh Hel, this has been one weird frizzing ass day and I need to vent. I've finally started writing in this journal my gramor gave me for the festival of Jul. I keep thinking that maybe it's all just some weird dream, but I know better than that. I've been sitting here staring at this stupid journal trying to figure out where to even begin. I guess I'll just start at the mall...

It was just a normal Freydag, and I was standing around in the usual place waiting for Eva, my girlfriend, if she could even be called that.

"Hey there," a soft feminine voice said suddenly in my ear. "Sorry I'm late."

I grinned and turned to face Eva. She had a pair of dazzling ocean-blue eyes, shoulder length raven-black hair, a nice pair of breasts, a smoking hot body and the face of a valkyrie. I'd met her a few months back at a party. She'd been standing in the corner glaring at everybody that came near her. I don't know how I managed to do it, but somehow I convinced her to dance with me and we'd been together every since.

"Did you miss me?" she asked.

I grabbed hold of the girl around the waist and kissed her on the lips. "Fraggin' frizz, yes!" I said grinning.

"Good. I missed you too," she said, giving me a dazzling smile that made me weak in the knees.

I couldn't quite place it, but there was something odd about Eva. Don't get me wrong I'm crazy about her, but she keeps saying all this weird stuff. she will sometimes be brutally honest and she reacts to the most mundane things as if seeing them for the first time. There were other things too. She had never told me her last name, and I knew next to nothing about her. I don't know why I put up with it. Oh wait, yeah I do, she's freaking hot!

"Well, I can't get you out of my head," I murmured which was true enough. Despite the weird hluti I had to deal with I couldn't stop thinking about her. Who was this strange girl? Why wouldn't she tell me anything about herself? Where did she come from? I shook my

head and grinned as I looked Eva in the eyes.

"I was thinking we could go—" I said stopping mid-sentence as I realized that Eva wasn't paying attention to me.

"Look at that one," Eva said suddenly. "She has a nice pair of breasts."

Eva was into girls too, which I really thought was pretty hot, but I found it a bit unnerving when she pointed out pretty girls for me to appreciate. Odder still, she fully expected me to point one out if I happened to find her attractive.

"Someone is following us," she said suddenly.

"What? Who would be following us?" I asked craning my neck to look around.

Sure enough, a woman with long golden locks seemed to be tailing us, and she really wasn't making any secret of it either. When I locked eyes with her, she flashed a smile, and that's about when I knew something was seriously wrong. I stopped mid-stride and stared at her with my mouth hanging wide open like some kind of idiot.

"I don't like this. Can we please leave?" Eva asked.

I didn't answer, not because I didn't want to, but because I couldn't. My feet were planted firmly on the ground, and I couldn't move them no matter how much I tried. My eyes followed the blond woman as she got closer. She was drop-dead gorgeous, yet I didn't feel the least bit attracted to her. There was something familiar about her, I didn't know why, but I knew I had never met her before.

"I feel deep regret," she muttered with a sad smile as she got closer.

"For what?" I asked dumbly finally able to speak.

The woman shook her head. A single tear ran down her face and she reached out to touch me on the right cheek with an open palm. "For the changes that I am about to invoke within thee."

Eva leapt at her, muttering something in a language I didn't understand. The soft glow of magic enveloped them both, and suddenly Eva went soaring through the air, and with a bright flash the blond woman was gone.

White hot pain shot from my face where the woman had touched me and surged through my entire body. I fell to my knees as sweat shot out from what felt like every pore and a strange lurching dizziness hit me. My stomach felt like it was going to explode and I clutched at it as my belly groaned in protest. The last thing I remember was hearing Eva scream and then the darkness poured in and brought me relief from my agony.



"Neil, are you alright?" Eva's voice echoed in my head. I blinked and looked up and felt my eyes bulge out of my head as two Evas looked down at me.

"Frizz!" I said groaning loudly. "I'm seeing double. What happened?"

"She touched you and you just collapsed. I tried to stop her, but she got away," she said tracing her hand across my face.

"She is a light elf," Eva added suddenly, and leaned over me, which granted me an awesome view of her cleavage in the process.

I stared up at my girlfriend in confusion, "A light elf? What would she want with me?"

She shrugged, "I couldn't say."

"How would you know she was an elf anyway?" I asked with a sigh.

Eva gave me a cautious look, "I-I know an elf when I see one."

"Holy Frizz I think you're right. Mom told me what light elves are like, and I think she could be one. Where'd she go anyway?"

"I don't know. She called up a travel spell and was gone before I knew what had happened," she said with a shake of her head.

I shook my head and laughed, "Frizz, Mom's not going to be happy."

I groaned and started to sit up, but a wave of dizziness washed over me and I sank back down to the ground. It was about that time that I finally noticed the shield of spirit magic that surrounded us. I'd seen my mom raise similar shields before, so I was able to recognize it almost at once. The barrier must have been Eva's, which meant she was either a Spirit Mage or a Spellbinder. No Charmer would ever have the power to raise any kind of shield, and very few Enchantresses would be capable of raising a shield as large as the one that surrounded us.

Eva closed her eyes and placed her hand on my left shoulder. I gasped as a bright white light poured out from her fingers and shot through my body. Eva rocked on her haunches and she let out a soft groan as a shudder swept through her body. Her eyes snapped open and I could see an expression of pure shock mirrored in her eyes.

"It cannot be!" she screamed hysterically. "It's not possible! You can't be one of them! No!"

"Eva..." I said in a vain attempt to calm her down, but was cut short as the air around us seemed to ripple and the dome of spirit magic that surrounded us shook like a bowl of gelatin.

Eva's eyes widened further and her hand began to shake. "My Shield! I can't let anyone

through my shield!"

Suddenly the air started swirling around almost if we had been caught in the middle of a whirlwind. A bright blue light temporarily blinded me and faded away as a large tear appeared in the shield. A woman with long auburn hair and an angry scowl stepped through the crack in the barrier and I felt my heart leap into my throat when I saw her.

"Frigg and Hel," I muttered under my breath and watched as the hole in Eva's shield closed behind my mother, Aryanna le Fey.



PART 2

Freydag, the third of Morsugur (cont'd)

"Get away from my son," my mother said a faint aura of red energy beginning to form around her fists. Despite being almost sixty she still looked like she was in her early twenties which was to be expected since she was a powerful Spellbinder. My friends all thought my mom was hot, but I didn't see it. I mean she was my mom after all.

"Hey Mom," I muttered. "So, I guess you're wondering how--" I said, but stopped short as she gave me a look that could have boiled solid stone.

"I said get away from my son! Elf!" Mother said rounding on Eva. "Where's Hervor? Where's your queen?"

Eva met my mother's gaze calmly. "I have no queen, I have no people, I am unbound," she muttered her eyes cast down to the floor.

I couldn't have heard that right, Eva was an elf? It didn't make sense, or did it? It would certainly explain almost all of her behavior. She was unbound? What in the name of Sif was that supposed to mean?

Mom's anger seemed to fade away and she seemed a bit taken aback. "What in the name of Hel are you doing here?"

"It is a very long story. Neil is important to me, I think he may be my lifkyn."

Mom eyed Eva warily then her eyes suddenly locked on me. "Goddesses," she said. "I'm too late. Hervor has already gotten to you."

"Hervor?" Eva gasped in horror. "That was Queen Hervor?!"

"I don't know. I haven't seen what you have, but I have reason to believe she was looking for Neil," Mom said between pursed lips.

Mom obviously knew something about this whole mess that I didn't. Which could only mean she had known something like this might happen. It would also explain a lot of her behavior over the years.

"Shit, what the Hel is going on, Mom?" I demanded suddenly.

"Neil! Watch your language!" Mom snapped.

"We will discuss it at home," she added looking to Eva then back to me. "Privately."

"Not without Eva," I said resolutely.

"Oh, she'll be coming with us. I have questions to ask her and I would very much like to know what an unbound elf is doing in New Copenhagen. Especially one that has so much interest in my son."

"Fine," I said glaring at her, "but I want her there when we talk."

"We will see..." she said with a trailing off with a sigh. "It involves your father."

There was a surprise, Mom never talked about my father, even my gramor who was usually very open about nearly everything became very evasive when the subject of my father came up. What was it about him that no one wanted me to know? When I had been younger I had always imagined that my father had died performing some heroic act, but as I grew older I had become more realistic. Mom had never shown any attraction toward men and I long suspected that she had never intended for me to be conceived. The answer to the question that had always been kept from me was dangling in front of my eyes and I wasn't sure I wanted to know.

"She'll be there," I said stubbornly, "or I'll tell her anyway."

Mom didn't look happy at all. "Sometimes I think you are too stubborn for your own good."

"I learned from the best," I responded irritably.

Mom gave me one of her looks, but I guess she decided not to respond. She turned to Eva, "What's your name?"

"Eva."

"Have you ever used a travel spell?"

Eva frowned, "No. I was never very good at controlling air magic."

"Very well, take one another's hands and we'll form a circle. I'll need you to drop your shield

once I give you the signal." Mother said kneeling down and taking my hand just as Eva clasped hold of each of our free hands.

"Now!" Mom yelled as the wind began to whip and whirl around us. Eva's shield buckled then disappeared with a flash of light. I felt a strange yet familiar tugging feeling then we all disappeared into the void.



Laurdag, the fourth of Morsugur

I never got a chance to finish up my journal entry last night, but after what Eva and I did it's not really much of a surprise, but I'll write about that here in a little bit. Anyway, it's a brand new day and I can't say that the revelations of yesterday sit with me any better than they did Freydag. I was so shocked and frustrated from everything that happened that I hadn't really felt like writing it down. I guess now is as good of a time as any to play catch up.

Shortly after arriving home yesterday Mother announced that she would return shortly then disappeared and left a gust of wind to ripple through my bedroom.

"I-I suppose you aren't very happy with me," Eva said almost as soon as the wind had subsided.

"You think? I mean when were you planning on telling me you were an elf?!" I asked glaring back at her.

Eva closed her eyes and tears started to form in the corner of her eyes. "I was afraid that if you knew what I am, what I once was that you might not want to be with me any longer."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't understand," she said quietly.

"I wouldn't understand? Well, I certainly won't if you don't tell me!"

"I'm unbound. It means I chose to leave my people. I couldn't live with the darkness any longer."

"Eva what darkness?"

Eva's hands began to tremble, "It's not something... You couldn't understand. I used to be--" she hesitated.

"Used to be what?"

"--a dark elf," she continued sobbing hysterically.

Of all the things she might have said that was about the last thing I would have expected. How could she have ever been a dark elf? I'd heard Mom describe them and Eva didn't resemble one in the least. What did it matter? She certainly wasn't a dark elf anymore. I wanted to wrap my arms around her and tell her everything was okay, but I didn't have the strength. Instead, I reached over and grabbed hold of her hand.

"Eva! Listen to me! It doesn't matter who or what you were. It only matters who you chose to be right here and now."

"You still don't understand," she said letting out a deep breathe as she attempted to rein in her tears. "I was sent to kill you."

"W-what?!" I asked staring at her wide-eyed and let my hand fall away.

"You didn't see me, I was cloaked in magic. It was a few weeks before the party where we first danced. I almost did it, I almost killed you. The magic was coursing through me and all I would have need done was summon it."

I remembered that night, it was the night Leif, Ham, and I had taken Sophie out one last time. I'd had a pretty creepy encounter with a sort of invisible presence and I had managed to convince myself that it had all been a figment of imagination. Clearly, I'd been wrong. It had been Eva whose breathe I'd fealty on my throat, it had been Eva that had produced that inhuman wail and scurried away.

"Eva goddesses, why?"

"I-I don't know exactly. I looked into your eyes and I realized what I was about to do was wrong, more than that I saw the wrongness within me. It terrified me and I just ran."

"Eva... I don't even know what to say. This is just so much to process."

"Maybe it would be best if I left. I don't know how you can even look at me," she said and started for the door, but before she had made it halfway it swung open and in stepped Mom followed closely by the blond woman from the mall.

"Neil," Mom said stopping mid-stride. "What's wrong?"

The blond woman smiled, cocked her head and said something in a strange tongue.

Eva stumbled backward, looking as if she had been slapped, "Not long ago I wouldn't have hesitated to kill you, light elf."

"Thou hast forsaken the darkness within thy heart. Murder is no longer thy way," the strange woman said with an odd gleam in her eyes.

"Hervor, what on Midgard is going on here?" Mom demanded rounding on the blond woman.

Holy Frigg the blond woman really was Hervor, the queen of light elves! What was she doing here and what interest did she have in me?

"Ask the girl, Seidkona. It is for her to tell," Hervor replied with a tired sigh.

Mom's eyes locked on Eva and she folded her arms across her chest. "Tell me."

Eva sank to her knees and she started to sob again. "I-I used to be a dark elf."

"What? How is that even possible?" Mom asked staring at her with wide eyes.

"Elves are not as humans. When darkness enters within it be reflected without. When light pierces the darkness and shines upon the soul, change be wrought upon the body just as it is the spirit," Hervor muttered with that weird gleam in her eyes again.

"So what she's a light elf now?" I asked.

"Nay, child. She is unbound. She hath chosen not to dwell among my people," Hervor said with a sad smile.

"I-I should leave," Eva said coming to stand on shaky knees. "After what I was, after what I've done I was a fool to think Neil would want to be with me."

"Nay, I cannot allow it child," Hervor said moving to block Eva's path.

"Move light elf!" Eva screamed.

"I think not! Thou knowest not what be at stake."

"What's going on here? " A new voice asked from the doorway and a familiar face pushed its way into the bedroom. It was Daniella, my... Well I'm not really sure exactly what I'd call her, but she was my mother's partner of almost twenty years so that had to count for something. Especially since in many ways, she has been every bit the mother to me as Mom.

"Neil!" she exclaimed as she saw me laying in bed and came running to fling her arms around me. There was a familiar tingle as I felt her magic wash over me and I could see the worry in her eyes as she broke away.

"Oh goddesses," she said her eyes growing wide. "Neil, no, not you too!"

"Would someone please explain to me what's going on?! First, I get attacked by the queen of the crenking light elves in the mall. Then I find out my girlfriend used to be a dark elf who was sent to kill me. What the Hel has got the elves so scared of me?"

"Eva was sent to kill you?" Mom asked suddenly rounding on Eva, who withered under her gaze.

"I don't know why the fólkhagi wanted him dead. I was just a low-level assassin with barely the enough power to match a human spellbinder." Eva said her voice barely more than a whisper.

"And what about Hervor? What was that about?"

"I intended thee no harm. Half thy blood is Álfar, I merely caused that thy Elven side dominate and that the magic awaken within thee."

"Okay, I couldn't have heard that right. I'm a half-elf?" I replied letting out a long sigh.

"It's true Neil. Heime, Hervor's son is your father," Mom said scowling at Hervor.

Holy frizz! I wasn't just a half-elf I was royalty, the grandchild of the queen herself! It was couldn't be true, it didn't make any frizzing sense. Then I felt a cold chill tickle down my spine as the rest of Hervor's statement set in. "You awakened the magic in me?" I asked filling dread fill me as I realized just what it meant.

"Aye, child," Hervor said softly.

"Oh frizzing Hel. I'm going to change into a damn girl. What gives you the right?!"

"'Twas necessary," she said matter-of-factly.

"Why!? What possible reason could there be!?"

Hervor shook her head, "To ensure the survival of our peoples against the coming of Ragnarok and the final battle. Surely, that be reason enough!"

Ragnarok? I thought she was frizzing nuts, but when I looked to Mom and Daniella I was met with looks that only served to confirm the elf queen's pronouncement.

"That's crazy talk! Ragnarok? I mean come on, get real!"

"Hath he not been told?" Hervor said rounding on my mother.

"No, Hervor I didn't tell him. I knew that you and Frigg had something big planned for him. The very least I could do for my son was allow him to have a normal life until the time came!" Mom retorted.

"The time is come, Seidkona. The truth cannot be kept from him any longer," Hervor said with a weary sigh.

"Well, I don't really have much choice, now do I?"

"Mom, this is freaking me out. Just tell me it's not true. Ragnarok can't be coming," I muttered feeling a sense of panic and dread come over me.

"It is coming, Neil. I'm sorry I kept it from you. I just hope you won't be angry with me once you learn the truth. I think it's best if I told you the story from the very beginning," she said. "It all started before my transformation..."

Mom went on to tell the story of when she was working as a security guard back before she became a woman she stumbled onto something she shouldn't have and wound up getting attacked. If her magic hadn't awakened to protect her, thus killing her attacker she probably would have died.

I'm obviously not going to tell the whole story here, but after a long series of events Mom found herself transformed into a woman, and named our ancestor Athilda's apprentice. She wound up incurring a debt to Hveror in the process which is how my conception came about, but I'll explain that here in a little bit.

Well, it's pretty complicated, but Mom along with her then lover, Penelope, wound up getting abducted by none other than Claudia de Clisson, the daughter of Jeane de Clisson, the woman Mom had killed when her magic awoke. Claudia attempted to invade my mother's mind, but it didn't work out very well for her as Penelope intervened and prevented her from turning my mother into her slave.

Penelope had been working for Claudia the whole time, but only because the De Clisson woman had been keeping her younger sister, Marion, hostage. Long story short, both Penelope and Claudia wound up dead. Athilda showed up and helped Mom rescue Marion then took Mom and the young girl back to the estates.

After they had returned safely, Athilda told Mom her concerning her suspicions that Ragnarok was coming. Not long after that Mom was visited by the Goddess Frigg who then confirmed that Ragnarok was coming and more importantly that it could be stopped. Frigg enlisted Mother's aid and set her upon the task of finding a means to halt Ragnarok.

She explained that it had been her that had caused the magic to come awake within Mom, and that my mother would be instrumental in the fight against the Jotun. She also said that if they played their cards right there would be another 'who could very well save our existence.'

She also insisted that whatever happened, Mom must fulfill the debt to Hveror. I know it sounds weird, and even knowing what came of that debt I still can't figure out why it was so important.

As for the whole debacle with the De Clissons, with Claudia dead, the Seidskati decided to keep her betrayal a secret from the world. Athilda didn't trust anyone within the council so she had elected to keep her knowledge concerning the coming of Ragnarok secret from her fellow council members and convinced them their actions had been nothing more than a grab for power. While the Seidskati did investigate the remaining members of the family, they weren't able to confirm any involvement.

My gramor, wound up adopting Marion and they all grew pretty close, even Athilda. About five years into her apprenticeship, Mom discovered that Athilda was dying from Leukemia.

Shortly after this discovery Mom would complete her apprenticeship and go on to become a full Spellbinder.

But that's only half the story, the rest of it wouldn't take place until a year after Mom's ascension to full Spellbinder. By then, Mom had managed to accumulate a surprising amount of power. Athilda, having grown increasingly ill from her cancer, stepped down as Head of House le Fey and named Mom acting head in her place. Naturally, her rise to power at such a young age hadn't made her very popular among her own house or even among the Seidskati. Everything she did was an uphill battle against overwhelming odds, and to tell the truth not much has changed in all these years.

It was about then that Daniella pitched in and together they wove the rest of the story. Like Mom, Daniella had begun life as a man, but her transformation had been brought about by entirely different means.

Daniella told the story of how she was abducted by the mad Doctor Mengele who was convinced that he could give men the ability to use magic by means of his formula, and it worked... sort of.

He had created his original formula years before and he was so eager to try it out that he tested it on himself. The formula did grant him the use of magic, but he also started to transform into a woman and he got stuck midway. While the magic had extended Mengele's life considerably, continued use ironically was slowly killing him. Both Mom and Daniella seemed to believe that his condition may also have contributed to if not caused his madness. Whatever the case, he spent years trying to perfect his formula and when he thought he might have finally perfected it he tested it on Daniella and a handful of others.

This was all in the days when the Men's rights movement was at its most violent and Mom was working with the Task Force Against domestic terrorism to track down the leader of the 'Sons of Odin', a man by the name of Jonas Talman. Together, they raided his compound which happened to be the same place Daniella was being held, but discovered that Talman was already gone.

The raid wasn't entirely unsuccessful, they did manage to capture Nicholas Flint, one of Talman's lieutenants and found evidence of Mengele's experimentation. Mengele escaped, and took Daniella with him, but he did leave his other victims behind, all of whom died, but not before Mom discovered that magic had somehow woken within them.

Flint was a war hero, and Mom believed him to be a good man despite his involvement with the Sons of Odin, so she made him an offer, freedom in exchange for his help in averting Ragnarok. Naturally, he was pretty skeptical, but he would eventually come around. He told Mom about Mengele, but still refused to reveal information about Talman.

Mom left him to mull things over, and went to see if she could track down Mengele. Heime showed up to settle the debt owed to Hervor and that's where my conception comes into play. It's pretty screwed up, but Hervor sent her son to knock my mom up. Yeah, it makes me shudder just thinking about it.

"Frizz lady, do you have any idea how messed up that is?!" I said unable to keep my silence any longer.

"You have no idea," Mom muttered with a shake of her head and a very slight shudder.

"What was done, was done out of necessity, Seidkona."

"Here's an idea. Why don't you tell us why!?" I spat.

"Alas I cannot. The time is not yet right."

"For a people who are suppose to be incapable of lying you sure know how to withhold the truth," I spat bitterly.

"I think I'm beginning to understand now why I was sent to kill Neil," Eva put in.

"How can we trust you? Knowing what you used to be?" Mom asked glaring down at Eva.

"I would never hurt him. I'm no longer capable of the things I once was," Eva muttered her voice barely more than a whisper.

"If the girl speaks so, it be the truth. She is no longer capable of deceit," Hervor added.

"We can trust her Mom. I've been meeting her for months and never once has she tried to kill me," I said.

Mom nodded, "I'm putting my trust in my son's judgment, but if you hurt him I swear to the goddesses you'll regret it."

Eva paled visibly and nodded in understanding. "I would never hurt him, not so long as I live. I swear it."

"Good," Daniella put in folding her arms across her chest.

"So... what happened next? I mean if I'm supposed to be involved in all this Ragnarok business I should probably know what I'll be dealing with."

"Yes, it's probably a good idea. After, fulfilling Hervor's debt, I went looking for information..."

Mom told how she learned of Menegele's whereabouts from a dwarf named Brokk in exchange for a piece of land which the family owned on Álfheim and an agreement that the dvergar would make weapons for the army she was soon to raise.

About that time, Flint had just been visited by Frigg who offered him a deal. In exchange for his help averting Ragnarok, Frigg would see to it that the playing field between the sexes would be leveled. Not long after that, he would be rescued from prison by an irritable Kobold named Crystal, who had been sent by the Frigg in order to lead him to Menegele's

hideout.

Well anyway, outside the abandoned apple distillery where Mengele was hiding, Mom met up with two other Spellbinders, Agnes Bernauers and Elizabeth Bathory. Believing that Elizabeth was a traitor in cahoots with the Jotun, Mom had invited them both in the hopes that she would be able to ferret out the truth. After an intensive search of the compound they found the room where the partially transformed Daniella was being kept, but apparently no Mengele. After they freed Daniella, Mengele made his appearance and inadvertently revealed the identity of the traitor in the process. It wasn't Elizabeth it was Agnes, or at least a dark elf sorceress masquerading as her.

The dark elf quickly overwhelmed Elizabeth and had nearly managed to defeat Mom, when Flint showed up and took her out with a single bullet to the head. When all was said and done, Elizabeth was brought into the loop as was Flint and they both decided to join the fight. As for Daniella, well that was a bit more complicated. Like Mengele, Daniella was trapped in a form that was half-male and half-female, but Mom believed she might be able to either reverse or complete the changes. She was hopeful, that Daniella would chose to become female and join her in the fight against the Jotun. Daniella, wasn't convinced, but after a visit from the Goddess Frigg she decided to accept Mom's offer.

Daniella agreed to complete the changes at Frigg's hand. Daniella was in love with my mother and she impulsively kissed Mom who panicked and rejected her. It didn't exactly help things along when Athilda died. Mom let the grief overcome her for a while, but eventually she came to realize that she had feelings for Daniella.

Mom took Daniella as an apprentice, and over the next few months their romance bloomed into what it is now. By the time I was born they had pretty much become inseparable.

Over the years, Flint has been working behind the scenes and has apparently managed to amass a pretty impressive army. Of course, a standing army would draw far too much attention, but Flint's experience with the Sons of Odin had provided the answer. Members of the army were organized into cells of no more than a dozen men. Each cell would hide inside a much larger organization and wait for the coming of Ragnarok. When the time came they would utilize the resources of those organizations to mobilize and fight the Jotun. It wasn't the perfect solution, but it was the only choice available if they didn't wish to reveal themselves and tip their hands.

It was almost too much to believe, but I couldn't deny the truth not when it was my mother telling me and certainly not with Hervor and Daniella to confirm everything. I wasn't sure what to think of it all, not only because the magnitude of it all, but because I had been deceived by the people I loved. Even Eva had withheld the truth from me and I felt betrayed. I'd kept my calm through the whole story, but now that it was laid out before me, I could feel the panic set in.

I'd long suspected Mom had never planned for me to be born, but the revelation that my birth had come about through Hervor's machinations was downright disturbing. Ragnarok was coming and I had a part to play in the upcoming battle. The worst part was that I really didn't think I had any choice. I don't think I could live with myself if through my inaction I

wound up dooming all of humanity.

As scary as all that was, it all took a back seat to the dread I was feeling about being transformed into a girl. I was a guy and wanted to stay that way. The thought of becoming a girl was terrifying. I was a guy dammit!

"Get out!" I yelled feeling suddenly very angry.

"Neil--" Mom started but I cut her short.

"No Mom! I don't want to hear it! You've been lying to me my whole life and worse still I find out I'm going to change into a frizzing girl! I need some time alone... please."

"Okay," she said with a soft sigh. "I owe you that much at least."

Everyone quickly piled out of the room until only Hervor remained. She walked quietly up to my bed and gently place her hand on my cheek. Warmth flooded through me and I felt strength return to me as the dizziness faded away.

"On the morrow thy transfiguration beginneth. Today marketh thy final day as a lad. Use thy time wisely. Now I take my leave of thee. Fare thee well grandchild," she said with a sad smile then she stalked out of the room without another word.

Shit, talk about rubbing salt in a wound! The woman had a lot of nerve even talking to me. I didn't want to be a girl, but Hervor didn't seem to give a frizzing damn. I think I really I hate that fucking bitch.



I loved the gardens, they were so peaceful and best of all Mom almost always avoided them. Gramor said it was because they reminded her of Athilda. I needed time alone and the gardens really were the best place to isolate myself.

I plopped down on the nearest bench and closed my eyes. My life had just taken a very weird turn and I hated that I had been lied too, but really that was just a small reason for why I was angry. I was going to turn into a frizzing chick and I hadn't even been given any choice in the matter. I felt like I'd been stabbed in the back and I knew things between my family and me would never be the same. Then there was Eva, she hadn't exactly lied to me, but she had withheld the truth. The revelation that she used to be a dark elf was freaky as Hel and it made me squirm just thinking about it.

"May I sit?" a familiar voice asked.

My eyes flew open and I looked up to find Eva standing over me with puffy eyes and trembling lips.

"I-I guess," I muttered not really sure if I wanted her around or not.

We sat there for a while, neither one of us talking. Eva opened her mouth several times as if to speak, but each time she would let out a soft sigh and her mouth would clamp shut.

"Eva, why didn't you tell me?" I blurted out suddenly.

"I wanted to, but I was so afraid of how you might react."

"Shit Eva, you had to know I'd find out eventually."

"All this is so foreign to me, Neil. Before we met all I knew anger and hatred. Now there are a whole slew of emotions I can feel and it's overwhelming. If there's one thing you can be sure of know that I love you and I always will," she touching my cheek with her open palm.

"I guess I hadn't really thought about it from your perspective. This must all be so confusing for you," I muttered clasping my hand around hers.

She nodded, "There is so much I don't understand. Humans are so different from dark elves."

"Eva what made you change? I mean I know what you said about seeing the evil inside of you, but there has to be more to it than that."

Eva sighed and bowed her head, "It was the catalyst. I don't know if I could really say it was any one thing. After I ran from you, I found one of those places you humans create that are suppose to resemble a forest."

I didn't understand what Eva was trying to say then it hit me and I almost laughed, "You mean a park?"

Eva nodded and continued, "There were children playing and one of them, a small boy, fell and hurt himself. He started to cry and a woman, perhaps his mother, began to comfort him. There was something so beautiful about the way she held the child and whispered in his ear that really hit me. I spent several days in that park, and I witnessed so many things. A couple sharing a kiss and whispering sweet somethings to each other, a family enjoying one another's company, and a man confessing his love to woman. I just changed. It didn't happen all at once it was a gradual process."

"I don't know why exactly, but after my change I became obsessed with you. I returned to the place where I tried to kill you in hopes that I would find you again. It took me a few days, but find you I did. I spent the next few weeks following you around. Then one night I followed you into the party and you asked me to dance. I didn't know what dancing was, but I would have said yes to anything you had asked of me."

"That explains some things," I muttered. Eva was a horrible dancer, I'd just never had the heart to tell her.

Eva cocked her head and smiled sadly, "Thank you for asking me to dance."

It took me a moment for her statement to really settle, "Elves don't say thanks."

"No, but humans do and I wanted you to understand how much it meant to me."

"Odin's bones it must have been hard for you. I mean you gave up everything you knew."

"It's not hard, not when I'm with you."

"Eva what did you mean when you said you thought I was your lifkyn?"

"Humans have a term with a similar meaning. I think you call it a soul mate. It means Neil... that I love you," she said as single tear rolled down her cheek.

Whatever doubts I had about Eva faded away with that statement. She may have been a dark elf once, but really that didn't matter to me. I admit the fact she was sent to kill me did make me a bit squeamish, but I believed her when she said she loved me. The amazing part was that I think I felt the same way.

"Eva... I think I love you too," I said quietly.

She smiled and we sat there and stared into each other eyes for a long time.

"Come on it's getting late, we probably better get inside," I muttered taking her hand and led her back into the estates.



Holy frizz yesterday took up a lot of pages in this journal. I'm going to run out of space if I keep up this pace. I'm sure Gramor, at least, will be happy to see me using this thing.

I woke up really early this morning to find Eva naked beside me on the bed. She was already awake and smiling at me. Neither one of us had intended for it to happen, but when we returned to my room I could hardly keep my hands off her.

I leaned in to kiss her, but before our lips locked I felt bile rise in my throat. I hurriedly, flung myself aside and sperged all over the side of my bed. Eva quickly dressed and left to find something to clean up the floor.

A woman with long blond hair entered the room just a few minutes later. "Hey, kiddo," she said with a sad smile on her face.

The woman was my aunt Marion, who, like my mother, was a breathtakingly beautiful woman. Yeah, that Marion, the one who was rescued by my mother after the death of her sister all those years ago.

"Aunt Mare," I groaned as my stomach continued to writhe in agony. "Mom's told you

everything?"

"I know enough," she said a dark look passing across her face which faded away within seconds. "I'd be surprised if she's told either of us everything. That woman has more secrets than the CNIA."

"Marion, I know about Penelope," I muttered averting my eyes.

"Should have figured she'd tell you about that. I had to find out about it from your grandmother. I spent most my life believing a lie about my own sister."

"Marion, I'm sure Mom--"

"Don't do it Neil, don't defend her. She should have told me just like she should have told you about your father."

"Marion, if you knew I was a half-elf... I mean why didn't you tell me?"

"That is something that should really come from your mother. You don't know how many times I tried to convince her to tell you, but the woman is too damned mule-headed to listen to reason. I know she's been a woman for twenty-five years, but she still acts like such a man sometimes."

"But enough about that. How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Like I'm going to frizzing explode."

"I can imagine," she said dryly. "Your mother asked me to come by and see how you were doing."

"There's not anything you can do about this, is there?" I asked her hopefully. Marion was a powerful spirit mage and a doctor of some renown. Even Mom couldn't match her power when it came to Spirit magic.

Marion gave me a thoughtful frown. "Sorry, kiddo. If there was any way I knew of I'd do it in a heartbeat."

"Now let's clean up this mess," she said staring down at the puddle of my puke. She closed her eyes for a few seconds and a shimmering sheet of spirit energy seemed to appear under the puke. The spirit energy rose up from the carpet, shaped itself into a bowl which she picked up as it reformed into a ball.

"Cool," I said. "Kinda gross, but cool."

"Who says you have to be a Spellbinder to get vomit out of carpet," Marion said giving me one of her lopsided grins and a wink as she dropped the spirit-ball in the garbage and let its energy collapse.

"Now," she said. "Let's have a look-see shall we?"

She bent down and lightly touched me on the forehead. A few seconds later her eyes snapped open and she gasped. "Dang kid, you're body is in for some major overhauls. I've never felt anything quite like it. Since I doubt you'll be able to keep anything down, I'd like to put you on an intravenous drip to help replace some of the fluids and nutrients your body is consuming."

"An intro-venous what?" I asked staring at her in confusion.

"Intravenous drip. It is a somewhat unconventional new therapy, where fluids are injected directly into the bloodstream. It's quite ingenious actually and surprisingly cost-effective."

I wasn't sure exactly what to think of my aunt's suggestion, but I nodded in spite of my doubts. Fluids injected into the blood? It sounded almost barbaric.

"Neil--" Eva said appearing the doorway with a bundle of rags in her arms and a glass of water. "Oh," she said with a surprised expression. "You have a visitor."

Marion smiled, "My name is Dr. Marion Valemont, I'm Neil's aunt. You're a light elf aren't you?"

Eva shook her head and looked down at the floor, "I-I am unbound, I do not have a people. I am Eva."

"Neil and I are together," my girlfriend said suddenly practically throwing the glass of water in my face and splashing it all over the front of my shirt.

"Easy," I said taking the glass and began to drink the remaining water inside.

"When did he take your virginity? From the way you are limping. I'd say quite recently," Marion said with a toothy grin.

The water in my mouth shot out like a fountain and I started coughing uncontrollably. "What the Frigg kind of question is that!" I exclaimed.

Marion laughed. She laughed! What the Hel was so funny about that? Sometimes Marion could be so embarrassing. "Okay, okay," she said. "Maybe that was a bit of a personal question."

"You think?" I asked irritably.

My aunt sighed and shook her head, "Well kiddo, I need to get to the hospital. I'll talk to your mother and see about treatment options before I leave."

"Okay," I muttered, "Just uh don't tell Mom about that whole virginity thing."

My aunt started laughing then ducked out of the room without giving me an answer.



I grabbed at my stomach and felt the world spin madly around me. I lurched and limped across the hallway and just barely made it into the bathroom before throwing up. I stared breathlessly at the red-brown sludge that had just come spewing out of my throat. With trembling hands I stumbled over to the sink and cranked the dial on the faucet to full blast. I let the sink fill with ice-cold water and then splashed it onto my face and stood there panting heavily. It didn't take an idiot to figure out that the goop I had just sperlged up was. It was tissue my body had discarded as part of the transformation process.

I looked up at the mirror and shuddered, I looked gaunt, sickly even. I knew I had to have lost a good fifteen pounds of weight at least and I couldn't be too sure, but I thought I might be an inch or two shorter. This was the first-trip to the bathroom today and I couldn't help but notice the changes which had come over me. What little facial hair I had been able to grow had fallen out, and my face was beginning to look younger. It was now extremely painful to walk and I might be imagining it but I could swear my hips had a slight curve to them. A rash had started to form on my chest around each nipple which more than likely meant I'd begin growing breasts soon. My previous blond hair had fallen out and had started coming in the same dark auburn as my mother's hair.

Another wave of dizziness washed over me and I braced myself against the counter until it subsided. It was then that it really settled in that I was going to change into a girl and I could barely stand the thought of it. I just stood there and cried as I thought about what had been done to me. What gave Hervor the frizzing right?! I forced back my tears as I felt the anger flood through me. I wasn't going to let anyone see me this way, especially Hervor. She wouldn't get the satisfaction.

I took one last look at myself in the mirror and gulped at the very sight of me. I didn't look much different than I had before I hit puberty, but there was softness about my features that had never been there before. I might have even looked like a girl with the right haircut. I was still male for the time being, but how long till my equipment was gone? I shuddered at the thought of having a vagina and breasts then quickly washed my hands and staggered back to my bedroom.

I had expected Mother, Gramor (where was my grandmother anyway?) or even Daniella to pop in at any moment, but they had yet to show and I was beginning to wonder what was up. I gingerly lay down on my bed beside the sleeping form of Eva and flicked on my teleprojector.

A realistic image of Mom appeared standing in front of my bed. At first I thought she had appeared in my room via travel spell, but realized that the image was being produced by the teleprojector and I felt dread fill me as I saw an image of me replace it.

"...the New Copenhagen shopping center last evening. Little information has been released regarding the incident, but witnesses claim to have witnessed some sort of confrontation between two unidentified females and one Neil Steinburg that ended in one of those

involved erecting a spirit shield. Later reports claim that Aryanna le Fey, the controversial head of the Spellbinder house arrived on the scene only to vanish with her son mere moments later," a voice said. A man in a gray suit replaced the image of me in front of my bed.

The anchorman didn't seem to know much more, thank the goddesses for that. I was afraid what might happen if people found out about my transformation or that I was the grandchild of Hervor. Half-elves were rare enough, but it was unheard of for a member of the royal elven family to mingle with humans.

I was about turn the teleprojector off when it suddenly started to buzz and I let out a sigh as I realized there was an incoming call. I flicked the button on the remote to see who was calling, it was my friend Leif. I clicked another button on the remote and Leif's huge disembodied head appeared hovering in front of my bed.

"Holy frizz, Venn! Are you trying to scare me to death with that ugly mug of yours?"

Leif's massive head grinned and let out a chuckle. Suddenly, his head shrunk down to proper size and the rest of his body appeared. Leif had probably stuck his face right in front of his telecam just so he could give me a scare. "Relax, venn. I'm just calling 'cause I saw the news."

"Yeah, I just got done watching it."

"Me too. Look, is everything okay? I mean you're not hurt or anything are you?"

"Well it depends on what you mean by hurt," I muttered bitterly.

Leif opened his mouth to speak, but I stopped him short, "Things are just sort of complicated. I've learned some things and they suck some major ass. Things aren't ever going to be the same for me."

"Ah, venn that sucks. I'd come over, but Mom's pretty eager to get me married off. I have damned date with this uggo from House Bathory. Who schedules a date at eleven in the morning on a Vordag? Shit, I really hope that this girl doesn't want to bargain for me. I was kinda hoping the girl Mom would force me to marry would be a little hotter."

"That's alright venn, I understand."

"You don't know how lucky you are man," Leif spat out with a jealous look.

Leif knew that my mother had no intention of forcing me to marry anyone and usually didn't have any problem voicing his jealousy. Lucky? If only he knew about the transformation I was going through, he probably wouldn't be jealous then. I wasn't going to say anything over the teleprojector, Leif was smart enough to know that. Teleprojector communications were far too easily intercepted, if someone were listening in, anything I let slip would be all over the news within minutes.

"You have no idea," I spat ironically.

"Hey, have you heard from Sophie, lately?" Leif asked suddenly apparently oblivious of my sarcasm.

"No, I left her a message a few days ago, but she hasn't called back," I replied. It had been a few months since Sophie moved away and we'd been keep in touch with her by teleprojector. Neither one of us had heard from her in a few weeks and we were both getting worried.

"She left a message on my machine. It sounding like she was crying... I've tried calling her back, but no answer."

"Sophie crying?"

"Yeah, it kind of freaked me out when I heard it. I hope everything is okay."

"If I hear anything I'll call you."

"Alright, well I really ought to go, venn. Hope things are okay," he muttered scratching the back of his head.

"Later, venn."

"Later."



Well, the next part is an excerpt from my mother's journal. Don't worry, I'll be back soon enough.

Laurdag 4. Morsugur

"Lady Aryanna," the tiny pixie said with a bow of her head after she flew through my window and came to land on my dresser. "It is an honor."

I looked the tiny vattir over and smiled, "To what do I owe the pleasure? It has been years since I was visited by one of the wee folk."

The pixie shook her head and her small bird-like wings twitched, "I was sent as an emissary by the Gray Queen to offer the aid of the faekyn in the coming battle of Ragnarok."

I looked down at the pixie thoughtfully, and wondered what had prompted the Gray Queen to seek an alliance with me. Like elves, fairies were incapable of lying, so I had no doubts about the authenticity of the pixie's message, but it was certainly an odd move for the notoriously independent fairies to make. The Gray Queen was one of the most enigmatic and mysterious vattir that I knew of and that was saying something. I'd never heard of her involving herself in matters of humans or goddesses, but I supposed it really wasn't that surprising. The Jotun would likely turn their eyes to other vattir once they'd taken care of

the goddesses and humans.

"I would gladly accept any aid the faekyn would be willing to offer," I smiled down at the tiny creature.

"The Gray Queen will be most pleased," the pixie beam up at me.

The faery's wings extended and she suddenly leapt up into the air and took off.

"Wait!" I called after her.

The pixie landed gracefully on the windowsill and turned back to me.

"How can I contact the Gray Queen?"

"One does not contact the Gray Queen, she contacts you," she responded with an amused grin on her face just before launching herself through the window.



"Aryanna, something is wro--" Daniella's voice drifted into my room with a gust of wind and suddenly cut short.

I leapt to my feet, sprang through the doorway, shot down the hallway and found Daniella holding a shield of spirit energy against a collapsing wall.

Once I got close enough I could feel magic pounding into the outside of the wall. I had powerful wards set around the entire estates, and I would have known instantly if someone brushed the wall with even the tiniest bit of magic. Clearly someone had found a way around my wards, I reached deep inside myself and latched onto that familiar well of energy I found there and began to weave a web of spirit energy around Daniella's shield to reinforce it, but by then it was already too late. Her barrier flew apart, her eyes rolled into the back of her head and she collapsed. I was barely able to pull her away as the wall came crashing down around us.

Men came pouring into the gap and I just barely managed to finish raising my spirit shield as they opened fire. Bullets exploded against the shimmering wall of blue light and fell harmlessly to the ground. I sent a wave of fire magic through the hole and the attackers fell screaming to the ground as they were engulfed by the fiery torrent.

A bright white light clashed against my shield and I felt my knees buckle against a sudden strain. A very familiar face appeared in the hole in the wall and I let out a long string of curses. It was Claramae, one of my cousins who had long resented my placement as head of House Le Fey.

"Clara, what the Hel do you think you're doing?"

"Something I should have done a long time ago," she said with a growl and leapt at me with a fist-full of bright white light pouring from her hands.

I blocked her blows easily enough and sent her tumbling back through the hole with a massive gust of wind. I followed her through the gap in the wall and fell to my knees as I was bombarded on either side by bright ribbons of fire magic. If it hadn't been for my shield I would have been dead, as it was I was just barely able to hold onto my barrier against the fiery onslaught. I couldn't make out the figures on either side, but I knew that one of them was most likely Clara. From the amount of magic they were channeling that they were both Spellbinders and I knew I had no chance of overcoming them alone.

"Frigg preserve me," I muttered between clenched teeth as I strained to keep hold of the shield.

Abruptly, there was a gust of wind and the threads of fire suddenly stopped. I tilted my head to either side and found that my attackers had simply vanished. My mother, Brigit, was standing there above me with a triumphant smile on her face. Her sudden appearance seemed to have scared my attackers off.

"You'll never believe what Eitri had for me."

I looked up at my mother and burst into nervous laughter,

"Goddesses? Aryanna what happened here?"



PART 3

Laurdag, the fourth of Morsugur (cont'd)

I nodded off while watching the news. I don't know how long I was asleep, but it was Eva that finally woke me. "Neil, wake up!" her voice pleaded. "You need to wake up, please!"

"What?" I managed to say.

"Listen!" she said.

I did as she suggested and heard the strangest wheezing sound coming from the hallway. It almost sounded like laughter, but I couldn't be sure. I forced my eyes open and just as I did the door to my bedroom flew off its hinges, shot across the room and hit the opposite wall with a deafening thud.

Luckily neither Eva nor I were in the path of the shooting door, but it came pretty close to hitting the foot of my bed. A person stepped into my room. I say person because it wouldn't be accurate to call 'him' a man or a woman. Half his body was that of really hot looking woman and the other was what could barely be recognized as a man. His skin was falling off in huge chunks and his male eye was completely white as if it had a cataract. His male side looked so weak and frail that I was surprised he could stand.

"Our plan has worked," he wheezed with a mad gleam in his good eye.

"How fortunate that we have found you here. We have been hoping to find someone like you for a very long time," he said and started to cough uncontrollably.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" Eva demanded angrily.

"Forgive us, we didn't mean to be rude. We are called Doctor Josef Mengele," he said with a cackle.

"I know who you are. You're the one that kidnapped Daniella and changed her," I said with a loud gasp. Goddess, my insides felt like they were on fire!

Mengele threw his head back and laughed, "Interesting... Is that what she calls herself now? It is true that we initiated the changes, but our formula did not complete them. We would very much like to know how these changes were finished. Is she around?"

"You think if she was, we would tell you?" I spat.

"No, we suppose not!" he said with a loud cackle. "Studying her would reveal much to us, but that does not matter now. You are undergoing a transformation. We believe your blood will be far more useful to us."

He took a step toward my bed and put his leg out to take another, but before his foot could reach the ground, a blinding white light shot into his chest. Eva had cast a lightning spell on the doctor and he was struggling against the power being used on him.

"Neill!" she said. "Run!"

I rolled off my bed and pulled the IV along with me. I tried to stand up so I could run, but I was too weak. I couldn't even so much as crawl. The familiar blue aura of a Spirit Shield surrounded the doctor, and the lightning shot out from him and almost seemed to bounce back into Eva. She was thrown against a wall and slumped to the floor unconscious.

The blue aura faded away and the doctor turned to look at me with his one good eye. More dead skin flaked away from his body as he moved toward me. "Do you see what the use of our magic does to us? If we do not find a solution soon we will die! The changes that are taking place inside you, they are the key. Your blood will free us!"

I was in so much pain now that all I could do was stare up at the doctor in horror. "Please..." I pleaded, but the doctor wasn't listening.

He walked over to where I was laying on the ground and pulled a syringe out of his pocket. "This will not hurt much," he said in an almost sympathetic tone.

He stuck the needle in my arm and waited until the tube inside filled with blood. Then he repeated the process until he had five more vials. He removed a half-full vial of purplish liquid from his coat and popped the stopper from both it and a bottle of my blood.

"If we had more time we might test this newest formula, but we are too close to death. We hope this will work," he cackled madly and dumped a small drop of my blood into the vial of the violet liquid.

The vial of purple liquid fizzled and hissed then started to steam and turned an almost sickly brown. Mengele laughed, then downed the whole tube and let it fall through his hand and shatter on the ground.

"We can feel it," he fell to his knees in a fit of hysterical laughter.

"Mengele," a cold voice said from what sounded like the doorway.

"Flint," Mengele said and fell to his side shaking with laughter.

I groaned and looked over to the doorway where a man with short cropped hair was holding a gun. "I don't know why you've chosen now to reappear, Mengele, bu—" Flint said but stopped short when the doctor started to convulse.

"Die!" Mengele suddenly howled and leapt to his feet with a clawed hand extended. A gust of wind shot out from Mengele's outstretched fingers and Flint went flying back through the doorway. He managed to fire several shots just before he slammed into the hallway wall and slumped to the ground in an unconscious heap. One of the bullets hit Mengele in his male shoulder, and he fell to the ground shrieking and clutching at his wounded joint.

I tried to take advantage of the distraction and crawl away, but I was still too weak. I looked up at Mengele's face and noticed something really weird, the skin on the male side of his face was rippling. The healthy female skin stretched across to the male side of his face and he began to change. It continued until roughly three-quarters of his face was female then it suddenly stopped.

Mengele threw his head back and giggled manically, "Our new formula works! You must come with us, we may need more samples."

Suddenly there was a pressure inside of me struggling to break lose. I gritted my teeth and screamed as blinding white light shot out from my chest and slammed into the doctor.

Mengele flew across the room and was knocked into the wall. He staggered back to his feet and I prepared myself for another attack, but it never came. He made a waving gesture with his hand and was gone as a gust of wind whisked him away.

I tried to stand, but I was feeling even weaker than before and I collapsed to my knees. I gasped as pain shot through my body and I felt myself slip into unconsciousness.



"Neil," my mother's voice said. "Wake up."

"No, just let me get a little more sleep," I replied. "I don't care if I'm late for school."

"NEIL!" my mother shouted and I practically jumped out of my skin. My eyes flew open and I realized where I was and what had happened. Daniella, Mom and Gramor were standing over me with worried expressions.

"Oh, Neil, thank the goddesses," Mom muttered leaning over to kiss me on the forehead. "You had us worried."

"Eva?" I muttered.

"Eva will be fine. The magic overwhelmed her system, her body just needs some time to recover," Daniella muttered running her hand through my hair.

"Holy crap, what happened to you two?" I asked really getting a good look at Daniella and Mom for the first time. They both looked about like I felt, like they'd been tossed through a frizzing blender.

"We were attacked, in what I presume was a distraction so Mengele could get to you," Mom said with a tired sigh.

"Mengele? How did you know about—"

"Flint told us," Gramor chimed in.

"Mom, he took some of my blood. I saw him mix it with this stuff, and he started to change," I muttered.

"Norns preserve, if that creature has found a way to perfect his formula it can only mean trouble. Especially this close to Ragnarok," Gramor said with a gasp.

"Time is running even shorter than I feared. Frigg appeared to me in a dream and told me we had a little more than four months," Mom said between pursed lips.

"Good goddesses, Aryanna, that would mean—" Gramor muttered her face turning pale.

"It means we're running short of time. It's time I make the Seidskati aware of our plans," Mom said with a soft sigh.

"What about this Mengele guy?" I asked.

Daniella sighed, "As much as I'd like to see Mengele brought to justice, he's a minor player in what is a much larger game. He'll have to wait."

Mom nodded, "I don't want you worrying about any of this right now Neil. I'm not sure how she's done it, but Hervor has initiated the changes in you. You need to get some rest. Once you're feeling better you're going to be thrown out into the middle of this."

"Mom, there's something you're not telling me, isn't there?" I asked, my voice barely more than a whisper.

"Yeah, there is," she said hanging her head. "We felt it when you used your magic against Mengele, which is how we knew to come find you. I'm not sure what to make of it, but you're far more powerful than any living Spellbinder."

"What!? How?"

"Elves are more powerful than humans, and it seems that you've inherited the magic from your Elven side. That being said, I know of only one elf with even a comparable amount of power to you, and that's Hervor," Mom said between pursed lips.

"Wait! You're not saying I'm more powerful than Hervor, are you?"

Mom shook her head, "No, magical talent is difficult to measure, but I'd say you're fairly evenly matched."

I hadn't expected that, I mean, I probably should have; it did make a certain amount of sense after all, but it shocked me nonetheless. What did Hervor stand to gain by doing this to me? I know the answer had to be buried somewhere with the depths of all the secrets that had been revealed to me, but I couldn't puzzle it out. It was like trying to find a frizzing needle in a haystack.

"Mom, why didn't you tell me?!" I demanded almost before I knew it was out of my mouth.

"I keep telling myself it was to give you a normal life, but the truth is I did it for my own selfish reasons. I wanted to keep you safe and away from all the chaos, but I can't do that, not anymore, the world needs you. It would be harder, if because of my selfishness I doomed the world to total annihilation. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me."

"I don't know if I can do that, just yet," I muttered shaking my head.

A single tear ran down my mother's cheek, "Fair enough. Do me a favor try and get some restful sleep, okay?"

I nodded, "Okay, Mom."

Mom smiled sadly then she bent in and kissed me on the forehead, and within moments she was gone. Gramor came over, knelt beside my bed and spoke quietly, "Don't be too hard on her. Your mother has been through a lot and she cares for you deeply."

"How would you feel, Gramor? Finding out you had been lied to by your own mother? Everything I thought I knew about my life is a lie."

Gramor patted my shoulder and smiled reassuringly, "Not everything. Your Mother does love you, so do Daniella and I."

"Gramor..." I muttered.

"Just get some rest, okay? We can talk later," she muttered sadly, then kissed me in the forehead in the same place that Mom had and just like that she was gone.



I could feel hot tears rolling down my face as I glanced over at the mirror. Last time I'd seen my reflection I looked sickly. This time I looked much worse, as if I were on the verge of dying. My eyes were blood-shot and the dark circles under my eyes looked like they had their own dark circles. I had lost even more weight, and I was definitely shorter. My hair had gotten even longer and I now resembled a twelve-year-old girl on the verge of puberty, if a somewhat tall and gawky one.

I looked down at my hands and noticed that they too had changed. They had always been a bit small, but now they seemed longer and more delicate. They were without a doubt, the hands of a girl.

Goddesses! Why was this happening to me? What did I ever do deserve this? More tears ran down my face and a sob escaped my lips. I rubbed at my chest and noticed the very slight bulge of two mounds sticking out from it.

I started to undress myself, which was pretty hard because I was so weak from the changes, but I managed to get everything off. When I was unclothed I really wished I hadn't. My hips had expanded quite a bit and had a noticeable curve to them. My feet had shrunk and look very dainty. Then there were my privates. My balls were shriveled up and were almost a third their usual size. My cock was only about an inch and a half long and hung limply between my legs. Then there were my breasts. They were very small, but they were unmistakable for what they were. I was growing a pair of tits! Holy frizzing fuck!

The sight of those mounds poking out of my chest were just too much and I fell to the floor and started sobbing uncontrollably. I know breaking down and crying like a girl wasn't exactly the most manly thing to do, but give me a break, okay? I mean I am turning into a frizzing girl, after all. Oh, Hel do I really need to explain myself to a bloody book? Anyway, I vaguely remember hearing my mother at the door, but I didn't answer.



I was pretty out of it for the next couple hours. I never really did fall unconscious. I just sort of was there, but not there, you know? When I did finally come back to the world, I was in my room where I found Mom, Daniella, and Eva hovering over me. Nick Flint was there as well, but I would hardly say he was hovering over me. He was leaning against a wall on the other side of the room with a thoughtful look on his face. It was the first time since Mengele had attacked us that I'd seen him, and I really felt as if I owed the guy something. I mean, even though Mengele managed to beat him pretty easily, he had come to my defense.

"Neil, thank the goddesses. We've been so worried," Mom said when I sat up and looked at her.

"How did I get here?" I asked with a voice that sounded very alien.

"When you wouldn't answer the door we got worried, so I magicked it open and found you lying on the floor," Mom said.

"Shit," I muttered.

"What is it? What's wrong?" Eva said suddenly.

"I sound like a crenking girl, is what's wrong!" I said feeling a sense of resignation come over me. I was turning into a girl and I couldn't do anything about it.

Daniella sighed, "Its can be difficult to cope with the changes at first, but it gets easier with time."

It was about then that I realized that I my stomach felt much better. "I'm frizzing starving," I said.

Mom placed her hand on my shoulder and I felt a small tickling sensation. A moment later she removed her hand and smiled sadly. "Your transformation seems to have entered a new stage. I think you'll be able to eat some solid food now. You're going to need the nutrients to help finish the changes."

"Lady Le Fey," a familiar voice said in the doorway.

"Yes, what is it Meredith?" Mom ask turning to face the woman.

"Lord Neil's friend, the young Lord Leif Yorgenson, insists he be allowed to speak with you. He claims it is urgent," Meredith said.

"Leif wants to speak with me? What for?"

"He wouldn't say," Meredith said between pursed lips.

"Alright send him in and after that see to it that some food is brought up for Neil."

"Yes, Lady Le Fey," she said with a nod of her head and left only to return a few moments later with an extremely flustered looking Leif.

"Holy Frizz, Neil. Is that you venn?" he asked staring at me with wide eyes.

"Yeah, Leif it's me," I muttered, wincing at the sound of my new voice.

"Shi--," Leif said but suddenly stopped with a glance at my mother who was staring at him with a disapproving frown. "you're turning into a chick. What the frizzing fu— heck."

"Leif!" Mom snapped with sudden impatience. "You wanted to speak with me?"

"Yeah," he muttered. "Ah, frizz. I don't know exactly how to say this so I'll just come right out and say it. I know about the attack on your estates."

"What how?" Both Mom and I suddenly asked at the same time.

"I overheard my Mother and the head of our house talking about it," he said with averted eyes. Leif didn't have the best relationship with his mother. She treated him like many Spellbinders treated their sons, as potential breeding stock to be sold to the highest bidder.

"Goddesses," Mom muttered. "I haven't even notified the police about the attack! If your mother and the lady Aquitaine have knowledge of it, that can only mean they were in on it."

Leif swallowed hard and locked eyes with my mother, "I know."

"Dammit!" Mother growled. "More traitors! I never cared for the Lady Aquitaine, but I always believed she was a woman of principle and I hoped that she would join forces with me once she learned what was at stake."

"At stake? What's at stake?" Leif asked with furrowed eyebrows.

"That is a discussion for another time. For now I must know everything you heard your mother and the Lady Aquitaine say," Mother said.

"Well, there was talk of Jonas Talman and someone named Doctor Mengele," he said with a shrug. "I only heard bits and pieces really. I was in another room and they didn't know I could hear them. They mentioned Neil and something about a distraction."

If Mom could prove that the Aquitaines were working with either Talman or even Menegele, the Seidskati would come down hard on their House. They might even get barred from the council altogether.

"The Spellbinders that attacked you..." Grammor said trailing off with a gasp.

"Clearly they were trying to get to Neil, but we really need to figure out how they knew he was changing," Daniella added.

"Talman is resourceful," Nick said speaking for the first time. "He probably has a spy here within the estates."

"Claramae," Daniella said with a shake of her head.

"No, I hadn't notified anyone in the family of Neil's changes yet. It has to be a member of the household staff," Mom muttered.

"I need to know everything they said. Even a seemingly mundane comment could hold a secret meaning." Mom paused for a moment, and I could tell she was thinking.

"As much as I hate to suggest it," she said finally. "There is a way I could know word for word what you heard them say. I could look into your mind."

Leif hesitated, but after a moment nodded. He had to know what a mind probe would entail. He had grown up surrounded by Spellbinders. "Okay."

Mom came over and stood beside him, "This will be easier if you just let me in. If you resist me it will be much more difficult for the both of us."

Leif nodded and Mom put her hands on his forehead. Both of their eyes turned milky white and then suddenly Leif broke away from her with a loud gasp. "Venn," he proclaimed. "That was frizzing weird!"

"Would you be willing to testify before the Seidskati?" Mom asked him a thoughtful expression on her face.

Leif still acted a bit disoriented by the whole ordeal, but he managed a nod. "Yeah."

Mom nodded back and quickly shuffled out of the room.



After everything died down a bit the others filed out of my room, leaving Eva and Leif alone with me. Since, they hadn't been given a proper introduction, I did so. When I introduced Eva as my girlfriend, Leif seemed surprised. When he learned that she was an elf he was dumbfounded. Eva seemed to find the whole thing amusing, bursting into laughter at the most peculiar moments.

"Uh, so..." Leif said awkwardly. "I guess you're girl now."

"Shit, have I really changed that much?"

Eva pursed her lips, "Yes, you really have."

"Damn," I cursed.

"You actually look pretty cute," Leif said unexpectedly.

"Venn," I said with what I'm sure was a baffled look. "What the frizz?"

"What?" Leif said defensively.

"You think I'm cute? You realize I'm still a guy down there don't you?"

"It's the elf in you," Eva said with a laugh.

"The elf in her. What are you talking about?" Leif said.

I sighed and shook my head. I really didn't intend to tell him just yet. "Leif, I'm a half-elf."

"Holy frizzing Hel," he muttered.

"Shit, I mean are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure."

"Did you feel an unusually strong attraction to Hervor in the mall?" Eva asked suddenly.

I hadn't felt a thing for her. "No," I said with a shake of my head.

Eva nodded, "Since you are her grandchild it is unlikely she would have used her aura on you. I, however, did feel the effects."

"What? What are you talking about!" I demanded.

Eva started to laugh again. "All elves emanate an aura. For all elves who walk in the light it causes people to have strong sexual desires toward the one emanating the aura. For dark elves it makes people feel fear and loathing."

"Holy Frigg," I said. "So I can I turn it off, right?"

"I can teach you to control it, but it can never be turned off, only focused," she said with a smile.

"Shit, venn. This is just weird," Leif said.

"Tell me about it," I replied irritably.

Things got a bit awkward after that and we spent the next few minutes hemming and hawing at each other. Thankfully, my food arrived shortly afterward and it gave me the perfect excuse to not to speak.



"Frizzing shit," I said glowering at my reflection. I didn't even recognize the person staring back at me. A girl with long auburn hair scowled back at me from the mirror. I gulped and touched my face, and watched as the girl mirrored my movement. I licked my lips and made faces at the mirror. The girl in the mirror matched my movements perfectly.

The girl was actually quite pretty, but there was something just a little off about her face. Angular, that was the word that came to mind, her face was just a little too angular. That would change soon enough, I knew, as the changes were almost done with.

I slowly unbuttoned my shirt and looked at my breasts. They had grown a lot since I'd last gotten a good look at them. I don't really know anything about cup sizes, but if I had to give them a label I'd say they were somewhere in the medium size range. I cupped them and sighed. My now dainty hands fell away and I glared down at the strange mounds which had invaded my chest.

My waist had narrowed quite a bit and my pants now hung around my much rounder hips. I

sighed and pulled my pants down. My testicles were completely gone, and an incomplete vulva had started to form around the shriveled remains of my penis.

"Goddesses be damned!" I heard myself say, but couldn't remember having uttered the words.

I was starting to feel better, well in the physical sense at least. I was only slightly dizzy and the pain didn't seem quite so bad anymore.

I looked at the mirror again, and felt anger rise up at the sight of the girl looking back at me. She wasn't me! I felt a sudden and overwhelming urge to lash out at something and I did. I grabbed the nearest thing I could find which turned out to be a can of my acne powder and hurled it at my reflection. The force of the impact was enough to create a rather sizable crack in the mirror.

I started at the mirror and started to laugh uncontrollably. It was just so strange. Just a week ago if someone had told me that I was a half-elf destined to save the world, I would have laughed in their face. If they had told me I was going to turn into the girl, I might have been a little more willing to believe, but I would have been skeptical. It's not that big of a stretch to think that something like this might happen to me if you knew who my mother was.

I looked at the mirror and all my laughter died away. I gave the stranger in the mirror one final glare, then slammed the button on the wall to turn off the lights before walking out the door.



When I returned to my room, instead of finding Eva and Leif like I expected, I found Hervor, my mother, and some guy I didn't recognize. I knew the man for a light elf almost immediately, and I felt as if my heart were going to jump out of my chest and run a marathon as I stared at up at his face. It wasn't as if I was attracted to him, it was just that I when I saw that face I just knew he was my father.

"Holy frizz!" I shouted and stared up at him with wide eyes.

"Neil, this is Heime, your father," Mom said biting her lips.

"I-I think I need to sit down," I muttered, realizing just how weak I really was.

Mom grabbed hold of my hand and helped me back to my bed and Hervor and Heime followed us into my room.

Heime looked about as nervous as I felt as he spoke, "Well met, my child! Long have I awaited to behold thee."

"Uh, so you and Mom, huh?"

"Neil!" Mom said glaring down at me.

"What?!" I protested.

Heime chuckled and grinned nervously as his eyes darted first to me then back to my mother.

"Why am I just meeting you now?" I asked him suddenly.

"'Twas thy mother's choice. She wished not that I play any role in thy life," Heime said with a very slight bow of his head.

"I didn't want you and your mother playing games with him the way you did with me," Mom spat back with a scowl.

"What we did never was borne of malice, Aryanna," Heime said his voice growing very soft as he spoke my mother's name.

"No, it was all for the better good," Mother spat.

"Thou art quick to accuse, Seidkona, but indeed thy guilt is as evident as mine," Hervor replied blandly.

"I never manipulated anyone into conceiving a child!" Mother spat back.

"Enough! Mother, Aryanna cease this forthwith!" Heime said suddenly.

Hervor's eyes grew very wide. She tilted her head forward in a very slight bow and gave Heime a knowing smile, "'Tis time to take leave of thee, my son. Stay, and bide time with the child."

"Aye, Mother. Fare thee well," he replied gripping his mother's shoulder.

"Fare thee well, my son," she said reaching up to pat him fondly on the cheek, then disappeared with a flash of light.

"Uh, okay? What was that about?"

"Honestly? I know not," Heime muttered with the a shake of his head.

"So, I gotta know, what is with all the thee's and thou's?"

Heime bowed his head and started to chuckle, "I am very old, my child, and I have passed very little time among humans since I had learned thy language. 'Tis as humans say, 'Old habits die hard.'"

"This is weird, right? I can't be the only one that thinks this is weird."

"Neil!" Mom cut in giving me that look that all women did so well.

"Aryanna, worry not. 'Tis fine."

"How old are you?" I asked suddenly.

Heime pursed his lips, "I know not mine exact age,. Our kind placeth not such import upon the number of our years as do humans. I can tell thee that I had passed many hundreds of years already when I first met thine ancestor, Morgana le Fey."

Holy, Frizz this guy is old. If she were alive today Morgana would be close to sixteen hundred years old. Heime could be well over two thousands years old, and if he was that old, no doubt Hervor was hundreds, if not thousands of years older, and it made me wonder how long I might live. Human magic users tended to age more slowly based on the strength of their magic, but my father obviously wasn't a magic user, so it made me wonder what it was that kept the guy ticking. Then I remembered something my Gramor once said about the elves being kin to the Aesir.

"You're immortal, aren't you?"

"Aye," he said.

"Am I?"

Heime let out a long sigh and pursed his lips, "I know not."

And so that's how I met my father. We had a pretty long discussion and at first we talked mostly about him as I kept asking him question after question, but finally the conversation shifted to me and it was his turn to ask the questions.



PART 4

Sunadag, the fifth of Morsugur

When I woke this morning, I really, really had to take a piss. I ran across the hall, flipped the toilet seat open and pulled my pants down only to find that I no longer had the necessary equipment to take a wizz standing up. With an angry grunt, I plopped down on the seat and started to urinate. Peeing felt a little weird, but it wasn't really very different. I did hit a bit of a road block, once I finished I realized I couldn't shake off like I used too. So I grabbed a triangle of toilet cloth and wiped off whatever remained.

I washed my hands and felt my jaw drop at the sight of my reflection. Holy frizzling Hel, I was one fine looking maer! I looked a lot more like Mom than I used to, but I also looked quite a bit like Heime, and even Hervor to a lesser extent. I swallowed hard and touched my face with my long delicate hands. My skin was silky smooth and I let my hand fall away as I studied my reflection more closely.

My hair was pretty long, but it wasn't as long as Mom's. I had a complexion that most girl's would die for, thick pouty lips and startling green eyes. "DAMMIT!" I yelled at the mirror.

I had a pretty good idea of what the rest of my body looked like, but I needed to see the whole picture. I slowly stripped out of my ill-fitting cloths and stared in disbelief at the changes. Yeah, I knew I was a girl. That wasn't really a surprise, but my body was perfect. I had curves in all the right places, I wasn't too skinny, but I wouldn't say I was fat either. My breasts seemed to weigh a ton, but when I looked at them in the mirror, while they looked large, they seemed to complement my form perfectly.

I shuddered, quickly redressed, and reached out to touch my face. "I'm a stranger in my own fucking body," I muttered, staring at my reflection for a moment, then left the bathroom. I nearly ran into Leif as I exited.

"Holy Frigg, Neil?"

Damn, I was shorter than him! I looked up into his face and couldn't help but feel a bit intimidating by his size. He was a good five-inches taller than me and he had packed on quite a lot of muscle in the last few years.

"Shit venn, you scared the frizz out of me! What are doing here?" I demanded.

Leif scowled, "You don't think I could go back home after what I told your mom, do you?"

"No, I guess not," I said. "I'm starved want to grab some breakfast?"

"Uh, you sure you should be out of bed?" he said staring at breasts.

"I'm feeling much better now," I said feeling my cheek turn red. Goddesses, why did he have to look at me like that!

"Okay, yeah I guess you would be. You're... I mean... Shit you're finished changing now. Aren't you?"

I frowned, "Yeah."

"Okay," he said with an awkward smile on his face. "Well I got to take a leak. I guess I'll see you down in the dining hall then."

"Yeah, I guess you will," I muttered feeling a surge of jealousy as I turned away. Even the simple act of urinating had become a foreign experience to me and I would have done almost anything to trade places with Leif at that moment.



Mom was nursing a cup of yerba mate and Daniella was munching on a piece of chicken when I appeared in the dining hall. "Neil!" Mom said with her eyes wide. "Goddesses, is it done then?"

I nodded and Mom and Daniella both gave me sympathetic looks.

"We didn't expect you up this early," Daniella said with a tired look on her face.

"Yeah, well I had to take a piss," I said irritably.

Mom smiled and let out a slight chuckle. Then her face turned suddenly serious. "As much as I hate to push you, we don't have much choice. I'd like to give you a few more days rest, but we don't have that luxury. We'll be meeting before the Seidskati tonight."

"Tonight?" I said. "Like this?" I said motioning down angrily at my breasts.

Mom sighed, "We need to get you some new clothes. It won't due to have you appear in

front of the council looking like a slob."

Clothes? Shit! I hadn't even thought that. I gulped, "We're going to the mall then?"

"Not exactly," Daniella said. "Too many people. There are a few shops on the east side of town that should do for our purposes."

Mom nodded, "As loath as I am to have you leave the estates with everything that is going on you need clothes. I'd have a seamstress come over and take your measurements, but we need something for you to wear tonight. You, Eva and Leif."

"Eva too?" I asked. "What possible reason would you have for her speak to the Seidskati?"

"She's Vattir, Neil, she can act as an ambassador," Daniella said.

"Ambassador? She doesn't even have a people!"

Mom shook her head, "That might actually play to our advantage. You've heard of the exiled elf tribes?"

"Yeah, they're supposed to have some sort of self-imposed exile aren't they?" I asked.

Mom nodded, "I don't fully understand the reasoning, but they disagree with the Lejosálfar on a number of philosophical matters and refuse to live among them. The light elves are just as glad to be rid of them, as they've intermingled with lesser vattir like the fairies."

"So you're hoping since Eva is unbound that they'll listen to her?"

"More or less, I've sent several requests to some of the bigger tribes for a meeting and none of them will have anything to do with me. They don't trust humans, I'm hoping that they will feel differently about an elf." Mother said.

"Morning," Leif's familiar voice said brightly. I turned to face him and felt my cheeks burn as his eyes seemed to linger on my breasts once again. What the Hel was wrong with him? Yeah my new body was freaking hot, but it was still me inside!

"Would you cut that out," I snapped angrily. "My eyes are up here, you know."

Leif's cheeks turned red, "I wasn't, uh, I mean I didn't mean to. I mean, look at you!"

Mom snorted, "It's not all his fault."

"You mean this aura business? Eva already told me about it," I said folding my arms across my chest and dropping them almost as quickly. It was weird feeling those bulges on my chest.

Mother nodded, "Get some breakfast in you and go take a shower. I want to get everything taken care of as early as possible."

"Uh? Take care of what?" Leif asked.

"Neil will fill you in. Daniella and I have some things to discuss," Mom said before standing and leaving the room with Daniella in tow.

I quickly told Leif what was going on and the room fell silent as we ate quietly.

"So what's it like?" Leif said suddenly. "Being a girl, I mean."

"So far it sucks, and it's weird, too, but I haven't been one long enough to tell you much."

"Well, at least if you're going to be a girl you get to be a hot one."

"What? That is absolutely no consolation whatsoever."

"Not to you maybe," a soft feminine voice chuckled from the doorway. "But it is to me."

Eva walked over and kissed me deeply on the lips. "Your transformation is finished?"

"Venn, that is so hot!" Leif said looking from me to Eva.

"As near as I can tell. Everything looks complete," I said casting an irritated glance at Leif then kissed Eva back. I felt my heart rate quicken and I suppressed the urge to start undressing Eva. At least I knew I still liked girls.

"Frizz," Leif said. "Two hot maers kissing. Frigg and Hel!"

Eva laughed, "Humans are so strange."

"Yeah, well Leif's weirder than most," I muttered irritably before sinking my teeth into a piece of chicken.



Breakfast was... awkward to say the least especially after my father showed up and told me I looked as beautiful as my mother. Leif kept staring at me and I felt like I was piece of meat he was trying to decide whether he might eat. This actually seemed to piss Heime off, who kept staring at Leif as if considering whether he should rip out his heart. It was humiliating, and I wished things would got back to the way they had been before. I might look like a girl now, but I sure as Frigg didn't feel like one. Why couldn't Leif see that? As for Heime, I wasn't sure what to think of that. The guy had just appeared, and I wasn't even sure I liked having him around let alone playing the part of the over-protective parent.

When I was done eating I got out of there as quickly as I could. Gramor grabbed me shortly after that and led me into the bathroom. "Your mother tells me that you'll be going out shopping today. What are you planning to wear?"

"I hadn't really thought about it. I guess some of my old clothes at least until I can get something that fits," I said.

"That is not going to happen," she said with a shake of her head. "Your old clothes will hang on you. I'll see if I can find something to fit you in Daniella and your mother's things. Get in the shower and I'll bring what I find in for you."

Once she was gone, I pulled my shirt off and tried to ignore the unwelcome guests on my chest. I sighed and started to pull off the pair of shorts that were hanging loosely around my hips when the door suddenly swung wide open. I quickly pulled the shorts back up, and stared into the doorway.

It was Leif. "Frizz, I didn't know you were in here," he said with wide eyes staring fixedly at my bare breasts.

I could feel my cheeks burn and I quickly covered my breasts with one of my arms. Goddesses, what the Hel did he think he was doing just walking into a bathroom when the door was closed? Idiot! My embarrassment turned to anger and I felt my free hand ball up into a fist and I just sort of reacted. I hit him in the face as hard as I could which happened to be much harder than I would have expected. Nevertheless, my hand felt like I'd hit a brick wall and Leif staggered backwards quite a way.

"What the Hel did you do that for?!" he asked with a loud gasp and cupped his hands over his nose.

"Get out!" I yelled.

"I didn't mean to—"

"GET OUT!" I yelled at the top of my lungs.

Leif stumbled back through the doorway and I slammed the door in his face. I sank to my knees and gasped. A few tears fell down my face, but I forced them away. Goddesses, why did I feel so vulnerable? I wanted to cry and keep on crying, but I wouldn't let myself. I wouldn't give in. Damn my frizzing hand hurt.

A few more minutes passed by and the door swung open again. "Dammit Leif! I told you to —" I growled and stopped mid-sentence as I realized it was Gramor who had opened the door. She held a stack of clothes in her arms which she dropped on the counter .

"What's happened?" she asked folding her arms across her chest.

"Uh, I don't want to talk about it," I replied quietly.

Gramor gave me that look that all women seemed to have mastered and I squirmed under her scrutiny. "Fine!" I said finally. "Leif walked in on me naked. You happy?!"

"That explains why he was running down the hall with a hand clasped over his nose," she said with a faint smile on her face. "I ran into him on my way back," she added in explanation

"Shit," I muttered. "I probably shouldn't have punched him, but who the crenking Hel walks into a bathroom when the door is closed? Damn my hands hurts."

"I think any girl would have done the same in your place," my grandmother said dryly. "Let's take a look at that hand."

"I'm not a girl!" I protested before giving her my hand.

There was a weird tickling sensation then slowly over the next ten minutes the pain in my hand seemed to fade until it was almost completely gone.

"You may not see yourself as a girl, but like it or not the world isn't going to agree. You managed to fracture one of the bones in your hand. If it had been much worse I wouldn't have been able to heal it. It might be a little stiff for a few days, but other than that it should be fine."

"Thanks," I said rubbing at my hand thoughtfully.

"Get in the shower. I need to see to that fool boy."

I nodded and stepped into the shower once she had left. I cranked the slider up to a ridiculously hot level and slammed the button on the wall and sighed in relief as boiling hot water rained down on me from the showerhead in the ceiling. Mom and Daniella thought I was nuts but I liked my showers really hot, I found it invigorating.

As great as the shower felt, I wanted to keep it short. The hot water against my breasts felt amazing, but only helped to remind me of how much my body had changed. I soaped my body up and tried my best to ignore the vulva between my legs and the breasts on my chest.

"Hey," Eva said as the shower door slid open and closed behind her.

"What's this?" I said unable to keep myself from smiling at her.

Eva shrugged, "I thought it would be more enjoyable if we showered together."

"Is the water too hot? I can turn it down," I said.

"It is perfect," she said with a smile then kissed me. "We elves have a much better tolerance for heat than humans."

Maybe my love of hot showers was more unusual than I had always thought. In fact I was sure of it. How many of my other habits had been effected by my elven side? I shuddered and put the thoughts out of my head. I would have to mull them over another time.

Eva reached over and began to soap my bare breasts. I had been so caught up in my thoughts that I hadn't even realized what she was doing until her hands were inches from my chest. I didn't tell her that I had already cleaned everything. Her hands softly brushed my breasts and there was a slow sensuality to her movement as she cleaned me. It was felt amazing and I hoped she would never stop.

Oh Norns, I was so freaking turned on. My nipples hardened on my chest and reached out to Eva and kissed her. I held her close and started to slowly massage her breasts. We got a little carried away after that and we didn't quite go all the way, but we came pretty damn close. If it wasn't for Gramor's return, we probably would have.

"What's going on in there?" Gramor said through the shower door.

I tried to answer, to tell my grandmother a quick lie, but every time I tried I couldn't speak. "Shit! I can't lie!" I said finally.

"We decided to share the shower," Eva said. It wasn't a lie precisely, but it wasn't the whole truth.

"Uh, huh," Gramor said. "That's not all that is going on is it?"

To my shock I found myself answering her, "No."

"Goddesses you're worse than your mother," she said with a chuckle. "The first time she took a shower after her change I found her fingering herself."

"Gramor!" I protested. "I really didn't need to know that!"

"Just be glad it was me that found you, and not your mother or Daniella," she teased.

My grandmother's interruption was a real mood-killer and it really didn't take us long to finish washing up. We both got dressed and just when I thought we were all done I learned that I couldn't have been more wrong.

To cut things a bit short, Gramor that she wanted to teach me about the my new anatomy and Eva piped in and mentioned that there were some minor differences between humans and elves that I should probably be aware of. So I got a lecture on a whole plethora of things ranging from how to proper clean my new privates, proper hair care and (yay!) periods.

Apparently, elves are much slower to reproduce than humans and have periods much more infrequently. Of course, since I was a half-elf, neither seemed sure exactly how I might be affected. I knew women had periods, but I hadn't even really thought about having one myself. Frizz, what else would I have to look forward too?



"Seidkona! I am honored," the middle-aged brunette woman said with a deep curtsy upon seeing my mother. Clearly, she recognized Mom, which was not very surprising since she was probably the most recognizable member of the Seidskati, especially in the New Copenhagen area.

Mom smiled politely, but I could tell she was irritated. She hated it when people groveled. "Please, that will not be necessary. Treat me as you would any other customer."

The woman's eyes widened, "Yes of course. Can I help the Lady Aryanna find anything?"

"Claire is it?" Mom said glancing at the woman's name badge with a strained smile. "My daughter here needs a bra fitting."

Claire gave Mom a startled expression, then her eyes fell on me. "My goodness," she said. "You are very lovely."

I felt my cheeks burn in humiliation. 'I'm a guy, damn you!' I cursed inwardly.

"Thanks," I said between gritted teeth.

"If you will follow me, please," she said with another curtsy and led Mom, Eva and me through the many racks of clothes and stopped just shy of a dressing room at the back of the store.

"I wouldn't expect a girl your age to need a fitting. Why you have to be ... you're seventeen at least?"

"Eighteen," I corrected.

"Goodness, in another year you'll be of age. Yes, much too old to need a fitting," Clara said giving Mom a funny look.

Mom forced a smile, "Children, huh? Just when you think they stop growing, they grow a little more."

"Yes, yes of course," the clerk said. "What's your name dear?"

I stared at the woman, and felt a brief panic settle over me. Should I tell her my real name or make up a female name? "N- uh," I mumbled. Oh, Frizz I couldn't lie! Damn Hervor for awakening my elven side!

"I'm sorry what was that dear?"

"Nyla," Mom said with a look of disinterest on her face. "Her name is Nyla."

"Nyla!" the woman said with a smile. "Very unusual, pretty, but unusual. Dear, why don't you step into the fitting room and we'll have a look."

I stared at the clerk with my mouth hanging open and looked back to Mom and Eva.

"Don't worry dear. If you like, your mother or your friend can come in with you."

"Eva," I said almost immediately.

Eva smiled and followed the woman and me into the dressing room. "Well dear, if you could undress."

"Undress?" I asked. "Why?"

"Well, you can't expect me to take accurate measurements through your blouse. Now can you?" Claire chuckled.

"I... uh guess not," I said with a grimace and began unbuttoning my shirt.

"My goodness," Clair said with obvious envy in her eyes once my shirt was removed. "I'm sure the boys are just lining up. With a figure like that you must be a popular girl."

"Oh, yes. I'm sure she would be very popular," Eva said with an amused grin. Norns! Eva's sense of humor could be so weird sometimes.

"You know it's strange. I never heard that Lady Aryanna had a daughter," Clair said.

"Uh, yeah," I muttered. "Weird huh?"

Clair smiled with a knowing expression as she took my measurements. Her hands were cold and the whole ordeal was uncomfortable to say the least.

"In fact I remember when your brother was born it was all over the news," she continued eying me with a smirk on her face. "There was a lot of speculation about who the father was. Nobody seemed to know. In fact, if I recall correctly he should be eighteen about now."

Frizzing Hel! The woman was no idiot. How much did she suspect?

"I'll be right back with a couple bras for you to try out," she said with another damned smile and slipped out the door.

"Mom," I said through the door once a few minutes later once I thought Clara would be far enough away. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes," Mom said. "Don't speak of it further and make sure you don't say anything that might give you away. "

"Yeah about that... I have a bit of a problem," I muttered quietly.

"Oh?" Mom asked through the door.

"Uh, I can't lie," I said.

I heard Mom mutter several curses under her breathe, "That could be an issue. I should have expected something like this with Hervor awakening your elven side. Just do your best."

"Okay." I muttered. "Is it just me or is it a little cold in here?"

Eva took a look at my chest and smiled mischievously and ran her finger across one of my nipples. "Oh, I'd say it's very chilly in here."

I felt a cold shiver run through my body and I looked down at my breasts. "Shit, why are they doing that?"

Eva laughed then leaned in and kissed me, "They do that when it gets cold. Maybe I'll show you another way to make them do it later on."

"Sorry to interrupt, but I have some bras for you to try on," Claire said suddenly. She must have come in while we were kissing and we just hadn't noticed her. There was a look of disapproval on her face, but it was quickly covered by an obviously false smile.

"Okay," I said grabbing a white bra from her hand. I fumbled with the damn thing for several minutes, but couldn't figure out how to get it on.

Claire gave me another disapproving frown which was replaced by a knowing smile. "You've never done this before have you?"

Shit! Shit shit shit shit! How the hel am I supposed to answer that question and not give myself away? "Uh..." I muttered trailing off.

"Here, let me help you with it," Claire offered with a knowing smile.

She took the bra out of my hands and slipped the straps over my head, made a few adjustments then snapped several buttons together just under and behind either of my arm pits.

"There how does that feel?"

"Well I guess it feels good," I muttered. I didn't know how the damn thing was supposed to fit, and although it felt very odd, it felt sort of good too. I did notice my breasts didn't seem as bouncy as they had before.

Clara seemed pretty insistent that I try on several different types of bras. I wasn't sure what they were all for, well except maybe the exercise bra, but Clara seemed to think they were needed. After a little bit of argument I relented and tried everything on she put in front of me.

After everything was said and done Mom chimed in and decided I needed to get a few packs of panties, an exercise bra, a form fitting one which she said I might need for tonight and a

weeks worth of 'regular' bras in white, black and 'nude'. My size varied from style to style, but all the regular type bras were size 7-D. Mom even got Eva a couple pair.

After that Mom excused Clair and took me aside. "Mom, I think she knows who I am."

"I overheard everything, Nyla," Mom said using the false name she had given me.

"That's not my name!" I growled.

"It will do for now. If you wish to chose another name later on you can do so, but that's not important right now," Mom said.

"Yeah, well what are we going to do?"

"It's my own fault. I shouldn't have said you were my daughter," Mom replied. "We'll buy these things and get the rest of your clothes somewhere else."

"What about Leif and Daniella?" I asked.

"Daniella knows what to do if the worst should happen, don't worry."

I nodded and we went through the line at the purchase ringer. The woman at the counter picked up the items and placed them on a glass circle. A yellow light shot out from a glass circle in the counter and encompassed all the items then faded into nothingness. "That will be seven gold trigguts and five silver bolas."

Mom paid the woman and we quickly made for the doors, but we both stopped just shy of the doors when we saw what was waiting for us outside.

"Damn! Reporters!" Mom said cursing under her breathe.

"You think that Claire woman called them?" I asked.

Mom shook her head, "It's possible, but she would have had to call them when we first got here for them to have arrived so quickly."

"What do we do?" I asked.

"This," Mom said taking hold of me and Eva. Suddenly the ground lurched out from under me and a huge gust of wind shot into my chest and we went hurling through the void.



"Frizz," I muttered as we reappeared in a busy street.

"Where are we?" Eva muttered after looking around and seeing the tall skyscrapers all around us.

"New Jorvík," Mom said casually.

"New Jorvík?" I asked in disbelief. "That's clear on the other side of the country! Why on Midgard did you bring us here?"

"People here keep to themselves, they mind their own business, and right now that's exactly what we need."

"Yeah, but New Jorvík!" I said.

Mother shook her head, "Come on."

As we walked through the street I couldn't help but notice all the looks I was getting. Men, and an unusual number of woman looked at me with barely disguised lust on their faces. It was pretty creepy and I did my best to ignore them as I passed them by.

Finally, after walking a few city blocks we stopped in front of a store that Mom thought would fit our needs. Eva had a look of amazement on her face as we entered, but I'd seen places like these before. Of course, I usually avoided them like the plague. It was just the sort of place that catered to rich Spellbinders.

"Hello," a black-haired beauty said with a disapproving glare as we approached. "May I help you?"

"Yes, I need these girls fitted for dresses," Mother said with a slight flick of her wrists.

"Might I suggest you try MacFrugal's on Farsk Street? They might be more in your price range," the woman said with her nose upturned.

I glanced at Mom and understood almost immediately why the woman was behaving the way she was. I was so accustomed to Mom dressing the way she did that I never even thought about it, but her slacks and plain button up shirt didn't exactly scream rich spellbinder. Slacks weren't very fashionable, and few women would be caught dead wearing them, especially not the head of a prominent Spellbinder house.

Mom's demeanor suddenly changed and she took on an air of arrogance. I might have been shocked, if I hadn't seen her do it before. It was all an act of course, but the woman didn't appear to realize that as a look of uncertainty appeared on her face.

"You will refer to me, as Lady Le Fey, child," Mother said with a cold glare. "Is this how you treat a member of the Seidskati? As if she were an inconsequential nobody?"

The woman's eyes widened and her face seemed to pale. "I'm sorry, I didn't realize. Please come inside. I would be glad to help you with whatever you need."

"I think not!" Mother said with mock indignation. "Find me someone who can afford me the sort of respect is due a person of my status. And hurry, or I might take my business

elsewhere!"

"Yes, of course, Lady Le Fey!" the woman said, and I couldn't help but laugh as she scurried out of sight.

"Lady Le Fey!" a new woman said with a deep curtsy. "I am Annelise. I apologize, Lady, for Sherrie's behavior."

"It is no consequence," Mom said looking as if she were very bored.

"How may I help you Lady," she said with a relieved smile.

"As I told that foolish child. I need these girls fitted for two formal dresses each," Mother said.

I masked my surprise. Two dresses? Why did I need two dresses? Frigg, if I had my way I wouldn't even get one of the damn things!

"As you wish," she said curtsying again. "Now girls, if you would please follow me we will see what we can do."

Eva and I followed Annelise through the store and stopped just short of a row of dresses. Mom gradually made her way over.

"That will do for now, child."

Annelise scurried away and Mom and I burst into laughter.

"I don't understand," Eva said. "Why were you behaving that way?"

Mom smiled, "Because it's the way they expect a Spellbinder to behave."

"Humans, are so strange," she said with a shake of her head.

"You know maybe I shouldn't have sent that woman off. I have a horrible eye for style," Mom said casting a sidelong glance back to where the woman had disappeared. "I'll go get her. Act like you're looking at the dresses."

We did as Mom suggested and started looking through the racks.

"How may I help?" Annelise said, reappearing behind Mom.

"These dresses are absolutely deplorable! Clearly your reputation as a fine dress maker is exaggerated," Mother said.

"Well I am sorry our selection is not to your satisfaction, my Lady. Perhaps I could make some recommendations."

"Very well."

Annelise went through several racks and pulled out a dress. "I'm sorry dear I didn't catch your name," she said looking at me.

"Call me..." I muttered before either Eva or Mom could speak up. After a brief hesitation, I blurted out the first feminine name I could think of, which happened to be "Bryn". It was short for Brynhilde, the name of the first girl I had kissed. I wanted to take it back as soon as it had left my lips, but it was already too late for that.

"Well Bryn, how do you like this dress?" She said with a nervous smile and pulled out a cream colored dress from the rack.

"That might do," Mother said with apparent disinterest.

After several trips to the dressing rooms Eva and I each had two dresses picked out. Or should I say Annelise had picked them out for us. Eva seemed just as lost as I was when it came to the dresses, but that really didn't surprise me. Dark elves made everything they used by hand, and were completely self-sufficient. They did not live lavishly and wore plain clothing in the rare instances that they wore any at all.

I wasn't exactly thrilled about wearing a dress, but I knew that Mom's meeting with the Seidskati was pretty damned important. In order to make things go along without a hitch I had to play the Seidskati's damn game, and if that meant wearing a frizzing dress, then by the many names of Frigg, I'd wear the stupid thing. When everything was said and done I'd cram that stupid dress up their asses and be done with the whole lot of them.

Just when I thought we were all finished they brought in the seamstress who happened to be a pretty talented wind mage. She had Eva and me put on each of the dresses and then with a number of complicated gestures she called up her magic and unleashed it on each article of clothing. Threads flew through the air around us, small pieces of cloth was sliced away with a well aimed gust of wind here and there. It took surprisingly little time, but when she was finished both dresses were a perfect fit.

Finally, we were done and Mom paid the bill, which ended up being seventy-eight gold trigguts and twelve silver bolas. She took us back home and there was another surprise waiting for me once we had arrived, a frizzing haircut.

I was dead-serious when I asked stylist to shave it all off, but Eva protested so strongly that I quickly relented. My hair was a tangled mess. I had horrible split ends and the stylist just wanted to trim it up a bit. Eva's protestations kept me from getting it cut too short, but we finally managed a compromise. My hair got cut down just an inch past chin length into what the stylist refereed to as a shaggy bob.

Once, Mom had paid the stylist I turned to Eva and scowled. "How do you put up with all this hair in your face?"

"You get used to it," she muttered with an amused grin.

The hairstyle was extremely feminine, but I had to admit that it really looked good with my new face. Really, it wouldn't have mattered what sort of haircut I might have gotten, as there was no disguising the fact that I was female. I couldn't hide it, not with a body and face like mine. I was beautiful and there was no way around that. Goddesses I hate looking like this! I hate beginning female, I hate seeing the face of a stranger in the mirror and I hate peeing sitting down! I just want to be a frizzing guy again!



PART 5

Manadag, the sixth of Morsugur

Holy Frigg. Mom was right Ragnarok is coming. Norns, where the frizz do I even begin? Everything has changed. So many things have been called into question, and I find myself doubting everything. Yeah, today has been hel, and I don't think my life shows any signs of going back to normal. Shit, I am so screwed.

We arrived at the Dingha by travel spell to find some frizzing reporters waiting for us. The Seidskati had never made much of an effort at keeping the times of their meetings private, and the recent news about Mom and me had drawn them like locusts to a wheat field. After our shopping trip the media was having a field day, and most were speculating on whether or not I really was Neil Steinburg transformed into a girl.

We pushed our way through the gaggle of reporters without any comment, and were soon inside the dingha where we were greeted by a gray-haired woman with a stern frown.

"Elizabeth," Mom said with a relieved sigh. "Are they ready for us?"

It only took me a moment to register her name before realizing that the woman was Elizabeth Bathory.

"As ready as they'll ever be," Elizabeth said a scowl and a shake of her head.

Mom smiled grimly and nodded, "Is it that bad?"

"Bad enough, but it's more of the usual. There have been speculation on why you've called the council together, but it is nothing more than speculation," Elizabeth said with an irritable shake of her head.

"Then they have no idea?"

"None."

"Good. Maybe I can catch them off guard."

"Are you ready?" Mom asked, suddenly turning around to lock eyes with me.

"Yeah, I guess so."

Mom nodded then turned to Daniella, "Remember what we discussed."

Daniella nodded before Mom motioned for me to follow her down the long corridor that led to the chamber doors. Daniella, Eva, and Leif all stayed behind as we were ushered inside the council chamber by a pair of women with stern expressions on their faces. I'd never been within the chamber before and I couldn't help but feel self-conscious as the hooded figures above all stared down at us.

"Kona le Fey, why have you called upon the Seidskati?" the wizened figure of a woman asked, glaring down at my mother. I wanted to shrink under the force of the woman's gaze, but Mom held her ground so I did my best to follow her example and not slink into the shadows.

"Ancient Theodora, as I have been forced to remind you on numerous occasions, it is inappropriate to refer to a fellow member of the Seidskati as Kona," Mother said, meeting the elderly woman's gaze with a glare just as formidable.

Theodora scowled, "Very well, sister, why have called us?"

"I have several reasons for calling the council together. The first of which has to do with the magical awakening of my son," Mom replied placing a hand on shoulder.

"Do you mean to say that this girl is your son?" a scorn-filled voice chimed in.

"That's right, Xiu."

"I must say I find this news disturbing," Theodora said, glaring down with a disgusted look on her face.

"Come now ancient, it is not as if Aryanna has any control over her child's transformation," a woman whom I recognized as Matoaka spoke up almost immediately.

As the only Native Nrylander among the Seidskati, she is nearly as controversial a figure as mother. Unlike the other members of the Seidskati Matoaka represented an entire tribe of people rather than a specific house.

"I am not so sure," Ancient Theodora shot back.

"Neil's transformation was not by my doing," Mother said calmly.

"She speaketh sooth. 'Twas I who did invoke the changes," A figure dressed in white said walking through the chamber doors. It was Hervor, followed closely by my father.

"Queen Hervor," Matoaka said frowning down at the light elf. "What brings you before the Seidskati?"

"I was entreated by thy peer to appear before thee," she replied.

"For what purpose?" A woman said, standing and removing the hood from her face. It was Mi Cha Shin, a relatively new member of the Seidskati. Her home country of Goryeo had been at war with Nyrland for almost twenty years until an uneasy peace had been declared. Her house had only been recently been admitted to the Seidskati, but she had already proven herself to be a formidable force within the ruling body of the Spellbinders.

"To make you aware of a danger that threatens everything," Mom replied calmly.

"What sort of danger?" Theodora asked with a scowl on her face.

"Ragnarok," Mom said, locking eyes with the ancient woman.

The council chambers suddenly erupted with noise as nearly every single member of the Seidskati began to speak at once.

A soft glow surrounded Mom and she raised a hand to loose a light gust of wind that swept through the room. It took a few moments for Mom's spell to have its desired effect, but silence once more fell upon the chamber. With a satisfied nod Mom dropped her hand and let the air in the room grow calm again.

"Sisters, if you would allow me to talk, I will try to explain."

That only proved to provoke more yelling as a good number of council members were competing to be heard.

"SILENCE!" Elizabeth Bathory yelled from above with a magically enhanced voice. "Sisters, let her speak."

That seemed to do the trick, as the room grew quiet again and Mom looked over to Elizabeth with an appreciative smile on her face. "Thank you, sister. Almost twenty-six years ago, after being named Athilda's apprentice I was tasked to put an end to Ragnarok."

"Tasked by whom?" Theodora asked suddenly. "The Eddas and the Codices clearly state that ___"

"Sister, please, let me continue," Mom said interrupting the ancient Spellbinder and continued after receiving a nod of resignation from Theodora. "It was Frigg, the Allmother, who tasked me with putting an end with Ragnarok."

"You speak lies and obscenities! The prophecies are clear. Ragnarok is unavoidable!"
Theodora spoke up angrily.

"Well Sister Theodora, it appears then that the prophecies are wrong!" Mom spat back between clenched teeth.

"Now please let me continue! As the goddess has revealed to me, a prophecy merely speaks of a probable outcome, not a definite one. It was the goddess herself who set me on this task. Unless you would question the judgment of one of the creators, Theodora. I would remain silent."

Another shouting match broke out as nearly everyone in the Dingha started yelling at once. Mom raised her hand and seemed about to loose another gust of wind when a voice range out through the whole chamber.

"Hold your tongues!" It was Havor.

Shocked silence pervaded the entire chamber. "Fools!" Havor said angrily removing the hood from her face. "Very soon come the Jotun! Ye shall surely fall if ye heed not the words of Lady le Fey. Restrain your doubts and prepare yourselves for the final battle! 'Tis the only way."

The queen's words invoked rippled murmurs throughout the council chambers, but no one came forward to speak.

"It seems likely that our young sister is telling the truth. As a spirit creature, the elf queen is incapable of deceit. It is certain that she believes Ragnarok is on the way. Does that not grant credence to our young friend's claims?" Matoaka said finally breaking the silence.

The woman Mom had named as Xiu glared across the chamber at Matoaka, "The elf may not be capable of deceit, but she can still be fooled."

Unexpectedly, Havor threw her head back and started to laugh, "Thou thinkest me so easy to fool Seidkona? Many millenia have I lived. Though I be incapable of speaking untruths, I have had numerous dealings with thy kind. Thinkest thou that I be so easily taken in?"

It was about then that I began to feel a strange feeling of unease. There was a malevolent presence in the room that wanted nothing so much as kill me and everyone else within the council chambers. I clutched at my mother's arm, and she glanced back at me with a curious expression on her face, but she turned away in order to reply to a comment made by one of the council members. I tried to make myself speak, but I wasn't able to form the words. I could feel a sense of grim amusement from the evil force, but it did not seem the least bit alarmed that I was aware of its presence. I looked around the chamber. No one seemed to sense what I did, not even Havor.

"...a traitor within the Seidskati," I heard my mother say, but most of my attention was on the presence.

I vaguely remembered Leif coming into the council chambers and then it happened. The presence reached out and I knew that if something wasn't done we would all die. I reached inward and clawed at the source of untapped magic locked deep within me. Blinding white light shot out from my chest and I screamed as the volley of power slammed into the empty space a mere half a dozen feet above me. Suddenly, I was flying through the air then, just as abruptly my back slammed into something hard. I let out a grunt of pain as I looked down and found that I was pinned by some invisible force against the wall. Darkness crept into my vision and I thought I might pass out, but there was a flash of light and when my vision cleared there was a man with long raven-black hair standing in front of me. I knew then that he was the source of the malevolent presence I had felt before.

"Wakey, wakey," he said with a snap of his fingers.

I gasped as burst of pain shot through my body and the darkness that had been creeping at the edge of my vision was gone.

"Who are you?" I grunted as I realized the magic was still pouring out from my body. I tried to release it, but nothing I did seemed to work. Instead, the light pouring out from me seemed to be growing increasingly more bright. More startling, was that it was shooting right into him and the man seemed completely unaffected by it. Clearly he was able to summon some sort of power, but it wasn't magic, that much was certain. I would have been able to feel it if he were using magic. Of course no man could use magic and live very long, so it was really a moot point.

He grinned maliciously and patted me on the cheek, "Hervor dearest knows who I am. Don't you Hervor?"

Suddenly I lurched through the air and I landed on my belly at Hervor's feet. "Tell them!" he yelled with a manic edge to his voice.

"Thou art Loki," Hervor said staring at him with wide eyes.

"Oh shit," I muttered under my breathe. "We are so screwed."



Frigg preserve us, Loki was alive! How the frizz was that even possible? All the ancient sources said he was dead just like all the male gods, but it appeared he had somehow escaped Hel's clutches. Maybe that really wasn't surprising, considering she was his daughter.

His status as a god certainly explained how he seemed immune to my magic even as it continued to pour out of me and shoot into him. He could call upon the powers of creation that were only available to the gods. What more he was Loki, the god of mischief and chaos.

"Enough of this!" Mother screamed. "Release him!"

"Him?" Loki said and I was suddenly jerked back to my feet. "You mean this pretty little

thing? Funny, she don't much look like a him to me."

"Let him go!" Mom screamed frantically and lunged at the god.

Loki laughed manically as he lifted his hand and Mom abruptly stopped mid stride. "Silly girl, you think you can match the power of a god? You are nothing to me, even with your cute little box of magic tricks."

"Unhand her, thou dissembling fustilarian!" Heime growled and stepped forward as he unsheathed the sword strapped across his back.

"Oh, now Heime, old friend, that just hurts. You might offend a fellow with language like that. It's not generally considered polite to yell at an old friend. Especially when said friend happens to be a god. Just for that I'm going to have to make things a little unpleasant for your friend here," Loki said with mock indignation.

"Unhand her!" Heime demanded.

"Now, now, you gotta do something about that temper of yours. Remember what I said about offending an old friend?" Loki giggled.

Heime clenched his teeth and pounced on Loki, but the god of mischief was ready for him and my father went soaring across the other side of the room with a casual flick of the god's wrist.

"What a downer. Now, let's have some fun shall we?" Loki said and suddenly I was spinning.

"Round and round she goes! Where she stops! Nobody knows!" Loki laughed.

The spinning started out slow, but it got progressively worse. I circled the great chamber endlessly until I thought I would pass out, suddenly I slammed into something hard and I heard Loki mutter a "whoops," followed by a laugh. Something snapped inside of me and I could feel the magic building. I tried to stop it, but it was like trying to contain a bonfire with my bare hands. I knew what could happen if a Spellbinder lost control, and I'd been told I was far more powerful than any spellbinder. I could level the entire county, maybe even the whole state, if I didn't put a stopper on the energy that was pouring out from me. I tried feebly to keep it from flowing out from me, but it continued to build, and it was only a matter of time before I popped.

Why wasn't anyone trying to stop what was happening? Couldn't they see that I could kill us all? That's when it hit me. That is what Loki wanted all along. He had revealed himself to me in hopes of achieving this very end. Somehow he was preventing the Spellbinders, and even Hervor from intervening, but how? He seemed completely unaffected by my magic. Perhaps he had some way of keeping Mom and the rest of the magic users from using their powers.

Desperately I reached outside the council chambers. Perhaps if I couldn't stop the flow of magic I could redirect it. There was a very familiar presence just outside the room and I realized it was Eva. I could feel her desperation, and I sensed that she was being blocked

from entering the chamber. I wanted to reach out to her and comfort her and somehow I knew I could do just that. I felt Daniella outside the chamber as well, but her presence was more distant, and I knew I couldn't touch her. I reached out to Eva and... she reached back.

Then it happened, I don't know how to describe it precisely, but suddenly I could feel everything Eva felt. Not so much a her thoughts, but her emotions. For a brief moment I couldn't distinguish myself from Eva. There was no me, there was no her, there was only us. Then that feeling of unity faded and I was myself again. I could still feel Eva in the back of my head, but her presence wasn't as strong as before.

There was a suddenly bright flash of light and a tall statuesque woman appeared within a tall pillar of light that soon faded away. She had long black hair, carried a rather wicked looking spear and wore ornately gilded armor. "Enough with your games, Loki. Release the girl."

"Gna, my, my, my, it has been a long time. Still running errands for Frigg I see," Loki said in a mocking tone.

"Release her," Gna repeated blandly.

"Make me. You don't have the power, even with the help of these witches and Hervor over there," he replied with a laugh.

"She may not be a match for you, but I am," a new voice said.

Suddenly, I fell to the ground as Loki released his hold on me and pain exploded in my breasts from the impact. I could feel the power gush out from me at even greater levels. Goddesses, why couldn't I control it?

"Freya, it really has been too long. Why I was just saying the other day that—"

"Silence!" the voice of Freya commanded. "You will leave this place now!"

A hand touched my shoulder and I looked up to find that it was Leif. "You must let go," he said quietly.

"Let go? If I let go the magic will..." trailing off as I stared back at him, aghast.

"You must empty your mind and let go!" he insisted.

I nodded and closed my eyes. I tried to clear away all my thoughts. For a moment it seemed to work as the magic flickered into nothingness, but then it flared back to life. Suddenly, I felt Leif's lips on mine. Then all thoughts fled as I became lost in the kiss. As we broke for air I realized that the magic had faded away and stared at Leif aghast. I wasn't about to admit it to anyone, but the kiss had felt really good.

"Drat! Foiled again!" Loki bellowed. Then he vanished.

"What the frizz, venn?" I said rounding on Leif

"I— uh— Don't you know your own family history?"

"What the Hel is that supposed to mean?"

"When your ancestor, Athilda was still an apprentice to her mother, Morgana, she lost control of the magic. A rather handsome admirer of hers intervened and managed to get her to loose her hold on the power of the Seidh by kissing her. " Gna said coming to stand over Leif and me.

"Yeah, but I mean— I— I—," I muttered unable to complete my sentence know full well it was a lie. I wanted so badly to say that the kiss meant nothing and I wasn't attracted to guys, but neither were true.

Gna grinned down at me and winked before turning to Freya.

"You are lucky, girl, that Gna and I were watching. Had we not appeared Loki likely would have succeeded in destroying you," Freya said, coming to stand beside Gna with a frown.

"So then he was baiting me?" I asked swallowing hard.

"Yes, see that you don't let him do it again," Gna said with a shake of her head.

"Enough," Freya said. "Neither, Gna nor myself intended to interfere with your meeting, but our presence here has already changed the status quo. I believe a short recess is in order. Then we will discuss the coming of Ragnarok. There is still much that needs done, and time is rapidly growing short."



After the Freya's pronouncement Mom dragged me out of the council chambers and hugged me so hard that I thought she might squeeze my insides out. "Are you going to be alright?" she asked removing her hands from around my middle and bringing them up to touch my cheeks.

"Yeah, Mom. I'll be fine," I said with groan.

"What happened?" Eva said off to my side.

"Apparently, Loki isn't as dead we all thought. He showed up and baited me into loosing my powers on him," I said bitterly.

"Ancestors preserve," Eva whispered, and I could feel her concern and worry seeping through the strange bond we now shared. I felt a twinge of guilt for the kiss shared with Leif, but I batted that guilt away. Why should I feel guilty? I hadn't initiated the stinking thing.

"I couldn't control it. I could have destroyed us all. I mean, if Leif hadn't kissed me..." I said and almost immediately wished I hadn't. Frizz, the whole not being able to lie thing was going to cause me all sorts of trouble.

Eva pursed her lips and cocked an eyebrow, "He kissed you?"

"I didn't ask him to," I mumbled and looked down at the ground feeling my cheeks burn at the memory of Leif's lips locked around my own.

"Frizz, it didn't mean anything," Leif said, and I realized for the first time that he had been there the whole time without me noticing.

"We shall see," Eva said with a shake of her head.

"Look, let's just get back in there," I muttered seizing on the opportunity to change the subject. "I'm sure Freya and Gna have better things to do than to wait on us."

Mom nodded, "The sooner we get this done with the better."

"Art thou— well?" a voice asked off to the side and I looked over to find my father standing a few feet away. I don't think I was really prepared for the intensity of the emotions I saw in those eyes.

"Fine," I muttered averting my eyes.

"Very good," Heime muttered with a nervous smile. "I shall see thee in a few moments. Yet must thy grandmother and I attend to certain things before we return to the council chambers."

"Okay," I said with a nervous smile of my own.

Heime nodded, flashed me another nervous smile then walked off in the opposite direction.



This time when we entered the council chambers, Leif and Eva followed us in. It wasn't until the doors closed behind us that I realized Daniella was missing. I pointed it out to Mom, but she only smiled and said that there "was nothing to worry about."

Gna and Freya, as well as the rest of the Seidskati were waiting for us as we returned to the chamber.

"Sisters," Mom said to the subdued council members. "I think by now you have all come to understand the seriousness of the situation. I would like to continue where we left off. As I stated before, there is a traitor in our midst."

"What evidence do you have of this?" Theodora asked warily.

"This young man is a descendant of the Lady Aquitaine," Mom said placing her hand on Leif's shoulder. "He overheard his mother and the head of his house speaking of a recent attack on the Le Fey estates. What I have learned from him gives me reason to believe she was behind the attack, and that she is consorting with Jonas Talman and Josef Mengele."

"Florette, what do you say to these accusations?" Xiu said, but there was no reply.

"Florette?" Xiu repeated looking around the chamber.

"Forget it sister, she's gone," Matoaka said with a shake of her head.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Gna said with a smug grin on her face.

Suddenly, the doors to the chamber burst open and a figure flew through the air and landed at Mom's feet. A brief moment later Hervor strode in accompanied by my father.

"This one hath attempted to flee," Hervor muttered blandly.

"Florette, so nice of you to join us," Mom said kneeling down next to the woman.

"Sister Aquitaine, you stand accused of orchestrating an attack on a fellow member of the Seidskati. What do you have to say to this?" Theodora asked glaring down at Florette.

"It was necessary," she said quietly.

"So then you admit your involvement?"

The Lady Aquitaine's lips twitched and she opened her mouth as if to speak, but instead she leapt to her feet and ran right for me. There was a blur of motion as Eva stepped in, and suddenly Florette was on the ground, convulsing and clutching at her throat.

"You alright?" Eva asked, turning to face me.

"Yeah, th—," I started to say, but stopped short when I felt bile rise in my throat at the sight of the dead body. "That was close. How the hel can you move so fast?"

Eva shrugged, but I could see the haunted look in her eyes. "I was trained to always be ready."

"Bryn, are you alright?" I heard Mom ask and it took me a second to realize she was talking to me. I still wasn't used to being called by my new name.

"Oh just crenking peachy! Why the hel is everyone after me? Why the frizz am I so damned important?"

"They fear thee. They know not the reason for which thou wert conceived," Hervor muttered coming to stand a few feet away.

"Yeah? Them and me both!" I growled, rounding on her.

"Mother mayhap..." Heime muttered leaving his sentence incomplete.

Hervor sighed and held her hand up, "Mayhap 'tis time. Brynhilde, 'tis given unto thee to complete a bold task," Hervor said, staring at me with that familiar weird gleam in her eyes.

"What sort of task?"

"When the eve of the final battle is upon us, thou art to descend into Helheim and deliver Odin and the other fallen gods back into the world of the living."

The silence that followed was so absolute, I could hear the beat of my own heart. I didn't so much as move a muscle, I could only stare at Hervor in disbelief. Of all the people in Midgard I had been born for this purpose, but I couldn't quite wrap my head around it. It didn't make any sense, I mean, yeah I had enormous magic power, but I kind of doubted I'd be able to gain enough control of it in time for it to do me any good. Wasn't there someone else, someone better suited for the task? Didn't it make more sense for one of the goddesses to make the trip?

"This has to be some sort of mistake," Mom said finally, breaking the silence.

"'Tis no mistake, Seidkona," Hervor muttered quietly averting her eyes as if ashamed to meet my mother's gaze. "'Tis Brynhilde's destiny to undertake this journey."

"But why me?!" I asked staring at her wide-eyed.

"Frigg hath foreseen it," Hervor said with a sad smile.

"There's something you're holding back, isn't there?"

Hervor nodded, "Aye, child."

"And you're not going to tell me are you?"

"Nay, I cannot," Hervor said as tears started to roll down her face.

"Shit, you've got some nerve, lady," I growled.

"You mean to say, that this girl is meant to rescue the dead gods from hel? No living mortal, or goddess for that matter, has managed to pass through the gates of Hel. What makes this child so special?" a new voice spoke incredulously.

I blinked and looked around. With everything that I had happened I'd completely forgotten we had an audience. I looked up at the woman. She was really young-looking to be a member of the Seidskati, and I thought she did look sort of familiar. Then my eyes grew wide as I realized who she was, Marianna de Clisson, the daughter of Olivia and current

head of House De Clisson.

"The elf spoke correctly. This girl is the only one who stands any chance of bringing our male counterparts back from Helheim," Freya added.

I could hardly believe my ears. I was the only one who stood a chance? What made me so special?

"And how is she to accomplish this task?" Theodora growled.

"I can't believe I'm about to say this, but I may have the answer," Mom said quietly.

The soft glow of magic surrounded my mother as a swirling cyclone of wind magic shot out the council chambers carrying her voice with it, "Daniella, bring her in."

A moment later Daniella appeared followed closely by my grandmother, who was carrying a cloth sack slung over her shoulder. Mom hurried over to Gramor and grabbed the sack. She upended the bag and out fell an old warhammer.

"I made a bargain with Eitri the dwarf for information. As part of that deal he agreed to give me a weapon. I had no idea what sort of weapon that would be until I sent my mother to retrieve it," Mom muttered quietly.

"Eitri?!" Theodora gasped. "The same Eitri that forged Mjölfnir with his brother Brokk?"

"The same," Mom muttered quietly.

"But that would mean..." Xiu muttered trailing off.

"It means, sister that it's a very good bet that this hammer is Mjölfnir," Mom said staring back at Xiu.

"The hammer is Mjölfnir. I haven't seen it in eons, but I would recognize it anywhere. Brokk and Eitri's work is unmistakable," Gna spoke up.

"Even if it is Thor's hammer, I don't see what good having it will do. It is written that only a god may wield the power of Mjölfnir," Theodora said.

"Actually," Gna said folding her arms across her chest. "That's not entirely true. Only a god may harness its full potential, but anyone may wield the hammer. Of course, a powerful vattir such as a princess of the royal Elven house, would be able to wield Mjölfnir to near its full potential."

I felt a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach at the realization that the goddess meant me. I hadn't even thought about what my relation to Hervor meant, but my transformation had left me female, which meant I was a damn princess. Just frizzing great.

"Forgive me goddess, but who are you referring to?" Marianna asked.

"She means me. I'm a half-elf. Hervor is my grandmother," I said staring up at Marianna with wide eyes.

"Is this true?" Xiu asked staring down at me with a thoughtful expression on her face.

"It is true, Seidkona. The child is my daughter," Heime spoke up.

"Sister le Fey, I'm assuming you were aware of your child's parentage?"

"Of course, sister," Mother said.

"And you did not see fit to make us aware of this?"

"No, Xiu, I did not. I wasn't sure who I could trust, just as I wasn't sure whether I could trust the Seidskati with the information regarding the coming of Ragnarok," Mom said staring up at her with a look of defiance.

"Is there anything else you haven't told us?" Theodora asked with a weary sigh.

"Well, there is one more thing," Mom said with a mischievous grin.

"And that would be?"

"You probably ought to know about my army," Mom replied.

"Your WHAT?!" Theodora asked staring at my mother with wide-eyed shock.

"I wasn't sure if I could count on the backing of the Seidskati when the time came. So with the help of a former associate of Jonas Talman, I began quietly amassing the forces I would need to help fend off the Jotun," Mom said, staring up at the ancient woman.

"How have you managed to do this without our knowledge?"

"My associate is very skilled at what he does," Mom said with a knowing smile.

"Sister, this is no laughing matter. Do have any idea of the magnitude of what you have done?!" Theodora spat out angrily.

"I am sure sister Le Fey is fully aware of the implications, Theodora. It is a waste of time to argue over Aryanna's conduct. She has taken steps in preparation for the final battle with the Jotun. As far as I'm concerned she is above reproach," Matoaka said suddenly.

"I am inclined to agree," Marianna de Clisson said her voice barely audible from across the room.

"Regardless, something of this magnitude must be put to vote," Xiu said with a weary sigh.

"Agreed. But what shall we vote on, sisters?" Theodora asked with a scowl on her face.

"Oh, I have a few ideas," Mom said with a smile.

"Wait! Shouldn't we test the hammer? Assuming it really is Mjölfnir, shouldn't we know if the girl can wield it or not?" Motoaka asked suddenly.

"Aye, methinks that be prudent," Hervor nodded with a sage smile.

"Bryn, come over here," Mom muttered, staring at me with a look of concern on her face.

I walked over to where the hammer was resting on the ground and shook my head, "What do I do?"

"Pick it up. See if anything happens," Mom muttered squeezing my shoulder gently.

I nodded and bent over to pick up Mjölfnir, and nearly dropped it when it started to shake and quiver. Lightning shot up my arm and I could feel the power of the hammer flow through me. When I first picked up the hammer, the haft was far too wide for me to fit my hand around it, but with a blink of an eye the hammer shrunk and became the perfect size for my hands.

"Whoa! Talk about a rush! So... what do I do now?!" I gasped.

"Try throwing it," my grammor suggested.

"Okay, here goes nothing," I muttered and tossed the hammer into the air above me.

I wasn't really ready for what happened next. There was a sudden flash of light as the hammer transformed into a bolt of lightning and shot into the roof of chamber, then it returned to its original form and fell back to the ground. I dove away, afraid that the hammer would hit me, but instead it just sort of hovered there in front of my face.

"Holy frizz," I muttered staring at Mjölfnir in awe as I reached out to grab it out of the air.

I looked up at the ceiling where the hammer had struck and felt my jaw drop as I realized the hammer had punched a huge hole in the roof of the dingha. "I guess that's yes on whether I can use this thing."

"It's settled then," Mom muttered her voice full of awe.

There was a call for votes, and the endless arguing and debate started. After what seemed like hours they finally made their decision. I was accepted as an initiate as a Spellbinder, the council would declare war on the Sons of Odin, Loki, and the Jotun, the Council of the Seidkona would be called together and all magic users down to the lowliest Charmer would be summoned to appear. It was rare for the Council of the Seidkona to be called together. Generally the Seidskati saw fit to rule on matters without input from the greater magic community. Of course, the really amazing part was that they agreed to call together all magic

users. As far as I knew, such a thing had never been done.

They even voted to meet with the leaders of the world and ask for their help. I highly doubted any of that would have been possible without the presence of Gna and Freya. I mean, almost everyone in the Seidskati hated Mom and believed her to have usurped the Le Fey legacy. With the goddesses present they had no choice but to accept the truth that Ragnarok was coming and that Frigg had chose my mother as her champion.

And of course, Mom mentioned sending envoys to various Vattir, including the exiled álfar tribes and the Dvergar Conclave. Eva's name was put forward and the Seidskati agreed to send her as an ambassador to the various exiled elven tribes.

Finally, it was over and I let out a sigh of relief as we turned to leave. I just wished I could escape the feeling that I was being led like a lamb to the slaughter.



Eirdag, the seventh of Morsugur

Okay, well where should I start? My mind is seriously frizzed up right now. I'm really freaking out about all this Ragnarok business, but it's not just Ragnarok that's getting to me. It's Eva, Mom, and everything. The worst part is Leif, I can't get him out of my head since he kissed me. Yeah, apparently I'm attracted to guys now. Yeah, that's right I only finished changing into a girl yesterday, and already I'm crushing on my best friend!

And there was Eva, I mean don't get me wrong, I'm still crazy about her, but I keep finding myself drifting off and fantasizing about making out with Leif. Goddesses, what the hel is wrong with me? I think my transformation is messing with my head. Somehow I think Hervor has something to do with it. Although what she would stand to gain by making me attracted to guys is beyond me.

Then there was the bond that Eva and I shared. She was always there in the back of my head and I wasn't sure if she was a permanent occupant or not. I really needed to talk to her, but I'd kind of been avoiding her. Okay, yeah I'm just going to go find her, this is ridiculous.

Later...



I found Eva pretty easily, as she spent almost all her time out in the gardens. I think she liked it out there even more than I do.

"Hey," I muttered quietly.

"You've been avoiding me," she said quietly.

"Yeah, I have."

"You're feeling guilty," she said matter-of-factly. I didn't even need to ask how she knew. It was pretty obvious she had sensed my emotions through our weird bond.

"Eva, what happened? Why are we connected like this? Why can I feel your emotions?"

I detected a faint trace of amusement as she answered, "All elves possess the ability to link ourselves with others. Dark elves use that ability to control and manipulate others. Light elves generally use it for much more benign purposes, usually as a marriage bond."

"Marriage bond?" I coughed staring at her wide eyed.

Eva threw her head back and fell into a fit of hysterical laughter, "Don't worry. This doesn't mean we're married."

"Eva, there's something I need to tell you."

"You're attracted to your friend Leif."

"How did you know?"

"Do you really need to ask?" she asked giving me a pointed look.

I could feel her emotions through the bond and I wasn't sure what to make of them. There were a whole slew of emotions half of which seemed to contradict the others. There was jealousy mingled with fondness, amusement mingled with possessiveness and strangely enough, there was even a bit of guilt.

"Eva, I want to be with you. I don't want to feel this way about Leif, but this new body of mine doesn't seem to understand that."

"Elves are sexual creatures, much more so than humans. Those of us that actually try to suppress our urges have a much more difficult time of it than a human would. Since your changes, you have taken on many elven traits. I think this sudden attraction to your friend is probably due to your elven side gaining dominance." She traced her fingers across my cheek.

"It bothers you that I'm attracted to Leif, doesn't it?" I asked. With the link we shared it wasn't really necessary, since I already knew how she felt, but I really felt like we should talk it out.

Eva nodded, smiling sadly, "I don't want to share you."

I stared at Eva, not really sure what to say. She couldn't honestly believe that I would take Leif as a second lover as she seemed to be suggesting, or maybe she meant just that. I never got the chance to ask her to clarify as she spoke first, "I'm leaving tonight."

"Eva—"

"Ragnarok is so close. Your mother wishes me to leave as soon as possible. If I can convince the exiled elves to join us then they'll need time to prepare."

"So you're really going then?"

Eva pursed her lips, "This is a chance for me to do some good. If I can convince at least some of the exiled tribes to join the fight maybe it will negate some of my own transgressions."

"Eva, you're not the same person as you were," I muttered, touching the palm of my hand to her cheek.

"That's where you're wrong. I've changed in so many ways, but a part of me will always be that twisted creature that almost killed you," she muttered smiling sadly.

"Eva—"

"Good bye, Bryn. I love you," she muttered with a sad smile. Then in moments she gone.

"I love you too," I muttered as she left, but she didn't give any indication she had heard me.



PART 6

Vordag, the eighth of Morsugur

I've been holing myself in my room doing my best to avoid Leif. Now that Eva's gone things between us have gotten even more awkward. Mom and practically everyone else is out making preparations for Ragnarok. It was pretty difficult to avoid him, seeing as he seemed to appear every time I rounded a corner. Of course until a few hours ago neither one of us had anything to do.

That changed when I was approached by Nick Flint.

"Hey, kid."

I looked up to find the former revolutionary leaning against the doorframe. He had his arms folded across his chest, a smirk on his face.

"Mr. Flint" I said completely surprised by his sudden appearance.

"You can call me, Nick," he said with a smile that didn't quite touch his eyes.

"Hey, I meant to say something earlier, but thanks for your help with Mengele. I mean if you hadn't showed up, who knows what would have happened."

"Don't mention it, kid," he muttered, a dark look briefly passing across his face and fading just as quickly.

There was an awkward silence as I stared at Nick, trying to figure out what I should say.

nick finally broke the silence. "Look kid, your mother asked me to oversee your training."

"Training?" I muttered staring up at him blankly.

"Ragnarok is coming, and from the sounds of it you're going to play a pretty damned important part in the coming battle. We don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to need every spare minute in order to make a decent fighter out of you."

"Fighter? Me?"

Flint let out a slight chuckle and shook his head, "Things get pretty sticky in the middle of a battle. You might find yourself alone, with no one to defend you. A little training can take you a long way."

"What about Mjölfnir?"

"My experience is with modern weaponry. Your mother has arranged for his lordship the Prince Heime to help train you with the hammer," he said with a smirk and the slightest hint of sarcasm.

"And my magical training?"

Flint shrugged, "I don't know anything about that. You'll have to talk with your mother. I'm sure she has made arrangements."

I stared at him for a moment then nodded, "Well I guess we'd better get started."



I had no idea that it was even there, but it turned out that there was a huge underground bunker under the Le Fey estates. Apparently, Mom had hired some dvergar to dig the place out. I couldn't believe she could have done so without anyone knowing. The chamber looked every bit the training center that it was intended to be. There were mats in the floor, a track for running that ringed the outside of the room, as well as what appeared to be some sort of obstacle course. Yeah, the chamber was big.

"Hey Bryn," Leif grinned as we moved toward the center of the chamber.

"What's he doing here?" I growled, rounding on Flint.

"The kid wants to fight," Flint shrugged.

"Is there a problem?" A new voice said. I'd been so focused on Leif that I hadn't even realized that there were others present.

The speaker turned out to be an unfamiliar face and I knew almost immediately he was a light elf. Standing there just to his side was my father.

"Well met, my daughter. 'Tis good to see thee," Heime said tilting his head with a smile on his face.

"Who's this?" I asked staring at the stranger. Goddesses why couldn't I keep my eyes off him?

"I am Garik, son of Arik. It is a honor to meet you, Princess Brynhilde," he said with a flourish and a bow.

Okay, I probably should have expected that, but I really wasn't used to the whole royal treatment.

"Garik, stand!" Heime said with a shake of his head.

"As you wish, Prince Heime," Garik said, standing back on his feet.

"How come you don't speak like Heime?" I asked suddenly realizing that Garik's vocabulary had a distinctly modern sound.

"The boy is very young. He learned to speak thy language but recently," Heime replied.

I met Garik's gaze and he flashed a smile as his eyes seemed to linger on my breasts. I felt my cheeks burn and quickly turned away. Just what I needed, another damn guy trying to woo me. As if Leif weren't enough.

"Well kids, let's get started," Flint said suddenly, I was glad for the distraction.

"I need to know what I'm working with. Let's start you off by running laps," Flint added.

I'd never been much of a runner before my changes, so it was pretty surprising when we started off and I shot past Leif with almost no effort. He'd always been the more physically fit of the two of us and I ended up smoking him pretty badly. Garik, on the other hand, matched me pace for pace, and it quickly turned into a race between the two of us. I'm just glad I'd thought to change into an exercise bra before coming down to the bunker.

I don't know how many laps we ran before Flint stopped us, but Garik wound up out-pacing me by a very thin margin. Leif was about a lap and a half behind, and he was breathing pretty heavily when he finally joined us.

"I'm impressed," Flint said folding his arms across his chest. "I've trained hundreds of men and you two seem to be in unusually good shape."

"Okay, what the frizz, venn? Since when can you run like that?" Leif said still panting.

"Elves lack many of the physical weaknesses of humans," Garik said, staring at the Leif with a look of contempt.

Leif scowled back at Garik, but lost his chance to respond when Flint suddenly cut in. "Alright why don't you drop down and give me thirty push ups."

Garik stared at Flint with a blank look, "What are push ups?"

"Watch and learn," Leif said dropping down with a triumphant smile.

"Ah, we call them risa-rata," Garik muttered suddenly and dropped down to the ground.

I shook my head and growled a curse before dropping down and started doing push-ups. Both Garik and I finished before Leif, despite his head-start. Leif glared at Garik, but didn't say anything. The two had only barely just met and I could tell that there was going to be trouble. Leif could get really competitive, especially when there was a girl was concerned. It just made it all that much worse that I happened to be the girl they were competing over.

Flint had us do jumping jacks, sit-ups and chin-ups next. Garik of course, had to be shown what each exercise entailed, but once he saw Leif and me doing it, he muttered some strange name and jumped right in. When we had finally completed the chin-ups, Flint called everyone to a stop and eyed us each with an appraising look.

"Well, since you two seem to be in such amazing shape, I'll be focusing more on your combat training. Leif, I'm going to have to push you hard if I'm going to get you into good enough shape."

Garik cast Leif a smug grin, then turned his attention to Flint, "There will be little need for me to receive any of your training, Mr. Flint. I have been training for Ragnarok for nearly the entirety of my life. I have served as a member of the royal guard for the past two years."

"Then what are you doing here, kid?"

"General Flint," Heime interjected suddenly. "I brought the boy to duel as partner for my daughter. If thou wouldst allow, mayhap, I think to begin her training."

Flint nodded, "I'll give you a few hours. Aryanna requested I train her with the Hyrklufar rifles."

"Very well," Heime said with a very slight bow of his head.

We separated, Leif went with Flint and Garik and I went with my father. Heime produced an old war hammer and an odd sort of wooden sword.

"They've been enchanted. The hammer should feel like you're handling Mjölfnir but it has been softened to prevent its impact from hurting anyone. The practice sword has been enhanced to prevent breaking and to prevent serious injury," Garik explained.

"Is it dwarven made?" I asked as Heime handled me the hammer.

"Nay, 'twas forged by elven hands," Heime replied quietly.

I tested the hammer out and it found that like Mjölfnir, it felt unnaturally light in my hands. I was suddenly struck by just how strange my current situation was. The very idea that I would

be training to use a war hammer was absolutely ridiculous. I dropped to my knees and fell into a fit of hysterical laughter.

"Brynhilde?" Heime asked with a concerned look on his face.

"I—uh—Doesn't this all seem strange to you? I mean, me learning to use a war hammer? Goddesses, just look at me!"

"'Tis as it must be," Heime muttered sadly.

I shook my head with a loud sigh, "Let's just get started."

Heime nodded and asked Garik and me to stand across from one another. I half-expected Heime to have us start dueling it out there and then, but instead, he began with a primer about footing and form. After that, with Garik's help, he began to show me some of the more basic moves. There was a lot more to fighting with a war hammer than I ever would have guessed, but it was still a weapon of brute force whereas the sword was a weapon that required a lot more finesse or at least that's what my father said.

I don't know how long we were at it when Flint finally stopped us, but I was just as glad it was over. I looked over to where Leif was waiting and I felt a tinge of guilt when I saw him collapsed in an exhausted heap on the ground. While Garik and Heime had been training me, Flint'd had Leif run the obstacle course. Flint hadn't exactly been kind or gentle either. Whenever Leif showed signs of lagging Flint became every bit the stereotypical drill instructor; yelling at the top of his lungs and doling out curses and insults.

"Alright, boys and girls, it's time for target practice," Flint muttered as he approached us.

Flint lead us out the practice room, down a corridor and into a much smaller room which had been setup as a shooting range. In the corner was a rack of rifles. I walked over and picked up one of the guns and could feel my eyes widened as I looked it over.

"This is a dwarven fire-cleaver, isn't it?"

Flint nodded, "Your mother was able to procure a large quantity of them."

"How large?"

"A couple hundred thousand," he shrugged.

"A couple hundred thousand? Holy frizz, venn! Your Mom's been busy," Leif whistled.

"Yeah, I noticed," I muttered, absently tracing my hands across the rune markings on the barrel and stock of the Hyrklufar rifle. It was the sort of weapon every police officer, soldier and marksman dreamed of owning, but few ever would. Mom had managed to stockpile a massive number of dwarven weapons, where no one else had ever been able to get hold of more than a few hundred at a time.

I knew a little about guns. I'd even learned how to fire them a few years back, but this was a whole different class of gun. The fire-cleaver made the hunting rifle I'd used look like a peashooter. It was a weapon meant to do one thing, kill, and it did it very well. Humans may have invented firearms, but dwarves had perfected them.

It made me wonder just what my role in the coming events would be. Hervor claimed I was meant to free the dead gods from Hel's clutches, but there had to be more to it than that. Otherwise, why change me into a girl? I could just as easily wield Mjölfnir as a guy, and Hervor had as much as admitted there were things she was holding back.

"You listening, kid?" Flint asked suddenly, and I realized that he'd been speaking the whole time and I'd been completely oblivious.

"What? Oh, I was just thinking," I said quietly.

He folded his arms across his chest. "This is too important for you to be daydreaming, kid."

I shook my head and let out a tired sigh, "Let's just get this over with."

Flint went on to show us how the guns worked. On the surface all the basic components looked similar to human-made guns, but when you looked further you started to find things that seemed a bit out of place. The ammunition was probably the best example of this. Like many weapons it loaded with a cartridge, but what was unusual was the shape of the cartridge and the bullets inside. The cylindrical cartridge was roughly two inches long, had a diameter about the same size, and was loaded with really odd cork-shaped bullets. Flint explained that many human arms manufacturers had attempted to duplicate the dwarven made weapons, but none had been successful. The ammunition could be reproduced easily enough, but the metals that the dvergar used to make the guns couldn't be found anywhere on Midgard.

Heime and Garik both knew next to nothing about guns, and seemed interested in learning to fire them, so Nick handed us each a set of earmuffs and got us started with the guns. At first, Garik and Heime had difficulty, but it didn't take them long to adjust to the unfamiliar weapons and start hitting their targets each time with near pinpoint accuracy. As for Leif and me, Flint said that our aim was so bad that we couldn't hit a drunken troll.

Flint didn't yell at any of us like he had Leif earlier, but he was much nicer to me than anyone else. It made me wonder if Flint was giving me preferential treatment because of who my mother was, or maybe it wasn't that at all. Maybe he was treating me differently because I was now a girl, or was there something else? Flint really didn't strike me as the type to favor anyone, especially not for personal gain. There to be some reason for him to be behaving that way, didn't there?

By the time we finally finished, it was getting pretty late, so I made my way to my bedroom. When I pushed in the light button, I stifled a scream as I realized I wasn't alone in the bedroom. Hervor was sitting cross-legged in the dead center of my bed. Her eyes were closed and she had a look of deep concentration on her face. Abruptly, her eyelids snapped open and she smiled as she turned her head to look me in the eyes.

"What the hel? You scared the frizz out of me!" I growled at her.

"Apologies, granddaughter. I intended not to unsettle thee."

"What exactly do you think you're doing on my bed?"

"I await thy return."

"Why?"

"I spake with thy mother and received her consent to train thee in the ways of seidh."

"What? Why?"

"The methods in which I may train thee are more effective than those available to humans," she responded with a cock of her head.

"Look, I'm really tired. Can we maybe talk about this tomorrow?" I replied with a tired sigh.

"Nay, haste be required so that thou art prepared when the final battle come."

"I can barely keep my eyes open. Can't it wait another damn day?" I spat glaring at her.

"Child, I understand thy resentment, but thou must learn to use thy magic. Time doth grow short," she replied, sliding across my bed and climbing to her feet.

"I just want some sleep."

Hevor smiled sympathetically then she came over to place her hand on my cheek. Ice-cold chills shot through my body and I let out a loud gasp as I felt my sleepiness and fatigue fade away.

"Holy frizzing hel! Ask me before you do anything like that!"

"Curb thy tongue! Such language becometh not an elven princess," Hervor muttered in response.

"Don't even go there, Hervor. You have no right to tell me what to do!" I folded my arms across my chest and glared at my grandmother.

Hevor smiled sadly and nodded, "Shall we begin?"

"You're not going to let up, are you?"

"Nay, Brynhilde. I will not."

I hung my head and gritted my teeth, "Does this mean Mom won't be taking me on as an

apprentice?"

"'Tis for thy mother to decide," Hervor said, reaching up to touch my cheek again.

I could see the soft glow of magic surround Hervor, and by the time I realized what Hervor was doing it was already too late. The world shattered into a million pieces as I lost focus of everything around me. I could feel Hervor in my mind as I realized what she was doing; she was forming a link like I had inadvertently done with Eva. I wanted to scream and make her stop, but there was nothing I could do. I was powerless as the magic bound us together.

Gradually my vision returned and I realized that I'd fallen to my knees. I let out a gasp and stared up at my grandmother in shocked disbelief. Just as with Eva, I could feel all her emotions in the back of my head and I had no doubts that Hervor could feel mine as well.

"Thou oughtst have told me that thou linkedst thyself with another," she muttered quietly.

"What the frizzling hel is wrong with you!" I screamed shaking with rage.

"Brynhilde—"

"Just shut the fuck up, Hervor! I don't want to hear it. You don't give a damn that I had a life before you came along, and you certainly don't give a damn that maybe I would have liked to have chosen my own path! This is my frizzling life, and you've screwed it all up. I didn't ask for any of this! I damn well didn't ask for a pair of these!" I yelled clutching at my breasts.

Hervor's eyes grew wide and she took a step back from me. I didn't stop to give her a chance to reply. "And what about Eva? I didn't intend for me and her to be bonded like that, but now she's stuck with you just like I am! Maybe if you had stopped to think about someone else for a change you might have realized that it was possible I was already bonded with Eva!"

"Thou understandest not. The bonds are separate. The girl and I share no link. I merely sense the link." Hervor said quietly.

"Oh, and that's supposed to make it all better?!"

"Nay, child."

I opened my mouth to speak, but then I really started to pay attention to the bond. Hervor may have looked calm and serene on the surface, but now that I could feel her emotions I knew that it was all just an act. She was plagued with self-doubt, a deep and abiding sadness, a nearly overwhelming guilt and strangely enough a stubborn unrelenting determination. I was struck by the power of her feelings and I couldn't believe she wasn't curled up in a ball sobbing her eyes out. For Frigg sakes, I was having trouble keeping them back and the emotions didn't even belong to me! Yeah, they were that powerful.

Ever since Eva had left, her emotions had been muddled almost as if they were somehow damped by the distance, but I could feel them rise up and touch me. Her worry for me and

as usual, a deep sense of love came over me and I reached out to her, doing my best to project reassurance and calm so that she would know that I was fine. And just like that Hervor's emotions didn't seem quite so overwhelming, I let out a sigh of relief as I looked at my grandmother.

"Why? Hervor? Why frizzing hel did you do that?!"

"'Twas necessary," she said as I felt guilt and remorse rise up and nearly overtake her.

Up until that moment I'd thought of Hervor as a cold manipulator who would do anything to ensure she achieved her goals, but I'd completely misjudged her. Yes, she had manipulated me, but she actually seemed to feel regret for what she had done.

"Why, damn you! Tell me!"

"I cannot. I have taken an oath. I am sorry, child," she said with a sad smile and guilt pouring out from the bond.

"An oath to who?"

"Frigg," she said, folding her arms across her chest.

And suddenly a lot of things that Hervor had done seem to make a bit more sense. It wasn't that she wouldn't tell me. It was that she literally couldn't. For an elf and nearly any other vattir, an oath had to be obeyed. If Hervor had sworn an oath, it couldn't be broken no matter how hard she tried. I made a mental note to watch what I said from then on out, I didn't know if I was bound by the same rules, but I really didn't want to find out the hard way.

"Shall we begin, Brynhilde?"

"Yeah, whatever." I muttered, doing my best to hold back my anger and resentment.

I didn't like what Hervor had done, but I knew that learning to control my powers would help me survive. I resented her for what she had done to me, but at the moment she was my best chance at getting through Ragnarok. It seemed fitting really, I was going to use her just like she had used been me.

"Very well child, let us begin," she said reaching up to touch my cheeks and the world shattered into a thousand pieces as I was lost to everything but the bond with Hervor.



Training with my grandmother turning out to be one of the weirdest experiences of my life. After she touched me the bond went into overdrive and the world around us just sort of faded away. There wasn't darkness, there wasn't light, there wasn't anything. Our consciousnesses were just there.

"What the hel?" I called out and I could hear my voice echo in a strange disjointed sort of way.

"Be not alarmed, child," Hervor's voice called out with the same disjointed echo.

"What's going on?"

"I created a bridge between thy consciousness and mine. In this place thou wilt be free of distraction."

"So, what do I do?"

"Thou shalt learn to silence thy mind."

"How?"

"Worry not, child. I shall show thee."

Hervor led me through several exercises to help me empty my mind. In one, she asked me imagine a rose blooming and to let go of everything as the petals pushed out. In another, she told me to imagine a mountain stream and imagine that I was a pebble resting under the water. It took me a while, but I was finally able to let go as I fell into a sort of calm serenity that felt absolutely amazing. I could have stayed like that for hours if it hadn't been for Hervor, who broke the link between us thus returning me back to the real world.

"Thou didst well, child," she beamed and I was more than a little surprised to feel her pride through our bond.

"I guess we're done then?" I asked.

"Indeed, now 'tis time for thee to rest," she muttered.

I realized then that whatever Hervor had done to energize me had worn off and I was dead tired.

"Uh, well I guess it's good night then."

"Good night, Brynhilde. May thy dreams bring thee peace and contentment," Hervor muttered and swept out of my bedroom with a swirl of her robes.



Vordag, the fifteenth of Morsugur

Well, it's been a week. I haven't had much spare time lately what with all the training. Eva's

still gone and it's been pretty hard not having her around, especially with Garik and Leif competing over me. A part of me really likes all the attention, and that really scares the hell out of me. I'm trying to resist it, but this new body is changing me, and that scares me more than anything else.

My naming ceremony is today. Mom is pretty paranoid that Jonas Talman or one of his allies will crash the party, so she's taking some pretty extreme precautions to insure that if anyone attacks they can't touch us. I'm a little fuzzy on what she has planned, but I do know Hervor is in on it.

Well, I guess I better go... It's time for me to get ready. I'm just so excited. Yay! Isn't sarcasm awesome?



So... The naming ceremony turned out to be a major suckfest. Well, really that's an understatement, but I'd rather just tell what happened...

I'd been to a few of my cousins' naming ceremonies so I pretty much knew what to expect, but it was still pretty uncomfortable for me. Especially since Mom had a team of beauticians doll me up, and the dress certainly didn't help. I looked every bit the elven princess that I was. I stood around greeting guests as was customary for the initiate being named. I only caught glimpses of my family and friends, but I knew they were all there, including Hervor, Heime, and Leif. Even Garik was there, but I'd hardly call him a friend, more of an irritation really. There were also a few familiar faces, various Spellbinders I'd met over the years and various members of the Seidskati like Elizabeth Bathory, Xiu and Matoaka. Mom and I stood around greeting guests until everyone was seated, then finally, Mom led me to the center of the room.

"Neil Gandalf Steenburg, my beloved son who through unfortunate circumstances has become my daughter. You have sought admittance into the Council of the Seidkona and have been found worthy to enter our ranks. Thus, I have chosen to take you on as my apprentice. Like me, you've had this mantle unfairly thrust upon you. You have trials ahead of you the like of which few can imagine. My hope is that you may find happiness despite what has been done to you. I name you, Brynhilde Athilda le Fey. Brynhilde a name of your own choosing, and Athilda after our ancestor, my mentor and dear friend. You are my pride and joy. I have given you the name of a legend because I believe that like her you are destined for greatness. Make me proud."

Mom reached out to touch a lock of my hair, there was a bright flash of light and I knew she had just laid the mark of an apprentice on me. The lock had been turned a reflective silver-gray and will mark me as an apprentice until I complete the trials to become a full Spellbinder.

It happened so suddenly, that it was over almost before I knew what was happening. I didn't even have time to duck as the knife came soaring toward me and... went right through me. I'd known all along, but Mom and I weren't really in the same place as the guests. Our

images were being projected from the estates. Anyone who tried to touch our illusory figures, would believe they were touching solid flesh, but would in fact be groping at air. No spellbinder, my mother included, had the power to create such a complex illusion, but Hervor did. Once my grandmother created the illusion it was a simple matter of passing the weave along to my mother. Holding the illusion took a lot less energy than creating it.

There was a scream from the crowd and a flash of light, and one of the guests tumbled to the ground in a heap.

"Dammit! I hate being right," I heard my mom curse as the image of the reception hall faded away.



I looked around and found that Mom and I were back in the dining room of the estates.

"Frizz, how many times are they going to try and kill me?" I asked bitterly.

Mom smiled sadly and placed her hand on my shoulder, "They'll only stop if we let them succeed."

"Well that's comforting."

"Lady Aryanna!" A voice said urgently from the doorway.

"Yes, what is it Meredith?" Mom asked glancing back at the woman.

"There's been an attack, it's all over the news. Vágburg has been leveled, and the Sons of Odin are claiming responsibility."

"Goddesses!" I muttered in disbelief.

There were hundreds of thousands of people living in Vágburg, if they had leveled it they'd either gotten hold of some really powerful military-grade weapons or it had been done with magic. Either way it was scary as frizzing fuck that the Sons of Odin had that sort of power at their disposal.

"H-how?" Mom muttered.

"I think it's better if you watch it for yourself," Meredith replied after a moments hesitation.

Meredith led us out of the dinning room then down the hall to the nearby media room. The teleprojector was already running as we stepped through the door. Real-time images of the wreckage were being displayed, while a reporter explained that rescue efforts had already begun. They spent a few minutes on this. Then the screen suddenly flashed to a man sitting at a desk.

"For those of you just joining us, a shocking and unprecedented attack has been per—" suddenly the image flickered away and was replaced by a tall gray-haired man dressed in full military fatigues.

"People of Nyrland. I am Jonas Talman, the leader of the Sons of Odin. We have gained control of all teleprojector communications so that I might speak with you concerning our recent attack on the city of Vágburg." he smiled darkly.

"This attack could not have been successful had it not been for the efforts of the beautiful Josefina Mengele, who has perfected her formula to grant any man the use of magic."

"Holy frizz!" I gasped.

A smoking hot woman in a lab coat appeared next to the image of Talman. It was obviously Mengele, and 'she' had completed her transformation. She looked just like her female half when I'd seen her before, but with one major exception. Her hair was now the same auburn as my own. My blood must have been responsible for her change in hair color. I shuddered as I was struck by a sudden thought. What if it had effected her in other ways? What if it had made her more powerful?

Mengele had changed. She looked more controlled, and composed, but I thought I could still see the spark of insanity in her eyes. When she spoke she sounded sane, but that was probably because she was actually referring to herself as 'I' rather than her usually 'we'.

"As my associate Jonas Talman has been so kind to point out, the formula may grant any man the use of magic. Unfortunately, the formula has another effect on the body, it transforms any man who takes it into a woman. I have injected a number of volunteers with the formula, and each one of them has been successfully transformed."

"Norns," Mom muttered, her face suddenly going very pale.

"Our attack on the city would not have been possible without Josefina's formula. We all know what can happen when a Spellbinder loses control of her powers. We sent several of our volunteers to Vágburg where each one of the new women unleashed her magic in key locations within the city, thus causing the near total annihilation of the populace," Talman continued.

"We regret the loss of life, but it has become very obvious that the Spellbinders will never give up their stranglehold on this country without some encouragement. Although great strides have been made in the Men's Rights Movement in the last few years, the upper class will always be composed of Spellbinders. Men will continue to be second-class citizens and this is something the Sons of Odin will not stand for. So this message goes out to those in power. Step down from your positions, disband the government, and the Seidskati or we will destroy one Nyrlander city every week. It's your choice. This is will be your only warning," Talman muttered, then the image flickered, returning back to the image of a stunned looking anchorman.

Mom looked pissed, and I mean pissed with a capital 'P'. I'd never seen her so mad. She

raised her hands and a huge fireball shot out from her fingers completely annihilating the teleprojector. "That bastard is going to pay!" she said between gritted teeth.

"Mom, what are you going to do?"

She shook her head and let out a long sigh as much of the anger drained away from her face. "He has to know that his demands will never be met. He's doing this to foment chaos. I need to find Elizabeth, and the rest of the Seidskati. We'll need to issue a response to this." Mom shook her head, then with a gust of wind she was gone.



Siffendag, the sixteenth of Morsugur

The media has had a field day since Jonas Talman's pronouncement to the nation and the destruction of Vágburg. And just about the entire country is in an uproar. People were already starting to demand that the government and the Seidskati give in to Talman. If only they knew what was at risk. As much as I hated the old bats, the Seidskati would be needed if we were to defeat the Jotun.

Just hours after Talman had hijacked the airwaves, the government issued their response, vowing to hunt down Talman and bring him to justice, but made it very clear that they would never give in to his demands. The Seidskati has issued their own response, saying much the same thing, and as they did so they took the opportunity to call together the Council of the Seidkona and the world's magic users.



Laurdag, the eighteenth of Morsugur

I haven't been getting very much rest. My training takes up nearly all my time, and on top of my lessons with Hervor, Heime, Garik and Flint, I now have lessons with Mom too. Ever since my naming ceremony she insists that I train with her at least a few hours a day. Damn, I'm so tired.

I stumbled onto something I really wish I hadn't earlier today. I'd just gotten through my lessons with Mom and was on my way to the bunker to start lessons with Heime and Garik when I passed by one of the guest rooms. The light was on, the door wasn't fully latched and I could hear voices inside.

"Nick I'm scared," I heard a familiar voice speak out. It belonged to my Aunt Marion.

"I know, me too, babe," the voice of Flint answered back.

I felt my jaw drop, had Flint just called my aunt 'babe'? I could hardly believe my ears. Flint and Marion? The guy had to be old enough to be Marion's father! It just wasn't right! I knew Spellbinders and other magic users hooked up with younger men all the time, but I'd always thought that was creepy. The reverse was pretty creepy too. The thought of Heime and my mother just made me shudder.

Someone cleared their throat behind me and I turned around to find my father standing there with his arms folded across his chest. "Come daughter, 'tis time for thy lessons."

"Okay, uh—yeah, I was on my way, but I just—uh—," Oh frizz, what was I supposed to say? I hated not being able to lie. "You know what? Forget it. Let's just get down to the bunker."

"Very well," Heime said with his brows furrowed. He gave me a strange look, but didn't say anything else as we made our way down to the bunker.



Manadag, the twentieth of Morsugur

So I'm getting really worried about Sophie. I got a call from her today, but when I answered there was no one there. I've tried calling her back, but I haven't gotten any answer back. I talked to Leif about it, but as usual he wasn't much help.

Maybe it's nothing. Maybe her area just lost power. Yeah that's probably it. I really hope that's all it is...



Siffendag, the twenty-third of Morsugur

My hands are shaking just trying to write this. Yesterday was a game changer. If I had any doubts before they're now gone. I'm not going to sit by the sidelines and watch as the people I love fight and die. Goddesses, I'm going to do everything in my power to make the Son's of Odin and Mengele pay for what they've done. If only there was something I could have done, maybe Marion would still be alive.

I was in my bed, having one of those private moments that have been far too rare lately. I think I must have dozed off when it happened. The estates began to shake and quiver so strongly that my teeth started to chatter.

"What the hel?" I gasped, sitting bolt upright. I felt my eyes widen, then I jumped to my feet and sprang out the door.

I ran down the hall, turned a corner, found the nearest window and looked out. Fear flooded

through me and felt panic threaten to overtake me. I almost gave over to it, but that stubborn part of me I'd inherited from my mother refused to give in. I looked out the window again and clenched my fists. A ring of women were pounding at the estate with bright bursts of magical energy. They were soon joined by a massive mob of human soldiers and horrendously ugly black-skinned creatures who appeared from out of nowhere via wind-spell. Though I'd never seen them before I recognized the creatures as dark elves.

"Holy frizzing shit!" I cursed and ran back toward my room.

I grabbed my shoes by the bed and slipped them on. I hesitated for a moment, then I grabbed my journal off my dresser and took off down the hall toward the bunker. With the estate under attack it was the only logical place to go.

"Bryn!" A voice called suddenly from behind me. It was Marion.

"Aunt Mare, the estate is under attack. We have to get out of here!" I called over my shoulder.

"Goddesses!" I heard her call out then she was right behind me. "Where are you going?"

"The bunker!" I called back and slowed down a bit so that I didn't outpace her.

We'd just rounded a corner when we ran into Nick Flint, Garik and my father. All three were wielding dvergar fire-cleavers and were running right at us.

"This way! They've gotten through the shield. We need to find another route out!" Flint yelled once they'd gotten closer.

"Daughter, take the weapon," Heime spoke tossing me a fire-cleaver that had been strapped across his back.

"Has anyone seen Leif?" I asked grabbing the rifle out the air.

"We shall find thy friend. Worry not, daughter."

We were soon headed back the opposite direction. Marion took up the rear, holding up a spirit shield behind us as we fled. Human soldiers and dark elves were on our tails within moments, and it was only Marion's shield that kept them off us as we sped down the corridors. Soon several magic users joined our attackers and I could tell it was taking every ounce of Marion's willpower to keep the shield up.

"What about Mom and everyone else?" I yelled as we ran.

"Your mother made me promise I'd get you to safety. She says she'll find her own way out. Hurry! We don't have a lot of time!" Flint called back.

We rounded another corner and I almost ran right into Leif. "Come on!" I yelled back as I zoomed past him.

"What the frizz, venn? What's going on?" Leif called after me.

"The estate is under attack! We need to get the hel out of here is what the frizz is going on!" I yelled back between gritted teeth.

We rounded another corner and Flint suddenly called for us to stop.

"Human, why have we stopped? It's not safe for the princess for us to just be standing here." Garik said rounding on Nick.

"There's a passage here," Flint muttered glancing back at the soldiers pounding against Marion's protective barrier.

He stood there for a moment, his hands tracing across the wall, "Now if I can just remember..." he muttered trailing off.

"Oh, for hel sakes," I muttered stepping in and grabbed hold of a nearby sconce and pulled on it. The wall swung open and we found ourselves looking down a long flight of stairs.

"Where's that lead?" Leif asked breathlessly.

"Out," I muttered with a shake of my head.

"The strain! It's too much!" Marion suddenly called out and I could see her shield begin to quiver like Eva's had when Mom had forced her way through it in the mall.

"Come on!" Flint called. "We have to get out of here!"

I moved toward the entrance just as the shield collapsed and enemy fire came shooting out at us. I didn't even have time to think as I leapt through the entrance to the stairway. I fell head-first down the stairs before landing on my chest. I hurt like hel, but I shook off the pain, struggled to my feet and looked back just as Garik and Heime came hurtling through the doorway. Flint and Leif came through a moment later dragging Marion along with them.

"Hey you! The runes in the doorway! Activate them!" Flint screamed gesturing wildly at me.

I hesitated a moment before leaping at the doorway and latching hold of my magic. I'd never activated a rune before, but I knew from what I'd learned from Hervor that they could be activated with the slightest touch of the right magical element. I struggled against the whirlwind inside me and unloosed the tiniest bit of spirit magic on the rune. Bright blue light flooded the doorway as a spirit shield appeared in the empty space in front of me.

"We need to leave. That shield will not hold for long," Garik muttered staring at the barrier then back to me.

"Yeah, good idea," I agreed with a nod.

"Shit, venn..." Leif said trailing off.

I looked over to where Leif and Flint were huddled over Marion's body and felt my stomach clench as I realized something was very wrong. Flint had his hand gripped around Marion's and there was a sort of wild look to his eyes that I'd never seen there before. When I looked over at Marion I finally understood. Her entire chest was blackened and covered in sores and boils. Then there were her eyes... they looked empty. I scrambled over to where her body was laying and frantically checked for a pulse. There wasn't one.

"I'm sorry, venn. When her shield collapsed she took a huge blast to the chest," Leif muttered quietly.

"No, no, no!" I breathed feeling suddenly very angry. I wanted to destroy those fuckers who were responsible for killing my aunt.

I reached out to my magic and was ready to summon it when my bond with Eva suddenly kicked back into full gear. I felt her love and concern through the bond and I realized what I'd almost allowed myself to do. If I had loosed my magic in the narrow stairway, I probably would have killed us all.

"We need to get out of here." I forced back my anger and felt hot tears sting my cheeks.

"Aye," my father said nodding solemnly.

"Just—do me a favor. Don't leave her here."

"Of this thou hast my word."

I got back to my feet and staggered down the stairs and did my best to keep a clear mind. I had to get out of the estate alive. I owed Marion that much at least. I heard Heime and the others following me, but I couldn't bring myself to look back. Not if it meant looking into Marion's dead eyes again.



The passage took us down a long flight of stairs and through an even longer tunnel that led out back behind the estates into the forested section of the property. There were runes all along the inside of the tunnel to keep anyone from entering it, but they weren't there to prevent anyone from leaving, so we were able to exit with relative ease.

I stumbled out of the tunnel with tear filled eyes, still in shock from everything that had happened.

"Come on, we're not out of danger yet," Flint muttered with a distinctly bitter tone to his voice.

"General, mayhap 'twould be best if I lead," Heime said, placing a hand on Flint's shoulder

and smiling sympathetically.

"Do whatever the hel you want!" Flint yelled.

"Human, remember the signal," Garik muttered suddenly.

Without a word Flint pulled a small silver coin out of his pocket and tossed it up into the air. There was a bright flash of light that shot straight up into the air, soaring over fifty feet before fading away a few minutes later.

No one really spoke after that. Leif wrapped his arms around me and I clung to him as if my life depended on it. My father took up the lead with Marion's body still slung over his shoulder, and Garik walked a few feet behind him with a very slight frown on his beautiful face. Leif kept looking at me as if he wanted to say something, but couldn't find the words. As for Flint, he kept a distance from all of us, his face didn't display any emotion, but when I got a look into his eyes I could see a storm of despair brewing just under the surface.

We were walking through the forest away from the estates when we all heard a loud bang. I looked back and watched the Le Fey estate go up in flames. I felt my jaw drop as explosions rippled through the building. Then with one final great blast the building collapsed in on itself.

"It's done," Flint muttered.



"Thank Frigg," Daniella's voice said suddenly from out nowhere.

"Daniella!" I cried running right for her as she appeared out of the trees. I flung my arms around her and buried my face in her chest before she even knew what hit her.

"Bryn? What happened?" she asked after a slight pause.

"Oh, goddesses Daniella, she's gone. She's dead!" I cried hysterically.

"Oh, Norns. Is that... Marion?" I heard Daniella whisper.

"Aye," Heime responded.

"Come on, Bryn. Let's get you somewhere safe," Daniella muttered with a slight quiver to her voice as wind began to whip around the two of us and we went soaring into nothingness.



We reappeared in the bunker a few moments later. Daniella touched my shoulder, "I'll be right back," she muttered, then disappeared with a gust of wind.

I collapsed to my knees and let it all out. Marion was dead and it had happened so suddenly that my mind was still reeling. I'd seen her body and looked into her empty dead eyes, and I still couldn't believe she was really gone. Her death had been so abrupt. One moment she'd been alive; the next, dead.

I don't really remember much more after that, I know that Daniella took a few more trips to bring everyone back down to the bunker. She wasn't near as gifted with air magic as Mom so she wasn't able to bring everyone down at once like Mom would have been able to do.

The bunker was safe, since the only physical entrance had been destroyed. The only way in or out was via travel spell, and someone could only do that if they knew the bunker's exact location.

I pretty well let my grief take over, Marion was more than just my aunt, she was one of my best friends and her death had left an empty spot in my soul. Shortly after being brought down into the bunker I felt a pair of strong arms wrap around me and lift me from the ground. I looked up to see Leif gazing down at me and I buried my face in his shoulder as he carried me away.



PART 7

Manadag, the twenty-seventh of Morsugur

Well, it has been a few days... Marion's funeral was today. It was pretty typical as funerals go, but it hurt more than any I've ever been to. It was a private ceremony and somehow Mom managed to keep the location secret from both the media and the Sons of Odin.

Mom and Gramor have taken Marion's death really hard. Mom hides it pretty well, but I can see the pain in her eyes. I even caught her crying the other day. Daniella has been the rock upon which we've all leaned on. Marion's death has effected her just like the rest of us, but somehow she's stayed strong. Flint, hasn't been the same either. He's moody and snaps at the smallest things. He's been running poor Leif haggard in our training sessions.

Yesterday, Hervor pronounced that I was ready to move on to the next phase of my training. I don't quite understand how or why, but ever since I activated that rune when we were escaping the estates the magic comes more easily to me. Mom is amazed by my progress. She insists it's nothing short of miraculous. I've done in a few weeks what would take any other spellbinder's apprentice months to learn. I think a lot of it is because of my bond with Hervor.

The first few days after Marion's death were the hardest, but when I woke up yesterday I realized that Marion wouldn't want me to fall apart because she had died. She would want me to keep on living my life, so that's what I'm doing. I've thrown myself into my training with a fiery intensity bordering on the obsessive. The next time the Sons of Odin attack I will be ready. I'm not going to let anyone else I care about die by the hands of those assholes.

Mom thinks the attack on the estates was to distract us while the Sons of Odin pulled off another attack and there's certainly enough reason to believe she's right. New Copenhagen, the center of the Seidskati's power, has been destroyed. The attack took out a large number of Spellbinders, including two members of the Seidskati. The estates were just far enough

outside the main city that they would have escaped the blast had they still been standing. Something needs to be done before they blow the whole fucking nation to hel.

Norns, it's really gone. An entire city destroyed by those bastards. How many thousands did they kill? Almost everyone I know lived in the city. How many of my friends are dead because of their selfish actions? How do you mourn the death of an entire city? I don't even know which of my friends are dead and which are still alive. Or are any of them still alive? It's just... Goddess I can't stop the damn tears. I hate this.

I wonder if Ham survived...

It was Mom that took out the estates. She knew that we didn't stand a chance of overtaking those jackasses, so she decided to blow the place to hel. The coin that Flint threw up in the air was the signal that we'd had made it out safely. Mom managed to take out a sizable number of dark elves, soldiers and magic users with the blast, so maybe it was worth it.

Tomorrow, is the big day where the Council of the Seidkona are finally going to meet. I have no idea what the Seidskati are going to say, but I'm sure it's going to be pretty Midgard-shattering.

I had an encounter with Flint that was... well it's gotten me to think that he really cared for Marion. It was pretty early in the morning and I passed by his room inside the bunker. I don't know why, but I got this feeling like maybe I should check in on him. So I did.

I didn't knock, I didn't know if he would answer if I did. I flipped the door open and I felt liked dying as I saw the tortured expression in his eyes as his head turned to meet my gaze. His hands were clutched around a small photo frame and I could just make out the picture well enough to tell that it was Marion.

"I- I'm sorry," I muttered.

"You don't have anything to be sorry about, kid," he replied with a slight quiver in his voice

I moved over to sit next him on the small cot, "You really loved her didn't you?"

Flint let out a long sigh, "Yeah, I did. She was just a kid when I met her, and I never thought of her as anything more than a friend, but a couple of years ago she..." he muttered trailing off as a sob escaped his lips.

I don't know what made me do it, but I reached out and wrapped my arms around him in a hug. Flint seemed to gain a little control of himself and he spoke, "She made me promise that I'd look out for you, you know."

That explained why Flint had seemed to have been favoring me, "I miss her." I replied with a whisper.

"Me too, kid. Me too."



Eirdag, the twenty-eighth of Morsugur

I could almost believe Garik was human dressed as he was in a suit and tie. We were at the Council meeting and the Seidskati were going to speak at any moment. Since New Copenhagen had been destroyed the meeting had been moved to Epegard at the convention center. Obviously not all magic users would be able to meet in one place, so everything was being retransmitted via teleprojector communication to various convention centers throughout the world.

I was a mere apprentice, so I had to stand among my peers. I think I was the only one with a protector, but after the many attempts on my life it was probably a good idea. Garik wasn't my only means of protection either. Hervor was lurking about concealed behind a shroud of invisibility.

"Neil?" a voice said from nearby.

I turned around and found a pair of pale-blue eyes looking back at me, they belonged to a girl with long-blond hair, a nose that was just a little too large and a mischievous smile on her face. It took me a moment before I recognized her, the last I'd seen her, her hair had been dyed electric-blue and she had no less than three facial piercings.

"Sophie?" I asked in surprised disbelief.

"So it's true, all this hubbub about you turning into a girl," she said with a smirk and folded her arms across her chest.

"Yeah, but I'm going by Bryn these days. Norns, it's good to see a friendly face. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, me? Well, you've caught me. I sneaked into this uber-secret event so that I could be bored out of my mind. The apprentice robes are part of my master disguise," she said sticking her tongue out at me. She may have changed her appearance, but Sophie was just as big a tease as always.

"Why haven't you been returning our calls? Leif and I have been worried sick!"

"Sorry, life's been sort of crazy lately," she replied back with a sheepish grin.

"What's with the boy toy?" she asked jerking her thumb at Garik.

"He's my protector," I replied quietly.

"Protector, huh? He's too pretty to be anyone's protector. If it were me I'd be taking him for a ride 'round the block, if you catch my drift." She grinned, giving Garik an appreciative

glance before turning back to me.

"I don't think my girlfriend would appreciate that too much," I replied defensively.

"Oh, a girlfriend, eh? Someone's been riding the Lesbo-train! Wooh! Wooh!" she said loudly and several people looked back to glare at her.

I grinned, shook my head and let out a slight chuckle, "Odin's bones, I've missed you. How's your brother?"

"Sam's good," she said with a slight frown, which was quickly replaced by a false smile.

There was something very odd about Sophie's reaction and I just knew something was very wrong with her. I looked into Sophie's eyes one more time and realized what it was. The Sophie I'd always know had green eyes, this Sophie had blue eyes. I cursed myself for not noticing it sooner and quickly grabbed at her before she could realize what was happening. We went down in a tangle of limbs and I soon felt myself being lifted away as Hervor and Garik came to my aid. There was a sudden bright burst of magic as Hervor summoned a spell to incapacitate the impostor.

'Sophie' collapsed to the ground and I knelt down next to her and felt for a pulse; she was alive, but unconscious. Who was this girl? She looked and sounded like Sophie and she seemed to know me. Which could mean one of two things: either someone, probably the Sons of Odin, was holding Sophie hostage and had grilled her for information or the person laying on the ground was someone I knew. Sam, was Sophie's older brother and I remembered his eyes being the same color as this girl. Besides having a strong physical resemblance to his sister, he was also shared a very similar personality. But, Sam and I had always been pretty friendly, and I couldn't exactly picture him volunteering to get transformed into a girl, especially if it meant hurting people.

I had only to wait the answers would come soon enough. A crowd was beginning to form around us and I didn't really think it was a great idea to stick around.

"Hervor," I called out to my grandmother. "Get us out of here!"

Hervor dropped the spell of invisibility and appeared standing over me. She knelt down grabbing hold of my shoulder and mystery girl's hand then my vision was flooded with the bright white light as Hervor called up her magic to spirit us away.



"What's taking them so long?" I muttered under my breathe as I paced back and forth in front of the detainment room of the convention center.

Mom had been down to ensure everything was alright before returning to the masses within the convention center. The meeting of the Council of Spellbinders was important, and no one intended to postpone anything even after what had happened between me and 'Sophie'.

So I was stuck waiting while Daniella and Hervor interrogated the girl, whoever she happened to be.

"Patience, daughter," Heime said quietly staring over at me.

"These things take time, Princess," Garik added with an understanding smile.

"Would you stop calling me that?" I growled rounding on him.

"A-as you wish, Your Highness."

"Frizz, that's even worse! Just call my Bryn," I said with a shake of my head.

"Okay, Bryn," he replied with a pleased smile on his face.

"I can't take it any more!" I shouted suddenly and burst through the door where Sophie's lookalike was being held.

"Daughter, wait!" Heime called after me, but I was already through.

"Bryn, what are you doing?!" I heard Daniella cry as I breezed past her and Hervor.

"Alright you!" I said suddenly dropping to my knees in front of the impostor—who was chained to the ground in the middle of a circle of imprisonment—and latched onto the collar of her apprentice robes. "Just who the frizzing hel are you! And what do you want with me!"

"I'm so sorry! I didn't want any of this, but after they found out that I knew you they wouldn't relent..." she cried and burst into hysterical tears.

"No," I whispered and let my head hang as I realized the implications in her words.

If she said she knew me that could only mean one thing. "Sam?"

The girl looked up at me and nodded, "I'm so sorry. They have Sophie. I didn't have any choice."

I shook my head, "The Sons of Odin?"

Sam nodded, "Yeah."

"Why? Why did they change you? You could have easily gotten close to me without being transformed."

"I volunteered."

"What?"

"You have to understand... When I first joined the Sons of Odin, I was so lost. They gave me something to believe in, but deep down I knew I didn't belong. I've spent my whole life pretending to be something I'm not. I was born male, but I wanted to be female as long as I can remember."

"I can relate," I muttered biting my lip. I had no idea Sam had ever felt that way before. I'd heard about people like Sam, but I'd never really met one. Well, I guess Mom and Daniella might have fit into that category at some point, and I didn't exactly feel at home in my body, but Sam had been born feeling as if she were trapped as the wrong sex. Mom, Daniella and I had been stuffed into the wrong body after years of living as the right sex.

"I tried for years to be normal. I was afraid that people would find out what I was so I repressed my feelings and did my best to live life as a guy, but it didn't work. I slipped into a deep depression and at one point I even tried to kill myself. People like me aren't accepted by society.

"Then one day I met a recruiter for the Sons of Odin. He was very persuasive and told me that if men got equal rights, then transgendered people like myself would be accepted. So I joined. At first, I thought I'd found my purpose, and when they asked for volunteers to try out Mengele's formula I thought it was my dream come true."

"The formula worked and I finally felt like I belonged in my body, but then I learned what they wanted me to do. At first I refused, but then... they kidnapped Sophie and Mom. It didn't take them long to figure out that Sophie and I knew you, and it all went downhill from there. They killed Mom and the threatened to kill Sophie if I didn't agree to help them."

"Now she's going to die, and it's all my fault," Sam finished breaking down into tears.

I slowly stood to my feet and clenched my fists as anger flooded through me. "Goddesses those fuckers are going to pay!"

Suddenly, there was Mjölfnir floating there in front of my face. Somehow the hammer had sensed my need and come to me. Clearly, I really was meant to wield the thing. I grabbed it out of the air and clenched my fist around the haft. The warhammer was an instrument of destruction, and that's exactly what I planned to use it for.

"Bryn, what exactly do you think you can do?" Daniella asked abruptly.

"Whatever I need to!" I snapped.

"Where's she being kept?!" I demanded turning back to Sam.

Sam stared up at me with wide eyes, "There's a facility in the old warehouse district a few miles away. It's on the corner of Weigh and Cross. That's where I saw her last."

I turned for the door, but was stopped by Hervor, "Granddaughter, this is folly. Thy training has only just begun, thou art not ready."

"I won't let someone else I care about die, Hervor. Never again!"

"I am sorry child. I shan't let thee pass."

I shook my head and looked down at the hammer. There had to be a way. I reach out to Mjölfnir with my mind and smiled as I could feel it's power flow through me. I acted quickly, slinging the hammer at the wall just beside the door and watched in satisfaction as the weapon transformed into a lightning bolt and blasted a huge hole in the wall.

I grabbed the hammer out of the air and ran for the hole before either Daniella or Hervor could stop me and leapt through it.



It didn't take me long to find a way out of the convention center. I sped out an emergency exit, and already had the beginning of a plan forming in my head when I stopped dead in my tracks. Dark elves. They were everywhere and I knew then that Sophie was as good as dead. Whatever chance I'd had at rescuing her had been thrown out the door when the dark elves appeared.

"What have we here?" A voice asked.

I swirled around and found myself facing a dark elf woman with platinum hair and an inhuman smile on her face.

"A pretty little halfling has come out to play," she continued with a wicked chuckle.

I looked down at my right hand and found Mjölfnir still within my grasp. "I'm not just any frizzing halfling. I am Princess Brynhilde Athilda le Fey of the royal Lejosálfar house, and this is the hammer of Thor!" I screamed and struck before the vile creature could so much as raise a hand in self-defense.

There was a bright flash of blue light as the hammer struck her square in the chest and sent her charred remains hurling through the air. I reached out and the hammer flew back into my hand. "Any more of you scum suckers want some of this?" I howled in fury.

For a moment none of the dark elves moved, then they all lurched into motion at once and I felt my eyes grow wide. "Oh, shit! Midgard to Bryn! When you're surrounded by an army of dark elves, don't provoke them!" I cursed and started booking it back toward the convention center.

And from out of nowhere there was Daniella, and Hervor, standing between the me and the entrance. "Go! There are dark elves all over the frizzing place! Get back inside!" I yelled urgently.

"We know," Hervor said between pursed lips just before she burst into action.

Goddesses, I knew Hervor was powerful, but I never realized how powerful, as she unleashed a fiery onslaught on our attackers. In just a few seconds she managed to wipe out several hundred dark elves with barely more effort than it took me to lift my hand. I shook my head and raised the hammer of Thor, I couldn't just stand around in the middle of a battle when my ass was on the line. I spun around and released the Mjölfnir and watched in amazement as it swept out in a wide arc and completely destroyed a dozen or so dark elves that were getting a little too close for comfort.

The hammer flew back toward me. I snatched it out of the air and threw it out again, aiming it at the next nearest group of attackers. I flung Mjölfnir out again and again, and each time I destroyed a new wave of dark elves. They just kept coming, and before long I knew I was in trouble if the attacks didn't stop. Each time I threw the hammer the more energy it seemed to drain from me. I was getting weaker and weaker, and I knew that if something didn't change the dark elves would overwhelm me at the first sign of weakness.

Daniella was completely surrounded by dark elves, and I don't know how much longer she could last. Hervor was fighting with the same intensity as before, but she was fending off Dökkálfar sorceresses in increasing numbers, and I doubted even she could keep up the pace for long. It was getting harder and harder to fend the dark elves off and I beginning to think things were hopeless.

Daniella wasn't the only one surrounded by Dökkálfar. They had formed a circle around me and each time I took one out, two more took its place. One leapt at me from behind and white hot pain shot through my body as his blade sliced across my back. I screamed in agony and spun around in a mad attempt to loose his hold, but it was an exercise in futility as the creature refused to let go. I had the strength and endurance of a full-blooded elf woman and was actually stronger than most human men despite being much smaller. So it's really no surprise I was able to remain standing, but when the dark elf clasped his arms around my neck in a stranglehold I couldn't remain standing and collapsed to the ground.

I clawed at my throat desperately attempting to force the dark elf to let go, but nothing I did seemed to work and I could feel my thoughts begin to slow as my mind was gradually deprived of the oxygen it so desperately needed. Just as human men were generally stronger than human women, elven men were stronger than elven women, and this dark elf was no exception to the rule; his grip was like iron. Then I remember the hammer, and I felt a glimmer of hope as I reached out to it with my right hand. The hammer flew back into my hand and I quickly slammed into the dark elf's arms. There was a bright flash of light as the hammer flared to life and suddenly I could breathe again.

For a brief second I remained on the ground, but as my mind came back into focus I realized how vulnerable I was. The encounter with the dark elf had left me weak, so it took some time to untangle myself from his corpse, but when I staggered back to my feet I found that the circle of attackers was gone. They must have figured me for dead and moved on.

I didn't really have any time to recuperate, as a new attacker was on me almost immediately. I barely had time to raise Mjölfnir to block his attack. Bolts of lightning shot out in every direction as the dark elf's blade came in contact with the hammer. One of those bolts hit the elf in the face and he stumbled backward howling in pain. I seized on the opportunity and

with all my strength I slammed the warhammer across his chest. The elf let out one howl of agony before the power of the hammer completely consumed him. His charred remains fell to the ground and I turned to meet my next opponent.

I was pretty well running on adrenaline, and I knew it was only a matter of time before I collapsed from exhaustion. I had pretty well given up on hope when suddenly, the first of the magic users from the convention center appeared, stepping out of a nearby door. She was only a Charmer judging by the strength of the magic she summoned, but her appearance was so unexpected that she managed to take out a full dozen enemies before taking a blast of fire to chest and collapsing to the ground. More members of the convention appeared, joining us in greater and greater numbers until even my mother, the ancient Theodora, and the other members of the Seidskati had thrown themselves into the fight.

The dark elves had greater numbers, but we had more magic users, and the tide of the battle quickly turned in our favor, but as I'd come to learn from my lessons with my father a fight seldom turned out the way you expected. Just when I thought the dark elves were about to turn tail and run, a new foe that was even worse appeared from out of the shadows. At first, they didn't appear to be anything more than misshapen hulks, but as they drew close I felt cold chills run down my spine.

A large gray, hairy, and very angry looking creature with twin tusks on either side of its head appeared out of the shadows before me. It was human in shape, but that's where the resemblance ended. Its face, was so gnarled that I couldn't even determine if it had a nose, but I knew it what it was almost instantly, a troll. Trolls generally avoided humans and it was very uncommon for anyone to run across one, but you did hear the occasional story of a traveler happening upon one and it seldom ended well for the traveler. According to legend, trolls were big, incredibly strong, stupid, and worst of all, damn near impossible to kill.

The massive hulk in front of me let out a loud roar and it was soon joined by dozens of others just like it.

"Uff da, this can't be good," I muttered then flung Thor's hammer at the nearest of the Trolls.

Mjölfnir hit the horrid thing right in the chest, and it staggered a few feet backward and fell to its knees. When the hammer returned to me I saw that it had left a huge black mark on the creature's chest.

"Double uff da, this is definitely not good."

"You can say that again," a voice said from nearby.

"Mom!" I said swirling around coming to face my mother.

"Bryn, I want you back in the convention center. It's not safe for you out here."

"Yeah, like I'm just going to cower inside while everyone else is fighting!" I shot back, then

leapt into action, throwing the hammer back at the same troll I had hit before. This time when I hit it, it went down and stayed down.

Mom let out a curse and shook her head, but she didn't say any more as a group of trolls came running right at her. Mom was amazing, I've never seen a magic user fight like her. When it came to air magic her skills were unparalleled and she used that to her advantage. She was like a ghost as she disappeared, only to reappear, then quickly strike and disappear again.

Heime appeared to join the fight, but I caught no sight of Garik, who I assumed was still guarding Sam. Heime's blade sliced through his opponents with an ease that almost seemed impossible. The blade sliced through solid bone as if it were butter and with the span of just a few minutes he'd already killed a full half-dozen dark elves. If I didn't know better, I would have sworn that my father were using magic, but no that couldn't be it. There was something very unusual about my father's weapon, and I had a feeling I might know what it was. Only one sword could cut through the wielder's enemies with such ease. I remember hearing it mentioned in history class. Gram, but the sword had been lost and no one had seen it for centuries.

"Princess!" a voice called from behind. I swirled around to find Garik running toward me.

"So much for him calling me Bryn," I muttered under my breath as I smashed a troll in the head with the hammer. The troll fell to the ground with a loud thud and I turned to swing the hammer at the next nearest target which happened to be Garik. I stopped the hammer just inches from his chest and let out a long string of curses as I stared up into his eyes. "What the frizz is wrong with you!? Are you trying to get yourself killed?!"

"Sorry, Bryn," he muttered with a big grin on his face.

"What are you doing out here? Who's guarding Sam?"

"Who?" he asked blankly.

"The girl I captured!" I yelled swinging my hammer at a nearby troll.

"I-I couldn't stay in there, and do nothing. Not when you were in danger," he said averting his eyes and then did something completely unexpected, he kissed me. It wasn't much more than a light peck on the lips, but it felt good, too good.

"What the frizz did you go and do that for? I growled as he broke away.

"I've been wanting to do that for a while now," he said with a grin, then turned to the nearest troll and started hacking at it with his weapon.

The trolls were hard as hel to kill, and many of the weaker magic users were having difficulty countering them. More and more fell as the trolls quickly overwhelmed them. Things were definitely starting to look bad, but that's when something amazing happened.

A loud call, that sounded almost like a trumpet rang throughout the battlefield just as bright pillars of light appeared all over the place and from out them emerged tall fair-haired figures many of which were mounted atop horses. Suddenly, the bond between me and Eva was back to full strength and I knew that she was among those that had come to our rescue.

"It's Eva!" I called over my shoulder.

"She's brought the exiled elves!" Mom called back.

The newcomers tore into the trolls and remaining dark elves with a vengeance and it was only a matter of time before the enemy combatants fled the fight. I let out a relieved sigh, felt my arms fall to my side and watched as a trio of elves approached. They were tall and beautiful, and they walked with the same fluid grace that I'd come to associate with Hervor.

"We would speak with the one known as Aryanna le Fey. Is she here?" The foremost of the elves spoke, she was tall, long-legged, had wavy light-brown hair that fell all the way down to the back of her knees and save for the leather loincloth and strip of clothe across her chest that didn't quite cover her breasts she wore no clothing.

"I am Aryanna le Fey," Mom said stepping forward.

"I am Solveig of the Vindálfar," the elven woman said with a very slight tilt of the head.

"I am Ingolf of the Saerálfar," a man said coming to stand just to Solveig's side. He wore a plain gray shirt, black shorts, and carried a trident in his left hand, but the thing that really stood out about him was his blue hair.

I felt a sudden weight up against my side and looked over to find Eva leaning against me with a thoughtful expression on her face. I smiled and reached for her hand. I felt her love and warmth through our bond and I basked in its glow. I didn't say anything, I didn't need to. The emotions we shared through our bond conveyed more than words ever could.

"I am Snorri of the Hyrrálfar," the final member of the trio proclaimed. Snorri was probably the strangest looking of the three. His hair was snow white despite having an agelessly youthful elven face, and was done up in a braid that hung on the right side of his head. His clothes were a garish collection of worn patched-up cloth, with every color from bright pink, to putrid green.

"We come before you to pledge our peoples' support in the coming battle of Ragnarok," Solveig continued once her other two companions had introduced themselves.

A slow smile crept onto Mom's face, "Well then on behalf of the Seidskati, the Council of the Seidskati, and House Le Fey I gladly accept your pledge of support."

Solveig tilted her head forward and bowed ever so slightly, "It is agreed then."

"Sam..." I whispered suddenly and met Eva's gaze.

"Come on," I muttered dragging Eva along with me back toward the convention center.



"Bryn, what's wrong?" Eva asked as I led her into the convention center.

"I'll explain later. It's just I have a bad feeling..." I muttered quietly as I leapt into motion and shot down the hall.

I flew into the small room where Sam was being held and stopped dead in my tracks. Sam was lying on the ground, still secure within the circle of imprisonment, but she wasn't the only person in the room. There was a tall beautiful woman with auburn hair standing over her. I didn't even need to see the woman's face to know who it was. "Mengele!" I cursed.

"Why hello again," Mengele smiled pleasantly.

I eyed Mengele warily. There was no doubt in my mind that 'she' was dangerous, but this woman was very different from the Mengele I'd met before. For starters she looked and acted sane, but it went beyond that. She struck me as someone who was very comfortable in her body. Everything from her clothes, her makeup and her perfume gave her the appearance of a refined upper-class woman.

"What do you want?" I growled.

"I have to thank you. I never imagined having a female body could be such... fun. It has been so long since I was capable of having sex. Have you tried it? Sex as a woman? If you haven't you really should. It feels so good it's almost indescribable."

I shuddered and looked into Mengele's eyes. The spark of insanity was still there, "Mengele... step away from Sam!"

"No, I don't think I will. I made her, she's mine. She's failed, and I must punish her," Mengele said, staring back at me with a cruel grin on her face.

"What have you done with Sophie?!" I spat back.

"You mean the sister? There was an unfortunate accident and she died. It's regrettable, but sometimes these things can't be avoided."

"Damn you! Damn you to frizzling helheim!" I screamed. I didn't even think before I acted. I raised Mjölfnir, felt the hammer's power flood through me then I leapt at Mengele. The hammer came down and hit Mengele square in the chest. She had been in the process of raising a spirit shield when I hit her, so it didn't hit her at full strength, but there was enough power in the blow to send her flying against the wall. Her spirit shield cushioned her from a good portion of the hammer's strength and most of the impact of hitting the wall, but I doubted it would be able to withstand much more. I raised the hammer and prepared to attack, but stopped short when Eva suddenly screamed out. "Bryn no!"

I hesitated for just one moment, which was long enough for Mengele to get away. She summoned a travel spell and was gone with the blink of an eye.

"Why did you stop me?" I demanded reeling on Eva once the wind from Mengele's travel spell had died down.

Eva shook her head and locked eyes with me, "You were acting out of anger."

"So!?"

"Bryn, that path doesn't lead to a good place. Believe me, I know that better than anyone else," she muttered quietly, and I felt her concern wash over me.

I felt tears well up in my eyes, I grabbed at Eva and let all my anger and grief loose in a flood of tears. Sophie was dead, and the person who was responsible had gotten away.



PART 8

Vordag, the twenty-ninth of Morsugur

All this death and destruction... What is it all for? So many people have died and for what? Aunt Marion, Sophie, the people of New Copenhagen, Vágburg, and all the dead from the convention center. How many more will before this is all over? Are humans as a race doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over? Will we ever learn that death is not the way? And yet I'm not fully human, so where does that leave me?

I think I've figured out what my purpose is. When I go to free the dead gods from Helheim, I don't think I'll be returning. I think that maybe I'm meant to sacrifice myself so that Odin and the others may return from the grave. It's a terrifying thought, but if it means saving humanity, maybe it will be worth it... Then again, maybe not. Maybe we're not worth saving. I just hope that if I am supposed to die that it'll be quick.

I'm so angry right now, I hate what's been done to me. I hate that Marion and Sophie are dead. I hate that the horrible things that the Sons of Odin have done. I hate that people are dying, and I hate my inability to do anything about it! I have so much anger that I don't know where to direct it. I need to do something, dammit! I need to let this anger go, but I can't! I just want things to go back to the way they were before I met Hervor in the mall.

Eva's the only reason I've stayed sane. When she and I are together, I don't feel so angry, and I think that maybe just maybe I'll live through Ragnarok. I don't know how many times we've had sex since she returned, but it's been a lot. Sex as a woman feels good, not really better per se, but good nonetheless.

There so much more to tell, but I don't really feel like writing. Maybe I'll play catch up later. It's about time for my lesson with Hervor anyway...



Freydag, the first of Thorri

Well, I'm feeling a little better about life now... Sophie's death was just too much, and for a while I could hardly keep myself together. I still can't believe she's gone. I hadn't seen her for months, and then bam suddenly she's just dead.

Well, I guess I'll catch up on everything that's happened so far...

The Sons of Odin have attacked another city. This time it was New Jorvík that got hit. The attack destroyed a major portion of the city, but thanks in large part to the efforts of Theodora and several members of her house, much of the city was saved. They realized what was happening at the last moment and were able to raise several spirit barriers to protect as much of the populace as they could. Maybe we aren't as helpless against the Sons of Odin's attacks as I once thought.

Mom, got together with her old friends from the Task Force Against Domestic Terrorism and they raided the compound where Sam said Sophie was being kept. The Sons of Odin had pretty well cleared the place out, but they did find Sophie's body scattered among some other corpses. I'm just glad I didn't have to see it. It's bad enough that I already have the image of Marion's dead eyes floating around in my head.

Mom still has Sam locked up in a circle of imprisonment. Not because she's necessarily a danger to the rest of us, but because Sam keeps trying to kill herself. She's been pretty cooperative about providing Mom information, but most of what she knew hasn't been that helpful. Mom's probed her mind several times and she's convinced that Sam is genuinely repentant about her involvement with the Sons of Odin. Eva's actually spent a lot of time with her. If anyone understands what she's been through Eva does.

Sam's physical appearance isn't quite what it was when she was first captured. She had a sort of illusion cast over her. She still resembles her sister, but she doesn't have her sister's over-sized nose, and just like Mengele, her hair is auburn. Mom says that anyone who's been given the formula will likely have auburn hair once they've finished their transformation. Mom actually thinks she may have found a way to detect those who have been transformed by the formula, and she strongly suspects that my blood holds the key.

The exiled elves have taken up residence above the bunker where the ruins of the estates now stand. Mom offered to let some of them stay down below with us, as there's a lot of empty room, but they refused, claiming that they dislike enclosed spaces. That is probably just as well. The few encounters that Hervor and Heime have had with them have been downright icy. I've tried asking Hervor, Heime and Garik why the exiled elves dislike the light elves so much, but each refuses to speak of it. Eva's no help, as she's just as confused by it as I am.

More and more exiled elves have joined those at the encampment. At the moment they number in the tens of thousands and their numbers keep on growing. Of the four main tribes, the mountain elves are the only ones who have yet to join. Eva mentioned that the fellálfar are 'slow thinking like the mountains they named themselves after'. I don't understand entirely why, but Eva burst into

hysterical fits of laughter after making that statement. Elven humor is so strange.

My training is going pretty well, and since Eva's joined our training sessions I'm learning new ways of fighting. Eva and I are both around the same size and she knows quite a lot about fighting much larger opponents. Her fighting style is much different than what I'm accustomed to, but it's not particularly suited for fighting with a warhammer so on top of everything else I'm now learning to fight with throwing knives and my bare hands.

And then there's Garik. Since he kissed me, things between him and me have been tense. I'm attracted to him, and we both know it. Leif and Eva have picked up on it too, and all three of them have been really competitive. I may be attracted to all three of them, but my heart belongs to Eva. I just wish they'd all realize that so I could have some frizzing peace.

I think that's about it for now... I wish I could say I've had direct involvement in everything that's going on, but the truth is I've been sitting here along the sidelines twiddling my thumbs... I just feel like I should be doing something, but Mom insists that I should stay out of danger until it's time for my mission into Helheim.



Laurdag, the second of Thorri

Just got back from Sophie's funeral. I can't stop crying. Marion's death was hard, but losing Sophie such a short time after Marion is harder still. How many more friends and family members will I lose before this is all over? I can't stand the thought of losing anyone else. I think I'd even be upset if I lost Heime. As for Hervor... well I don't really know how I'd react if she were to bite the dust.

Mom and the other members of the Seidskati have figured out how to track people transformed by Mengele's formula. It's all pretty complicated, but Mom was right when she said my blood held the key. The amount of magic required is staggering, but the number of magic users who are actively implementing the wards to track Menegele's pawns are just as amazing.

Hopefully, we can stop that monster, I can't stand the thought of what she's done with my blood, but if I'm going to be honest with myself, which my elven side pretty much guarantees, then I'll have to admit that the main reason I'm so eager to catch her is because of what she did to Sophie.



I kind of stopped short with my last entry there. Mom stopped by to talk with me and I didn't have time to finish it off. I really didn't have much more to say, but I do now.

I heard a knock at the door and I hurried to finish my last sentence before hopping to my feet and leaping at the door. Mom was on the other side and I could tell by the look on her face that she was there to tell me something big.

"May I come in?" she asked.

I nodded and winced as I watched my mother step hesitantly inside the small room.

"We need to talk," she said quietly as she turned to close the door behind her.

"What is it? Is it bad news?"

"Not of the sort you're likely expecting," Mom said locking eyes with me.

I eyed her warily, "What is it then?"

"I've been talking with Hervor. Things on Midgard are only going to get worse before they get better and it's not safe for you here."

I stared at my mother and winced. I had a feeling I knew what was coming next and sure enough she confirmed my fears when she spoke. "Hervor has agreed to take you to Álfheim where you'll be safe."

I stared at Mom for a few minutes then I slowly started to shake my head, "No, Mom I don't know what Hervor told you, but please don't do this. I want to stay right here. I need to be a part of the fight against the Sons of Odin. The things they've done... I don't want to just sit along the sidelines and watch as the world goes to hel."

"I've already made my decision. Pack your things you'll be leaving in two days."

"No, Mom. Please..." I pleaded.

"Bryn," she said reaching out to touch my face. "I'm sorry for everything. I'm sorry I never told you about your father. I'm sorry for the deaths you've had to witness, and I'm sorry for the way in which Hervor and Frigg have manipulated you. You are more precious to me than all the world. I just want to keep you safe for as long as I am able. It's too dangerous here on Midgard. You're meant for great things I just want to ensure that you live long enough for you to fulfill your destiny."

"What does it matter? I'm probably going to die anyway!" I spat back. I didn't intend to say it, but the words were out of my mouth, and the damage was already done.

"Oh, Bryn!" Mom said and wrapped her arms around me. "Is that what you think?"

I tried to hold back the tears, but it was like someone had opened the floodgates and I couldn't keep them back. "What am I supposed to think?"

"Bryn," Mom said pulling away and locking her eyes with mine. "You're not going to die! You hear me? I'll descend into the depths of Helheim, if that's what it takes, but I won't let you die."

"Mom I... I just want everything to go back the way it was before. I hate being a girl. I hate what the Sons of Odin are doing. I just want my life back."

"I know, I wish I could give it to you, but we don't have that luxury."

"Just please... Mom don't make me go. I need to be here. I need to be a part of it all. After the way Marion died and what Mengele did to Sophie I..."

"No Bryn. It's not safe. You are going. I'm sorry, but it's for your own good. I want you to promise me that you'll go with Hervor without any fuss."

I did it without thinking. I hadn't exactly made a habit of it, but like all teenagers I'd made my fair share of false promises to my mother. "I promise," I said and felt my heart sink as felt something click in the back of my head. I'd just made a promise and I was pretty sure that my elven side wasn't going to let me break it no matter how much I tried.

It seemed almost a contradiction really, I could make a promise fully intending to break it, yet I couldn't lie. It didn't make sense. Wouldn't my inability to lie prevent me from making that promise? Yet, by speaking the promise, I'd bound myself and pretty well assured that the promise couldn't be broken. So by speaking it, I had in fact, turned a lie into a truth. It was a real puzzler. Boy, being a half-elf sure can be complicated sometimes.

"You tricked me," I growled at my mother.

Mom smiled sadly, "I didn't want to, but I knew it was the only way to keep you from doing something bullheaded."

"What makes you think I would have done something bullheaded?!" I spat back angrily.

"Because I know you. I know how you think, because I was just like you at that age," she said touching my cheek.

I turned my back on my mother and moved as far away from her as I possibly could within the confines of the tiny room, "I know you think you're protecting me, but with everything that's happened I deserve to choose."

"You're right, you should be able to chose, but you're not seeing the whole picture. If you die before you're supposed to go into Helheim, what then?"

"I-I don't know."

Mom nodded, "I can't risk losing you, Bryn. Please understand, you are my child. I don't want anything to happen to you."

"I know..." I said quietly.



Manadag, the fourth of Thorri

Well... I'm never going to make another promise if I can help it. I can't even think of trying to run off without feeling all itchy... Okay, that's probably not the right word, but I don't know exactly how to explain it. Anytime I think of going against my promise I get all antsy and that feeling doesn't go away until I turn my thoughts to something else. Usually, I wait until the last minute to pack when traveling, but I kept getting this nagging feeling like maybe I should get my bags ready, and whenever I tried to resist, that itchy feeling popped into my head and made me want to scream. So I finally gave in and got everything ready yesterday.

I hate this. I don't want to go, but I'm stuck making all these preparations because of a promise. Me and my stupid frizzing mouth, if I'd just kept it shut I would be able to find a way out of it, but all I can do is grin and bear it.

It's about time to head out. I don't know if I'll be able to write anything for a few days. Somehow I doubt I'll be able to write much traveling up the root of the world tree. I don't know what it is, but my stomach kind of hurts. I hope I'm not getting sick. Gah! I'd better go, there's that damn itching again.



Eirdag, the fifth of Thorri

I'm not really sure if it's Eirdag or not... There's really no way to tell up here in the heavens... Yeah, that's right I said, 'heavens.' Traversing the roots of the world tree is definitely an experience, which is how I got to be here in the first place...

It was early in the morning when we left the bunker, I don't know the exact time, but it was somewhere around seven in the morning. Mom, Daniella, Gramor, Eva, Leif, Heime, Hervor were all there when we left, but there was one other person I was surprised to find in our party and that was: Sam.

"I guess I'm coming with you," she muttered, staring at the floor and looking like someone who was ready to crawl out of her own skin.

"Mom?" I asked looking to my mother for answers.

Mom let out a long sigh and shook her head, "I've been trying to protect Sam from fellow members of the Seidskati. They're convinced if they probe her mind deep enough that they can find something of use."

"And that's a bad thing?" I asked.

"If they probe too deeply, they'll kill her," Mom responded. folding her arms across her chest with an ever so slight frown.

"That be the least of what I deserve," Sam muttered, quietly meeting my gaze for the first time. I shuddered and quickly looked away. Never had I seen such a haunted look in another person's eyes.

I wondered briefly why my mother seemed so intent on trying to help Sam after everything she had done. If it hadn't been for Sam's poor choices in joining the Sons of Odin, Sophie would still be alive. I didn't know if I could forgive Sam for that.

"Remember what we discussed," Mom said, putting a reassuring hand on Sam's shoulder.

Okay... Yeah, I'm not really sure what that was about and I really didn't get a chance to ask, since Mom spoke first.

"Everyone ready?"

"What about Flint?" I asked her suddenly.

"I need him here. Heime is more than capable of completing your training," Mom replied, placing a reassuring hand on my shoulder.

I actually felt a little sad about that, which kind of surprised me, even though Flint wasn't exactly the easiest person to get along with. "Tell him goodbye for me, would you?"

Mom's eyes widening in surprise, but she nodded. "Sure."

"Let's get going then," I muttered quietly. I wasn't exactly looking forward to my trip, but I wanted it to be over with, and I couldn't do that by standing around.

"Join thy hands together," Hervor said suddenly.

Gradually we each complied, I clasped hands with Eva on my right and Heime on my left. Finally after we had all joined together, I felt Hervor grasp hold of her magic and summon up a travel spell. There were two types of travel spells: the type used by most humans and weaker vattir, and the type Hervor and other powerful vattir used. The former utilized air magic, while the latter required that the user combine all five magical elements into a single spell, and the weave was probably the most complex I'd ever seen. It required the user have a greater well of energy than a wind-based travel spell, but strangely, it actually used less energy.

Blinding bright light filled my vision and suddenly we were there standing out in the cold of the arctic. It was daytime, which wasn't really surprising, as sun stays up something like six months at the North Pole.

"There are wards set all around the root that prevent travel spells being used once you get a few hundred yards in," Mom said with a sad smile

I tugged at my spell-enhanced coat and turned to my mother, who had a thoughtful expression on her face. "Is this where we say goodbye?"

"In a moment. There's still something Aryanna needs to do before we get to that," Daniella replied quietly.

"Where's the root? I mean, shouldn't we be able to see it from here?" Leif asked abruptly.

"Thou shalt gaze upon the root soon enough, child. The wards set upon this place also hide the root from prying eyes," Hervor stated, staring at Leif with a blank look. Hervor's presence through our bond seemed distant. I got the impression that her mind was on other things, but what those things might have been I had no idea.

There was a very slight twinge of nervous fear emanating from Eva and I was pretty sure I knew why. Eva had spent most of her life hating the light elves, and now she was about to begin a journey that would take her to the light elf home world. She had pretty well set her hatred aside, but I think she was worried the light elves would reject her because of her past. I was pretty nervous myself, and for similar reasons. I wasn't sure how I'd be received, I mean, I was Heime's daughter and a member of the royal family, but I was only a half-elf, and I had been raised by a human mother, while completely unaware of my elven heritage. I didn't know the elven language, which would likely only serve to remind the people of just how much of an outsider I really was. I did my best to set my fears in the back of my mind, but despite my best efforts I couldn't keep them completely at bay.

Mom moved over to a rather large snow bank a few yards away, and I saw the soft glow of magic surround her as she summoned up her magic. Abruptly the snow bank disappeared, and a very large multi-passenger vehicle took its place. It looked pretty similar to an old wind car like the one Mom used to keep in the garage at the estates, but instead of tires, it had a sets of treads on either side.

"I've had this thing hidden here for almost fifteen years," Mom explained with a smug grin.

"Yeah, and it was a pain getting the freaking thing out here. I'll be glad to see the thing get some use for a change," Daniella muttered with a shake of her head before motioning everyone inside.

"It's about time we leave then, isn't it?" I asked.

Mom nodded, "Bryn, come here."

I moved over to where Daniella and Mom were standing and wrapped my arms around my mother in a hug.

"Mom," I whispered so that only the two of us could hear. I was still pretty miffed at her for forcing me to go to Alfheim, but I didn't want to leave her on bad terms, since there was a chance I might not see her again, so I swallowed my pride and continued.

"I want you to know that I understand why you kept things from me and why you're sending me to Álfheim. I don't know if I would have done the same in your place, but I can't hold it against you. You were trying to protect me, and I really appreciate that. I'm going to miss you, and I love you, Mom."

"Thank you. I really needed to hear that. I love you too, Bryn. Goddesses I'm going to miss you so much," she whispered as we broke away.

I moved over to Daniella and wrapped my arms around her just like I had my mother, but it was Daniella who spoke first. "I know we don't share any blood, but I love you like you were my own

child. I'll miss you Bryn."

"I'll miss you too Dan... Mom," I whispered back. There was a startled but pleased look on Daniella's face as we broke away. If anyone deserved being called my mom besides my mother, it was Daniella. She was every bit the mother to me as Mom, even if as she had said we didn't share any blood.

Everyone else said their goodbyes to Mom and Daniella, then we all piled into the wind car and began the first leg of our trip.



There was no bright flash of light, or any other indication as we passed through the wards, but when the root of the world tree suddenly materialized in front of our eyes it was a dead give away that we had gone through them.

The root of the Yggdrasil was planted directly in the center of the North Pole, and it reached straight up into the sky as far as the eye could see. It was completely invisible from anywhere else in the world. The powerful wards we had just passed through saw to that. Over the many millennia since the root of the world tree had settled into Midgard, ice sheets had formed up around it and had created a permanent ice-field.

As we drew closer to our destination I could make out the form of a building that had been built up around the root. The building appeared to be made from plain gray stone, but the snow and frost made it difficult to make out any more details.

The drive to the building, or station, as I've come to think of it, was pretty well uneventful. When we arrived, Gramor stopped the wind car, but before we could get out, a figure with a long black beard appeared and motioned for us to continue. Gramor shifted the wind car back into gear and started in toward an entryway that had opened to accommodate our vehicle.

"Well, what haves we here?" A grizzled gray-haired dwarf said appearing to greet us as we climbed out of the wind car.

"Durinn," Hervor said with a tilt of her head. "'Tis good to see thee again."

"Don't yeh worry 'bout that!" the dwarf yelled, suddenly pointing a stubby finger at Leif, who had been working at unloading the wind car. "I'll get me lads teh unload yer windy-merchine."

"Interesting company you be keepin', elf. Haven't ever see yeh travel with anyone but yer son afore," he growled, turning back to Hervor.

"It is as the humans say, strange times make for strange traveling companions," Hervor said with the barest hint of a smile.

"Aye, there's truth in that. Strange times we're livin' in, that's fer sure," the dvergar said, running a hand through his beard.

"Are yeh ready ter go then?" he asked suddenly.

Hervor nodded and produced a small sack cloth that jingled a bit as she handed it over to the dwarf. The dwarf pulled loose the draw strings and peeked inside, nodded with satisfaction, then tucked the bag into his tunic. "Aye that oughts ter cover it then. Yeh knows the way, but I suppose with these humans I properly oughts to show yehs so they don't wander off."

We followed the dwarf as he hurried down a long corridor, through a large chamber, and down another hallway before finally coming to an abrupt stop in front of a large metal gate. "Through here is the path ter the root. Yer ride be waitin' inside o' there."

"Ride?" Sam asked blankly, speaking for the first time since we'd left the bunker.

Durinn threw his head back and laughed, "How der yeh figure yer goin' to get to Alfheim then? Walk up the root o' the world tree?"

"What exactly are we going to be riding?" Leif put in.

"Yeh'll find out soon enough, lad," the dwarf growled.

"Let's go then," Eva said quietly.

"Once yeh pass through them gates, there'll be no turnin' back," Durinn muttered, scratching at his beard.

"I know. I'm ready."

"Aye, so yeh are lass," the dwarf muttered quietly as he moved to open the gate.

I stepped through the gate as it swung open and didn't look back.



I stepped into another long corridor, clenched my fists at my side and kept on walking. Vaguely I sensed the others following, but I paid them no mind. As much as I had resisted going to Álfheim, there was a part of me that really wanted to see the home of my father.

Finally, I stepped into what could only be described as a stable. On either side were four huge stalls that were larger than my bedroom in the estates. Despite their size, the stalls were far less remarkable than what they housed. The creatures were massive, had long serpentine scaled bodies, and five pairs of legs.

"Draki!" Eva hissed suddenly.

"Aye, these be dragons," a light voice said from inside one of the stalls. A moment later a short stocky figure emerged from within the nearest stall on my right. She was a female dwarf, and while

she wasn't very attractive, there was something very appealing about her calm smile, and blue eyes.

"We're going to ride dragons up the root of the world tree?" Leif asked in disbelief.

"Aye, young lad. Ain't no better means of travelin'. The viddraki were bred for this purpose," she replied.

"Domesticated dragons," Gramor murmured with a shake of her head. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"Was quite the task breedin' them, but it were well worth it. Now is we going to stand 'round and talk, or is we goin' to leave?"

"Aye, let us begone from this place," Heime said irritably. I stared at my father in surprise. I'd never seen him behave in such a way. I don't know if it was the station itself, or if it was something else, but I could tell just by the look on his face that something was bothering him.

"Yeah, I guess it's time to leave."

Sogvor nodded her head in satisfaction then turned back toward the stall and swung the door wide open. "Come on then, Else. We haven't got all day now, do we?"

The dragon inside took a few tentative steps forward and peeked its head out. It stared at me for a moment, then it suddenly rushed at me and before I could even think to leap out of the way it was on me. I closed my eyes and fell to the ground as the dragon's snout hit me in the chest. Something warm and wet slithered across my face and for a moment I thought the dragon was going to sink its teeth into me.

I heard Sogvor let out a throaty laugh. Then I felt myself being lifted to my feet and let my eyes snap back open.

"She likes yeh!" Sogvor said with another laugh. I felt something big brushing against my stomach and when I looked down, I saw that it was the dragon.

"Alright Else, that's enough," Sogvor said sternly.

"As yeh can see I've already gots her saddled up. I still gots ter get Eksel ready, and the Durinn and the others still hasn't brought yer things up," she muttered with a shake of her head, disappearing into another stall.

It took a good twenty minutes before we were finally ready to depart. A pair of dwarves brought up our baggage and helped Sogvor fasten our bags on Else and the second draki still inside the other stall.

"Ready!" Sogvor said appearing from one of the stalls, leading another dragon along with her.

The other two dwarves departed and Sogvor helped each of us climb onto the dragons so we could mount up.

"I hate to be the one to ask the obvious, but who exactly is going to steering these things?" Leif asked as Sogvor was tightening the straps around him.

"I'll be takin' Else's reins, but Eksel ain't be needing anyone ter steer him. He'll follow his sister wherever she goes," Sogvor grumbled.

It took a few minutes to get us all mounted up, but in the end I wound up riding Else along with Gramor, Eva, and of course Sogvor at the reins. Sam, Leif, Heime and Hervor all rode mounted atop Eksel.

So, that's how I found myself riding a ten-legged dragon up the root of the Yggdrasil. The ride was pretty bumpy, seeing as Else used her ten limbs to slide up the trunk. The dragons seemed to be moving slowly, yet we were actually moving at an amazing speed. Hervor explained that it was the magic of the Yggdrasil at work. The distance between worlds was immense, and without the world tree to speed things up it would have taken hundreds of thousands of years.

It was pretty unnerving riding the dragon as it climbed straight up the root of the Yggdrasil, but it was pretty frizzing amazing, too. The view alone was worth all the discomfort, but before we reached the outside of Midgard's atmosphere my stomach started to feel progressively worse. At first I thought that I was sick, but when I shifted my legs I felt something wet and I knew what it was.

"Not now," I groaned.

I felt Eva's hand on my shoulder, "Bryn what's wrong?"

"I think... I'm having my first period," I grumbled.

I could feel the touch of her magic ripple through my body as she called it up to examine me. I felt her power fade away and I could feel sympathy flood through the blood. "This is not going to be a very pleasant ride for you," she muttered, patting her arm on my shoulder.

"Welcome to womanhood," my grandmother added with a sympathetic look of her own.

We didn't stop for several hours, but even then we couldn't dismount from the viddraki, since they were all that were keeping us from plummeting to a gruesome and certain death, which made my predicament all the more unpleasant. Norns, I really hate this body. I tried repeatedly to think of something to keep my mind off of my period, but nothing worked.



Partway into the ride I discovered that by closing my eyes and clearing my mind of thought as Hervor had taught me, I was able to forget my discomfort and drifted into a realm of pure relaxation. I don't know how long I stayed like that. It could have been minutes, but at some point I felt a tap on my shoulder. I let out a loud gasp as my eyes flew back open and I turned my head to stare at Eva, "What was that for?"

"Look," was all she said.

And so I did. I strangled another gasp and felt wonder, and awe fill me as I looked. We had left Midgard's atmosphere long before and I had a clear unobstructed view of the stars. They shone much more brightly than they ever had from below, and I could only stare in wonder, as I looked around, noting the sun, and the moon. It was the most beautiful and marvelous sight I had ever beheld. Then, I looked down at Midgard and felt my breath catch in my throat. All the wonder in the heavens paled in comparison to the beauty of the world below. It was a wonder the goddesses weren't moved to tears each time they looked down on the world they had created.

We traveled several more hours after that, and when we finally came to a stop my period was at the back of mind, but not quite forgotten. By then we had crested a 'rise', for lack of a better word and were actually able to get up off the dragons and walk around. Sogvor set up a sort of barrier on either side of the root to prevent anyone from falling over, and we made camp right there out in the heavens. Obviously, we couldn't start a fire, so we ate a meal of cold sandwiches, then set up our beds and everyone except myself drifted off to sleep.

Here I am, writing in my journal sitting on the root of the world tree with Eva's sleeping form cuddled up beside me. Sogvor says that we'll reach Álfheim tomorrow. I guess I ought to try and get some sleep. We have a long day of travel tomorrow before we reach our destination.



PART 9

Vordag, the sixth of Thorri

When we finally arrived at Álheim, Hervor called us all to a halt and after we all dismounted from our rides. She moved away from us all and began to weave a spell. Ribbons of pale blue magic flew out from her fingertips and spun around in a complex pattern which stretched out in all directions. The magic washed over us all, and what looked like a spirit shield appeared in a wide circle around the root. No, that wasn't right, the shield had been there the whole time. We just hadn't been able to see it.

A hole appeared in the shield and Hervor gestured for us to move through. We quickly complied, dragging along all our baggage as we hurriedly passed across the opening. Hervor didn't immediately follow us. Instead, she calmly walked over to Sogvor and handed her a small bag, which I assumed contained payment then followed us through the hole. The shimmering blue barrier closed behind her then seemed to wink out of existence as it returned to its previous invisible state.

The root seemed to be planted firmly in the middle of a forest that extended as far as the eye could see. It really didn't look any different than a forest on Midgard might. I even recognized several different varieties of trees including maple and cedar. It was so green and vibrant that I almost thought I could feel the life emanating all around me.

"Miun drouneng," a voice proclaimed abruptly as a tall figure detached itself from a nearby tree and fell to one knee facing Hervor and was joined by three more figures. Each of them had been so well disguised that they had appeared as if they were part of the forest.

"Resa," Hervor proclaimed and the elves each returned to their feet.

There was a brief exchange, and I didn't understand any of what they said, but when I heard my name accompanied by the word 'prinsessa' it didn't take an idiot to figure out Hervor had just introduced me as her granddaughter.

The four elves turned to me and each fell to one knee. Each muttered something in Elvish, then returned to their feet as Hervor commanded them too. I hadn't even realized that two of the camouflaged elves were women until they spoke. They wore so much paint over their features that I had been barely able to distinguish their faces, let alone determine their sex.

Hervor muttered something with a casual flick of her wrist and two of them disappeared back into the trees as if they had never even been there. One of the remaining two approached me.

"Your highness, I would be honored if you would allow me to take your bag," she said in almost perfect English.

"Sure, if you don't mind," I muttered, warily relinquishing my bag to her.

She stared at me a moment, but didn't say a word as she grabbed it from my hands.

"How much further do we have to go?" Sam asked suddenly.

"Not long, child. Dagdedar is merely a travel-spell away," Hervor replied, eying Sam with a calculating expression.

"Dagdedar what's that?" Leif asked dumbly.

"It is our capital city, human," Garik muttered, staring at Leif in irritation.

"Why don't we get going then? I'm eager to get out of these dirty clothes," Gramor muttered suddenly.

Hervor nodded and directed us all to stand in a circle with her standing at its center. She called up magic and began to work the weaves. There was a bright flash of light and then we were standing in the middle of what I at first took to be another forest filled with massive trees, many of which were as large as a house.

"Venn, what's this? I thought you were taking us to this Dagdedar place?" Leif asked, looking around with wide eyes.

"She did," I muttered, feeling a sense of awe come over me.

The place where Hervor had brought us was a forest, but it was also a city. When I looked around, I was able to make out the outline of a window here, a doorway there.

"It feels so good to be home," Garik said from my side with a huge smile on his face.

"Aye, no offense to thee my daughter, but I find human dwellings to be much too confining."

"You actually built your homes inside of the trees?" Sam asked in amazement.

"Nay child, these dwellings were not built. They were grown," Hervor said with a soft murmur.

A face appeared around a corner. It belonged to a young child who let out a delighted squeal then disappeared again. I could hear his voice carry out through the city as he called out excitedly. It didn't take long for a crowd to gather, they each bowed to Hervor and Heime and stared curiously at the rest of us.

Hervor smiled and addressed the people that had gathered. Again I noted her use of the word 'prinsessa' and my name. The people turned to me and I felt a sense of panic set in as I realized I had no idea what to say or do.

"Prinsessa Brynhilde," an elven woman close-cropped light-brown hair at the front of the crowd said with a flourish and a bow. She beamed up at me and said something more in Elvish.

"Princess," a voice whispered from my side. It was the guard who had volunteered herself to carry my bag. "This woman names herself Aglaia. She wishes to welcome you home and hopes your visit will be a pleasant one."

"Tell her that... I'm sure it will be," I muttered, staring at the guard with wide eyes, remembering at the last moment that elves felt it was poor manners to thank someone.

The guard relayed my message, and Aglaia beamed back at me. I waved awkwardly at the crowd, then I heard Hervor make a pronouncement in Elvish and the assembled elves moved out of the way to make a path for us. Heime took the lead, motioning for us to continue as we made our way through the Lejosálfar capital.

We reached the center of the city where the branches of the massive royal palace reached up into the sky. Sunlight shining down from above seemed to make the great tree appear almost as if it had been set afire. There was a brief delay as we all gawked in amazement before we were led inside.

There's so much to tell, and yet I find myself at a loss for where to start. Dagdedar is a really amazing place, as are the people. I don't know exactly what I was expecting, but they are much different than I could ever have guessed. I've always thought of elves as being humans with a more magical nature, but the truth is that elves are very different. They simply don't care about the small things that humans worry and fret over. They have different priorities, and I'm not entirely sure if the divergence is just cultural, or if it's due to a fundamental peculiarity at the very core of their being.

I have to ask myself is that divergence a part of me, or am I more human than elf? Even just a few days ago I would have said I was more human without question, but since coming to this place I'm not so sure. I'd never felt so complete before coming to Álheim. It was as if a piece of myself were missing, and I hadn't even known it. It was like this huge burden had been lifted from my shoulders and I felt free of it for the first time in over eighteen years.

I've changed so much since my transformation... Sometimes I feel as if I'm a different person who somehow got stuck with Neil's memories. The question really is: how much of this change is due to my own natural progression, and how much has been forced upon me by Hervor's many machinations? Or is it simply my innate elven nature slowly growing more dominant? I wish Hervor would talk to me and help me to understand, but all she will say is that understanding will come to me only when I'm ready. Well enough of that. If I keep this sort of talk up I'll wind up driving

myself crazy.

There's a sort of celebration tonight. I get the impression that Hervor comes and goes quite a lot, and it's not usual to make a big deal when she returns. I think it's because of me. The light elves seem captivated by their new princess. I was afraid how the people might react, but they really seem genuinely pleased to have me as part of the royal family. I think had the people been human I would have received a much different reception.



Siffendag, the seventh of Thorri

Well I met my aunts last night... Yep I said aunts. Apparently, Heime has two sisters. I'm not really surprised, but it would have been nice for someone to tell me. Like every other elf I've ever met, my aunts are tall, beautiful, and fair. When I first met them I thought they were twins they looked so much alike, but there's quite an age gap between the two of them, something like a few hundred years.

Gilda is the older of the two, and she seems to be the more outspoken of the sisters. Dagmar, has Hervor's calm serenity, but unlike my grandmother, actually seems to have a sense of humor. She speaks with a much more modern vocabulary than any of my other Elven relatives. Well at least the ones that I've met. Both my aunts admit to having children, though none so young as me.

My suspicions that the celebration last night was supposed to be in my honor turned out to be dead on. There was a feast, and well... a really wild party. The elves are highly sexual beings and they have very few inhibitions in that regard. I witnessed several couples have sex right out in the open. Needless to say, I returned to the palace early that night. Eva seemed disappointed, and actually found my embarrassment quite amusing. Leif, Sam and even Gramor shared my discomfort, and we all stayed inside for the length of the celebration.

I have a feeling my time spent within the Dagdedar is going to be an eye opener. I have the day more or less to myself, and because Álfheim is protected by a ultra-powerful spirit shield and the place is practically crime free, I can go pretty much wherever I like without having some overzealous guard getting in my way. Eva and I plan on hiking up into some nearby foothills where we can have some alone time.



Freydag, the fifteenth of Thorri

It's been over a week since my last journal entry... I've become quite the celebrity among the Lejosálfar wherever I go I can't seem to get any privacy, but I guess that's to be expected since most elves have little understanding when it comes to the concepts of personal space and privacy. They are a very open people, which I never would have guessed from my experiences with Hervor. Maybe

she's spent too much time among humans. I've tried to keep under the radar, but that's pretty difficult since there are no locked doors anywhere in Dagdedar, or anywhere else on Alfheim near as I can tell.

I immersed myself in my training, since I didn't seem to have much else to do besides stand around and let the elves gawk at me. There are some fields a few miles outside of Dagdedar that we all trained at. Until coming to Álfheim, I had been training almost exclusively with the practice hammer, but all the open space allowed for me to do a little practice with Mjölfnir.

Hevor handed over most of my magical training to my aunts. I still have training with my grandmother once a week, but most of what she's been teaching me is more meditative in nature. The rest of the week I rotate between lessons with Dagmar and Gilda. Dagmar's teaching style is pretty similar to Hervor's, and I was able to adapt to lessons with her quite easily. Lessons with Gilda aren't exactly what I'd call pleasant. She's not very good at explaining things, and when I failed to do as she instructed she got impatient and yelled at me.

Ah, well not much else to tell about...

I think I'll go and check in on Eva. We haven't been spending enough time alone together I need to let out some of my stress, and what Eva and I did in the bedroom does wonders for that particular problem.



Eirdag, the twenty-sixth of Thorri

So, I haven't been keeping up with my journal much. I've been busy... Hervor insists I need to spend time learning about my people. I've spent the last few weeks dodging the dusty old elf Hervor assigned to teach me about elven history and politics. It's pretty dry stuff and I really have no interest in learning any of it. I enjoy spending my time here in Dagdedar, and I almost feel like it's a second home, but I never really had much interest in history or politics, and having both crammed down my throat by some monotone-voiced librarian isn't what I consider fun. I mean, despite being older than dirt, my tutor, like all elves doesn't show her age, and like any other elf she's amazingly attractive, but it's still boring stuff even if the person who's reciting it happens to be easy on the eyes.

I started to pick up the elven language. I didn't really intend to at first, but most elves don't speak English and after a while I was starting to feel pretty isolated. I've only met about a dozen and a half elves who speak English thus far, and most of them are related. I still don't understand most of what I hear, but I know a few phrases, I've memorized the runic alphabet, and I can count up to thirty. When I asked Eva to help me learn the language she admitted somewhat reluctantly that she didn't know how to read or write, and insisted she was ill-suited to teach me.

I tried asking my father and Dagmar for help learning Elvish, but like Eva, they both insisted they weren't suited to the task. There was absolutely no way I was going to ask Eydís, (that's the name of librarian), for help, and Gilda was pretty well out of the picture as well. When I finally got to the end of my list Garik, was the only one I hadn't asked, and much to my surprise, he agreed to tutor

me. Well, maybe it shouldn't be so much of a surprise. I mean it's pretty obvious the guy has feelings for me. I think he'd do anything to spend a little one on one time with me which really makes me wonder if spending alone time with him is such a good idea. I mean I am attracted to him, and if I'm going to be really honest with myself, I'm beginning to like him even if he can be a little annoying sometimes.

At least I don't have to worry about Leif anymore. I don't know how I missed it, but he and Sam have coupled up. I mean pretty much everyone else knew, but I only figured it out a few days ago. It kind of pisses me off... At first I thought it was because of Sam's past, but really it's because I'm sort of jealous. A part of me liked the attention Leif was giving me, and I think I actually had feelings for him... Gah, me and this damn love square, pentagon or whatever the hel you want to call it. It's some sort of polygon anyway. Nothing is simple anymore. Not that I ever thought relationships were simple, but honestly, this is just ridiculous! Frizz, I need some peace I think I'll go meditate for a while that always helps me clear my mind...



Vordag, the twenty-seventh of Thorri

I did something really stupid today... No, it wasn't stupid it was completely and utterly insane! I-I... kissed Garik. It was just a light peck on the lips, but even so I find myself wanting more. What the frizzing hel is wrong with me? Why can't I be happy with Eva? I love her, shouldn't that be enough? I know it's not uncommon for elves to take multiple lovers and occasionally multiple spouses, but I just want to be with Eva... Damn this frizzing ass body! I hate being a damn girl, and I hate being attracted to guys! Especially, frizzing Garik! Leif was bad enough, but Garik?! Gah! Dammit all to Hell!



Vordag, the fourth of Goa

Shit... I saw exactly what happens when a light elf goes dark last night. The worse part is that it was Gilda that turned bad... I know she wasn't exactly the easiest person to get along with, but still I never would have thought she would go all super-villain on us. Eva and I had just returned from our daily training sessions and we were walking through one of the branches of the palace-tree when we heard a blood curdling cry ring out through the corridor.

We exchanged glances, then I grabbed Mjölfnir from where it was strapped at my waist and we took off running toward the source of the sound. We ran down the branch in a mad rush and stopped as we came into sight of Gilda and her victim. I don't really know the full story. None of us really do, but apparently Gilda had gotten into a heated argument with one of the servants and just lashed out at her.

"Gilda," I whispered as I approached the tall elven woman. She was standing over the corpse with

her back to me.

She whirled around and I took an involuntary step back when I saw the look of pure hatred on her face. She hadn't started to change yet, but the change had already been wrought upon her soul, so it was only a matter of time before she started to transform.

"I am free!" she yelled and leapt right at me.

I raised Thor's hammer and felt it slam into Gilda with the full force of its power. It might have killed her had she not called up a spirit shield, but it still sent her reeling down the hallway.

"Gilda, no!" an anguished cry called from behind me as my father came bursting onto the scene.

"'Tis already too late, brother," Gilda hissed leaping back to her feet.

"Nay sister, 'tis never too late. Thou canst still redeem thyself!"

"Thou understandeth not. I want this!" she howled.

"Even knowing the pain it will bring to your family and friends? Do you want to do this to them?" Eva retorted.

"What knowest thou thereof? Never have I felt so free!" Gilda shuddered, and grinned madly.

"I've lived with the darkness howling in my heart. It will consume you until there is nothing left but the desire to kill and destroy is all you care about," Eva called back.

"I do not care. Canst thou see? This is how I was meant to be! For too long have I tried to hold it back, but no longer!"

"Gilda!" Heime pleaded.

"Nay, brother! I will not hear thy pleas. Fare the well!" she exclaimed and was gone before any of us could act.

As the light from her travel spell faded away I watched as my father fell to his knees and wept. I felt his pain and grief almost as if it were my own, and moved to wrap my arms around him.

"Eva," I muttered quietly. "Go find Hervor or Dagmar. If Gilda is on the loose they're the only ones with enough power to defeat her."

Eva nodded and disappeared down the corridor as I did my best to comfort my father...



Laurdag, the seventh of Goa

Gilda is still on the loose. It has been hard on Dagmar who was closer to Gilda than anyone. Hveror, well... she hides it well, but since I can feel her emotions through the bond I know she's feels deep remorse for her daughter. There's a little bit of guilt too... I don't think she was surprised by her daughter's betrayal, it's almost as if she were expecting it. It sounds crazy I know, but this is Hveror we're talking about.

I think I've grown closer to my father than I ever realized. It nearly breaks my heart to see the pain in his eyes whenever Gilda's name is mentioned. He and Dagmar are leading the hunt to find their sister, but the search hasn't been very successful. Since Hveror has the shield around the root locked up, the only way in or out of Alfheim is through Hveror, so the hunt has been focused in the area around the palace in the belief that Gilda will return to confront her mother.

Well that's all I know... Hopefully we can find Gilda soon. Having a dark elf on the loose isn't good for anyone's nerves.



Eirdag, the tenth of Goa

"Prinsessa," a voice said from the opening to my room. I turned to find one of the servants standing there staring at me apprehensively. Very few of the servants spoke English not that it mattered since I'd requested the few that did to speak only to me in Elvish.

I still didn't understand the language that well, but when I caught the words 'drouneng' the elf word for queen, and 'tronraem' the Elvish word for throne room, I was reasonably sure I knew what she wanted.

I let her lead me through the branchway down into the main section of the palace-tree and finally into Hveror's throne room. Bright tapestries adorned the walls and a simple unadorned padded chair seated Hveror on a raised platform near the back.

A familiar figure with long auburn hair stood in the center of the room facing Hveror. Had there not been a very slight ring of light around my mother's form, I might have believed she was actually there. As it was I knew there was some form of magic at work. The Seidskati didn't have the sort of power required to send messages across worlds, but it was well within Hveror's abilities and sure enough, when I looked over to my grandmother I saw her hand clenched around a glowing purple orb about the size of a small orange. My mother had a similar orb clenched in her hand, and I just knew that the orbs were magical objects more than likely created by Hveror herself.

"...Sons of Odin are telling people that the Jotun will spare those who join their side. I don't know if it's true, but they have more and more magic users flocking to them. We're having some success detecting those transformed by Mengele's formula, but for every one we capture, another gets through. It isn't helping our credibility. Many are arguing the Seidskati aren't doing enough, and it's getting difficult to convince the people that we're doing everything in our power. For the time being we have the advantage, but I don't know if that will last."

"This is most troubling," Hervor said with a slight frown.

"You're telling me. We could use some help... if we don't stop Talman and his followers, there may be nothing left when it comes time for the final battle."

"I have apprised thee of the situation, Siedkona," Hervor muttered, staring at my mother with a meaningful look.

"Surely, one dark elf can't be that much of a danger. You're going to have to open the barrier around your world sooner or later."

"Of this I am well aware. Steps are being taken to resolve the matter."

"Hervor, we're supposed to be allies. We need your help. Are you just going to sit idly by while our world burns to ashes around us?"

Hervor let out a long sigh, "I will send my troops as soon as I am able."

"I certainly hope so. We're not getting desperate yet, but it's only a matter of time. Please hurry."

"I shall do all within my power. Thou hast my word, Seidkona. Now tell me what of the faekin?"

Mom shook her head, "The faeries have been quite a valuable asset, but there is only so much they can do against human weapons. Very few of them are skilled at using their magic for destructive purpose and many of those that do have the knowledge refuse to use it in order to kill. I've yet to see the Gray Queen face to face, but her messengers assure me she is doing everything within her power to help."

"Have the dvergar settled upon a price?"

"The dwarves seem unusually reticent. I'm convinced they're holding out for something, but I can't even begin to guess what it would be."

"The dvergar are no fools. They shall see the light soon. Thou hast only to wait."

"And what of thy other allies?" Hervor muttered, and I could feel her discomfort through the bond. Obviously, she was referring to the exiled elves, but her pride kept her from speaking of them directly.

"The Fellálfar still haven't come to a decision. The other tribes are probably the only reason we're holding our ground. Now enough with the questions. I'd like to hear how my daughter has been doing."

"Ask her thyself, Siedkona. She has been listening upon our conversation for some time," Hervor said, waving a hand in my direction.

Mom spun around, and I saw her face for the first time in months. She looked haggard, tired and

worn, but her face seemed to brighten considerably when she caught sight of me.

"Bryn, I've missed you so much."

"I've missed you too, Mom. I wish I could be there with you," I muttered, wishing for all the world that I could wrap my arms around my mother's image, but she was just an illusion, and I doubted it was a good enough one to allow for me to 'touch' her.

Mom shook her head, "No, Bryn you don't. I've seen the very worst of human nature come to light since you've left. I don't ever want you to see the things I've seen. It's better you stay where you're at in Álfheim, but enough of that. I want to hear how you have been."

"I'm fine."

"Bryn, please... I need this. Tell me what's been happening with you," she said staring up at me with an expectant expression.

Things must have gotten bad. I knew my mother and I knew how she thought. She wanted to hear about me because it would put her mind off her troubles for a short time. So I told her about my training, Sam and Leif's budding romance, my attempts at learning Elvish and I finally described Dagdedar and Álfheim to her.

Mom didn't interrupt me, instead she merely listened with an almost wistful expression on her face. When I was done she seemed disappointed, but didn't press me for any more information.

"I suppose it's time for me to go... The rest of the Seidskati will likely want to know what I've found out. Goodbye, Bryn. Goodbye, Hervor," she said sadly, then suddenly her image faded away and it was just me and my grandmother again.



Siffendag, the twelfth of Goa

Well, I think Hervor has had enough playing cat and mouse with Gilda. She announced today that she was going to be sending troops through to Midgard as part of an effort to try and get Gilda to reveal herself. Of course, it's a calculated risk. Hervor can't lie, so she actually has to send troops. So we'll probably only have one chance at capturing Gilda, and if we fail it's a good bet she'll escape through Hervor's shield.

The real surprising part is that when we spring the trap on Gilda, Hervor wants me there. Hervor, Dagmar, and I are the only ones with enough power to match Gilda. While I have very little training in the full use of my magic. I more than make up for that particular shortcoming with Mjölfnir at my side. I'm pretty sure Hervor has some secret reason for including me, but I really don't care. I want to be a part of this. At the very least I can help my father get some closure.



Vordag, the eighteenth of Goa

Yesterday we sprung our trap and it was a disaster.

With a blink of an eye we appeared outside the root with a few thousand of Hervor's soldiers.

"Gilda, daughter, I know thou art here. I know also that thou waitest for me to open the shield, likely so that thou mightest sneak through. Know this, daughter, I shan't let thee through. I didst give the humans my words that I would send aid, but I gave them no promise of when. I will to wait thee out, daughter. Wilt thou to wait me out?" Hervor called out in English.

There was no reply... So we sat and waited... and waited... and waited. It was hours before anything happened and just when I was beginning to think Hervor had miscalculated, Gilda finally made an appearance. It was getting late and Dagmar, Hervor and I were all sitting around a fire. There were guards posted all over the place, but when dealing with a magic user as powerful as my aunt, the guards were superfluous.

She came at Hervor from out of nowhere, and it happened so suddenly that she was on my grandmother before I realized she was there. Hervor was ready however, and a spirit shield formed up around her to repel Gilda's attacks. The black blur that was Gilda let out a howl of impotent rage and disappeared just as quickly as she had appeared.

"Thou shalt die, mother! I would have preferred that thou live, but thou hast left me with little choice," a voice called seemingly from everywhere at once. The voice wasn't recognizable as belonging to Gilda. Before, her voice had been soft and musical. After her change her voice sounded rough and guttural.

"Gilda, sister, please, return with us to Dagdedar... It's not too late. You can still redeem yourself. You can still expel the darkness from your soul," Dagmar pleaded.

"Nay sister, I will not! I have been liberated!"

"She hath chosen her path, Dagmar," Hervor pronounced quietly.

"Mother, I give thee one more chance. Let me through or die!"

"Nay daughter, I will not."

"So be it!" Gilda growled.

"Mother!" Dagmar called out suddenly and flung herself in front of Hervor.

The air in front of Dagmar flashed a sickly yellow color and she let out a high pitched scream as the magic worked its deadly course through her body. Steam rose from her skin as her flesh started to boil. I let out a strangled cry and turned away so I didn't have to watch the rest. When I let myself

look again, Dagmar's charred remains were lying on the ground at Hervor's feet.

I was angry, but I couldn't afford to be angry... I'd seen what anger could do to an elf who let it take control, and I didn't want that. No! I couldn't allow myself to take that path. Gilda had allowed herself to take that trail, and she had killed her own sister in an attempt to kill her own mother. I reached hold of my magic and let it wash over me. Then I emptied my mind of all emotion as Hervor had taught me. It worked, the anger faded away and a calm serenity washed over me.

My eyes scanned the small clearing looking for Gilda. She was nowhere to be seen, but I knew she would strike again once she detected a hint of weakness. I didn't intend for that to happen. She had to be stopped, and Hervor and I alone were the ones that had the power.

"Hervor!" I called. "Duck."

I grabbed Mjölfnir from my belt and raised it up into the air. A bolt of lightning flashed from above and hit the hammer in the center of its head. I swept it in a wide arc and watched as bolts of lightning shot out in all directions. Power sizzled across the landscape and the trees. I heard a thud and a loud gasp as the wave of lightning hit Gilda and sent her careening to the ground. I caught my first real glimpse of her post-change, and I kind of wished I hadn't. She had completed her transformation and looked like a typical Dokkálfar female. Her nose had been blunted, her skin had turned completely black, and her once golden locks had gone completely white.

She snarled up at me as I approached and leapt back to her feet in a flurry of motion. I raised Thor's hammer and sent bolt after bolt at her as she leapt through the trees. She was just too damn fast and none of the bolts hit home.

Power crackled around me and a yellowish splash of color appeared before my eyes. I leapt to the side, but the field of yellow followed me wherever I went. I knew that if I didn't act soon I would die just as Dagmar had. Mjölfnir's power proved useless in this regard, so I turned to my only other avenue, my magic. Power flooded through me and I concentrated on creating a spirit shield. Although, I knew how to form the weave, I'd never successfully created a barrier, and it was only in my moment of desperation that I was able to successfully form the proper threads of magic together. A bubble of blue energy winked into existence around me and Gilda's curse fizzed harmlessly against it.

I looked down at my hands and realized with a start that there were first-degree burns up and down my arms. I had become so deeply immersed in the workings of my magic that I hadn't even felt the corroding effects of Gilda's magic against my skin. They hurt like hell, but I wasn't seriously injured, so I forced my attention back onto what was important and leapt back into action.

Gilda's spell had succeeded in one respect. It had occupied all my attention and allowed her to move against Hervor. I let the spirit shield slip away and took off running toward my grandmother and Gilda as they duked it out. I waited for an opportunity to slip in, but the swirls of magic that surrounded both of them emanated a few yards in every direction and there was simply no way I could get close enough to do any good. So I watched hopelessly as they dueled.

The amount of power emanating from the two of them was staggering, but I got the feeling that Hervor was holding back. The emotions pouring through our bond were those of a mother in

distress for her daughter. Hervor couldn't bring herself to kill Gilda. Even after everything my aunt had done, Hervor still loved her daughter. I couldn't hardly believe that Hervor would let her emotions keep her from do what was necessary. It was a horrible thing for a mother to have to do, but this was Hervor, the same being who had commanded her own son to father a child with a woman he had barely known.

Gilda pounded at Hervor with her magic and I watched as Hervor slowly lost ground. Finally, it looked as if it might be the end. Gilda summoned an incredible amount of earth magic and the ground started to quake. A huge cavity appeared between the two of them, and a massive arm shot out from it. The arm, which was composed entirely of stone, reached out and snatched Hervor up from the ground.

"Now mother, 'tis time for thee to die!"

"Not if I have anything to say about it!" I yelled, having finally found my opening.

I jumping at Gilda with the hammer above my head and brought it down with all the force I could muster. The power blasted into Gilda's shield, which crackled and fizzled against the strain. Gilda staggered back and lost hold of her earth spell. The arm collapsed to the ground, and Hervor became lost among the debris. I didn't stop to concern myself over my grandmother's well-being. I had caught my aunt off-guard, and I didn't intend to lose that advantage. Lightning shot out all around me as I unleashed the power of the hammer against her barrier. She tried to counter with a fire-spell, but I saw her attack coming a mile away, and summoned a spirit shield to dispel the attack. With another hit from the hammer Gilda's shield shot apart and she fell to her knees, seemingly dazed.

I moved in for the final blow, but Gilda wasn't nearly as weakened as she had led me to believe. She struck out with massive blast of fire and it was all I could do to keep my shield up.

"Gilda!" Hervor called out. She was bruised, and bloodied, and looked like shit, but she was still alive.

Gilda's head snapped toward the sound of Hervor's voice and while she didn't loose her hold on the fire spell, it waned just enough to allow me to act. I pushed outward with my shield and let it absorb the full brunt of her attack as I took a tentative step forward. I clenched Mjölfnir in my right hand and slammed it into her chest with all the strength I could muster. She let out a nightmarish screech of pain as the lightning cascaded through her body and built up inside of her. I sensed what was about to happen next and averted my gaze as her body exploded from the energy building up inside. Her bloody remains littered the forest floor and I did my best to ignore them as I let my shield fall away.

The combined use of my magic and Mjölfnir had left me feeling quite drained, but I wasn't so weakened that I couldn't remain standing. I stuffed the hammer back into the loop on my belt and moved slowly over to where Hervor had fallen to her knees. She looked to have lost a lot of blood, and I suspect that her right arm was broken, but she would survive.

"Thou hast done well, Brynhilde," she muttered with a wary shake of her head. "Thou hast done what I, in my weakness could not." I could feel her despair and misery through the bond. In just a

short span of time she'd lost both of her daughters.

"You knew this would happen," I whispered suddenly. I don't know exactly why that particular thought popped into my head. There was no indication whatsoever to give me any reason to believe it were true, and yet I knew down at the very core of my being that it was.

"Aye, I knew," Hervor and began to weep. I'd never seen my grandmother lose her hold on her emotions like that. I found that I couldn't hold my tears back either, so I wrapped my arms around her and we wept together.



Freydag, the eighteenth of Goa

Lejosálfar funerals—if what I just experienced can even be called that—are very different from human ceremonies. Everyone got together, and they simply talked and consoled one another. There were no speeches, no prayer-songs, they didn't even bother burying or burning the bodies. They simply they left them sitting out in the woods for the animals to carry away.

Hervor wants me to return to Midgard with the next batch of soldiers. She said that I'm finally ready to return... I know it sounds odd, but she actually brought me to Álfheim to protect me from myself. According to Hervor, after Marion and Sophie's deaths I had set myself on a path that would have led to me going dark. As much as I hate to agree with her, I think she's right.

After Sophie's death I had been out for blood. If I had allowed my anger to control me, I could have easily gone down the same path as Gilda, and there's no way in Hel that I want to let myself go down that road. That's why Hervor's been cramming meditation down my throat. She knew that it would help me gain control of my emotions. Had I been completely human, I couldn't have learned so quickly, but elves are capable of a much deeper control than humans. We're actually able to fragment our minds, so that while we still experience the emotions in a tiny corner of our brain, our emotions won't affect our ability to think rationally.

I don't think Mom really understood why Hervor wanted me to come here. I think she was more concerned about my physical well being than anything else. She probably won't be happy to see me returning home, but I think I'm finally ready.



Vordag, the twenty-third of Goa

"Are they ready?" I asked turning to my father.

Heime nodded and I turned back to Leif, Sam, Gramor and Eva. After receiving a nod from each, I gave the all go to the elven spellcasters. A flash of bright light filled my vision and once it had

cleared I found myself standing in the shattered remnants of New Copenhagen. It was my birthplace and my home of eighteen years, and almost nothing of it remained. It made me want to weep, but I didn't allow myself to become lost in my grief. We hadn't come for sentimentality sake. We were there with a purpose in mind. The city had become one of the primary focal points between the war against the Sons of Odin and their allies. It was for that reason we had come.

Hervor had given command of the elven soldiers to me, all five-thousand of them. I didn't have the experience or knowledge, but Heime was there to guide me and keep me from making any stupid mistakes. Hevor seemed to think I needed the experience, but as always, she refused to tell me why. The Lejosálfar soldiers had embraced my leadership enthusiastically. I was after all, the hero who had defeated the dark elf Gilda.

Suddenly, I felt a trickle of cold chills run down my spine and I knew someone was casting a spell nearby.

"Havta frem!" I called in Elvish issuing the command to move forward.

My companions, along with the contingent of soldiers leapt into motion behind me and I moved quickly toward the source of the magic. The icy tingles became stronger as I moved closer to the source, and judging from the frequency and the power of the magic being used it was a good bet we were about step into the middle of a battle.

"Father, there's a lot of magic being used over that way," I whispered at my father pointing to the North.

Heime nodded thoughtfully, "Then to battle we must go, daughter. 'Tis the only the choice."

"I know it's just... I've never ordered anyone into battle."

"Aye, 'tis a difficult burden, but methinks thou shalt bear it well," he replied back, gripping my shoulder with an encouraging smile.

"Bryn, you were born for this," Eva said whispering on my other side.

Sam, Leif, and Garik all joined in offering their support.

I nodded, unhooked Mjölfnir from my belt, and called "Havta frem!" one final time before breaking out in a dead run.



A burst of air magic shot toward me and I summoned up a spirit barrier to block it. My attacker was an air mage, and while she was extremely skilled in the use of her power, she was no match for me when it came to raw elemental potential. Really, it sounds arrogant, but no human was.

Mjölfnir made short work of her and I moved on to the next fighter, only to find that there were

none left to fight. Our arrival had turned the battle—well, maybe skirmish is a better word—quickly in favor of our allies. There were maybe a few hundred soldiers and a dozen or so magic users on the other side so we pretty easily overwhelmed the enemy.

A very dirty and very tired looking soldier appeared. "It was sure nice of you folks to show up."

"Glad we could render some assistance. I'm Princess Brynhilde le Fey. And you are?"

"Lieutenant Jensen at your service, your highness. I'm sorry but did you say le Fey? I thought elves didn't have surnames."

"I'm only half-elf. My mother is Aryanna le Fey," I replied quietly.

"So the rumors are true," he said with a shake of his head.

"Well, I guess I ought to show you to camp. I'm sure the Lady le Fey will wish to see you," he added.

"Lead the way," I muttered with an extended hand.



"...move some troops down south to this ridge we can head them off before they can get any closer," Mom said. Nick Flint, Daniella, Matoaka and Theodora were all huddled around her, listening intently as she spoke. She was leaning over a large map and had her back turned away from us as we stepped inside the command tent.

Daniella was the first to note our presence and I saw her eyes widen in surprise as she whispered my name. Mom straightened her back and swirled around to face me, "Goddesses, Bryn what are you doing here?"

"Why yes, Mom, it's nice to see you too," I replied.

"That's not what I meant. It is good to see you, but why aren't you on *Álfheim*?"

"Hervor thought it was time for me to spread my wings and fly," I replied dryly.

"Hervor... That woman never ceases to confound me," she muttered with a shake of her head.

Mom stared at me for a moment, then moved across the room and embraced me in a hug. "I am glad to see you. I just didn't want our reunion to take place in the middle of a battlefield," Mom whispered in my ear.

Daniella joined in our hug and there were warm wishes spread all around as we greeted one another. Our reunion was cut short as a soldier appeared at the tent entrance to announce an incoming attack.

"I've brought five-thousand battle-ready *Lejosálfar* soldiers if you'll have us," I volunteered.

Mom looked ready to object, but after a brief moment let out a weary sigh, "I'll welcome the help, but I don't want you putting yourself in danger."

"I don't think my troops will be willing to go into battle without their prinsessa," I replied with a smirk.

That seemed to do the trick, "You're not going to take no for an answer, are you?"

I smiled ruefully and shook my head, but before I could make a reply there came a loud bang from somewhere outside and we all went running out of the tent.



PART 10

Vordag, the ninth of Einmander

Goddesses, Garik... He's so close to death right now. The last battle was a great victory for our side, but Garik took a huge burst of fire to the chest. The doctors and elven healers are doing their best, but when someone is that badly injured there's only so much they can do. If they flood his body with healing magic, they could wind up killing him, so they have to do it in small bursts.

If he dies I don't think I could bear it. I care about him, much more than I want too. I think I love him, but I love Eva too. Oh hel, I can't stand the thoughts of losing him. I'm so confused right now.



"Bryn, we need to talk," Eva muttered quietly coming over to place her hands on my shoulders.

"The doctors say he's going to live," I said quietly squeezing Garik's hand.

"You love him, don't you?" she asked and I could feel her apprehension through her bond.

I reached up to touch her hand, and felt tears well up in my eyes.

"Yes, but I love you too."

"I know," she whispered.

There were so many emotions swirling through the bond, but love was the most prominent among them. Surprisingly there was no jealousy or anger at my pronouncement, but there seemed to be a good deal of self-recrimination.

"I've been selfish—"

"What? Eva no! You're one of the most selfless people I know!" I cut her short.

"It's true, Bryn. I thought I could keep you to myself, but elves seldom confine themselves to a single mate. You deserve to be happy, and you can't do that if I keep you to myself."

I stood on my feet and turned to meet Eva in the eyes. "Eva... That's really... selfless of you, but I can't... I mean. It's not ..." I couldn't bring myself to finish a single sentence because everything I want to say was a lie.

Human morality simply doesn't apply to me anymore. Of all the sapient beings, humans are the only ones who have confined themselves to such a strict and often times baffling moral code. All beings have a sense of right and wrong, but humans tended to get hung up over so many silly and pointless details that most Vattir looked on us with a sense of amusement. I was only half-human, and since Hervor had awakened my elven side I was becoming more and more elf-like.

Everyday I felt more like an elf and less like a human, and in many ways it scared the frizz out of me. And yet... A large and ever-growing part of me wanted to shed away the final remnants of my humanity and be done with it. It was my humanity that kept me from accepting what Eva was telling me, but I knew what I wanted, and it was my elven side and my heart that finally won out.

I let out a long sigh and wrapped my arms around Eva, "If I'm with him. I can be with you?" I asked.

I felt shame for even asking it, but that was my human side, and I couldn't let it get in my way. My heart was made up, and there was no going back.

Eva nodded and I felt her regret mingled with relief through the bond, "Yes, of course."

"Thank the Norns! I feel like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders," I said with a nervous laugh.

Eva smiled and I felt her warm emotions flood through the bond. "If you're happy. I'm happy," she said before we joined in a kiss.



Laurdag, the third of Harpa

Today, I leave to face my destiny. It's been a long, twisted and difficult journey that has made me the person I am today. I'm ready to do what is necessary in order to insure my people, both humans and Lejosálfar, survive. If that means I must die then so be it, but I will die fighting, and I will make my death mean something.

I'm so afraid, but what choice do I have? I must complete my destiny. I cannot allow for either

Midgard or Álfheim to be destroyed. They are my homes, and the people I care about are depending on the efforts of both myself and others.

It's time for me to go. My supplies are packed, and I'll be leaving this journal here in case I don't survive. If I die, I want to leave something of myself behind. I'm ready, goodbye to everyone and everything.



Manadag, the twelfth of Harpa

Well, I survived the trip to hel, but even I don't understand how. It's been almost a week since the final battle, and I still can hardly believe everything that has happened. So many of the things Hervor has done make sense now, but there so many questions that have been left unanswered. I think that I'll go back and recount everything from my last journal entry just to help my mind make sense of it all...

We departed from the root of the Yggdrasil just as we had when we left for Álfheim, but this time Hervor was not with us. She was making final preparations back on the light elf home world and would soon be leading the last of her troops to Midgard for the final battle.

We said our goodbyes as we had before, but this time the goodbyes were much more emotional, as both Mom and Daniella realized it may very well be the last time they saw me.

Again, we mounted up on Else and Eksel, and again Sogvor was our dwarven guide. Finally, we were underway and our mounts were crawling up the root of the world tree.

We travel for a good ten hours before coming to a level section of root. We made camp and after a fitful night spent tossing and turning we broke camp, re-mounted the dragons and continued onward. We reached the trunk of the Yggdrasil in less than an hour. The world tree was so massive that the trunk appeared to go on forever, and I was a bit disappointed that I couldn't see its branches. I yearned to stay longer and explore every branch and root of the tree, but I knew that we didn't have the time.

Sogvor steered her mount down a nearby root and we started our descent down to Niflheim. At first things were calm and sedate as our previous days travel, but then we heard a loud howl coming up on our tails.

"Oh frizzing hel, dark elves" I cursed after turning to look back.

"Sogvor! We've got company!" I shouted.

"I see 'em!" Sogvor called back over her shoulder, and suddenly Eksel began picking up speed and Else did the same.

The dragons moved fast, but the dark elves were even faster as they scurried down the root of the

world tree. I don't know how they kept grip, but I suspect there was some form of magic at work. I tore Mjölfnir loose from where it was strapped at my waist and summoned the power of thunder. I directed a bolt out at the dark elves and felt a sense of grim satisfaction as those at the forefront were sent soaring over the edge of the root. I felt, Eva and Gramor summon their magic and begin to help fend off the approaching Dokkálfar, but no matter how many we killed, more took their place. Heime, Garik, Sam and Leif all helped fend off the attacks with their dwarven fire-cleavers. Sam hadn't developed her magic to the point that she could use it without fear of losing control, so she had no choice but to depend on the fire-cleaver to defend herself.

Despite our best efforts, the dark elves got closer and closer until they were riding on Else's tail, literally. The dragon let out a loud rage-filled roar and snapped at a dark elf as it latched onto her tail. She bit into it with her mouth of razor-sharp teeth and flung it aside with a snap of her neck.

Three more dark elves leapt onto Else's back. She took out the first with a swing of her tail, but the other two climbed up the dragon's back and started ripping into her flesh. Sam took out another one with her rifle, but before she could level her gun at the third it was on her. The monstrous creature let out a loud screech as Leif grabbed it off her, but then it had already ripped the straps holding Sam to shreds. She slipped from where was seated and flew forward, directly into Leif and the dark elf that was tearing at his chest. There was a snap as the Leif's straps flew apart and all three tumbled off Else's back and into oblivion.

"No!" I cried out frantically feeling as if a part of me had just died.

Else lurched into motion, first loosing her hold on the root, then suddenly leaping into the open space 'above' us. Gramor summoned wind magic and I felt my stomach lurch as it whipped all around us. We went shooting past Eksel and landed about twenty feet in front of him. I tugged on the rein and Else lunged into a mad dash fueled by adrenaline and desperation. I looked back and watched as Eksel heaved into the same mad-dash behind us.

"Leif... Sam..." I whispered as we raced toward Niflheim and away from the dark elves.



The dark elves stayed on our tail for almost the whole ride. The hurried pace was taking a heavy toll on the dragons, but they were creatures of magic and seemed able to push themselves beyond the limits of any mortal creature. The viddrakis' pace kept the dark elves from getting too close, but not far enough for us to slow.

I tried not to think on Leif and Sam's apparent deaths as we fled. Logically I knew that it was extremely unlikely that they had survived, but for whatever reason I couldn't accept it on an emotional level. Too many people had died already, and I was sure more were to follow. Maybe it wasn't so bad, I'd probably wind up seeing them again very soon.

We reached Niflheim after hours of traveling with the Dokkálfar nipping at our heels. We were tired and weary from the ordeals, but were forced to press on as our pursuers showed no signs of relenting.

Niflheim proved true to its name. The place was dark and the fog was so thick that we could barely see a few feet in front of us. Not only that, but it was cold, colder even than the arctic back on Midgard. The root of the World Tree had been very cold, so we were still wearing our cold-weather gear when we arrived on the world of mist.

"The conclave will be expecting compensation for my continued services," Sogvor growled as she pulled Eksel up alongside us.

"Is that all you think of? Money?" Gramor asked from the other draki.

"What yeh think? I'm dvergar," Sogvor retorted falling into a fit of laughter.

"The conclave will receive their compensation," I replied coldly, then spat bitterly, "Let's just get going. The dark elves will be on us any minute now."

Sogvor nodded, and without another word, guided Eksel back into motion, Else followed a moment later.



The ride to Helheim seemed to drag on for days and it very well could have. There was no day on Niflheim and it was perpetually dark, which made it that much harder to tell how much time had passed. I know we stopped repeatedly to eat and rest, but time just seemed to bleed together and I had a hard time keeping track as the hours ticked by. We didn't dare stop for more than a few hours so we weren't able to get much sleep.

Several times the dark elves almost had us, but each time we managed to get away by the skin of our teeth.

Finally we reached the bridge leading into Helheim, but someone was waiting for us.



I looked around and noted something odd. Pale colorless figures were arrayed in a line and were walking slowly toward the Gjöll bridge. They moved in perfect unison and seemed completely unaware of anything but the bridge into Helheim.

"Holy frizz," I muttered quietly as I realized what I was seeing.

"Bryn? What is it?" Garik's voice said from behind me and I felt his hand on my shoulder.

"Can't you see them?" I asked him.

"See what?"

"The dead," I responded back turning to look him in the eyes.

Garik didn't give me an answer and I didn't wait around for one. I quickly pulled loose the straps holding me atop Else, jumped down to the ground and moved quickly toward the bridge. I stopped just a few feet away from the entrance. According to legend there was a Jotun named Modgud who guarded the entrance to Helheim. So where was she, and why hadn't she made an appearance?

"Modgud!" I called out.

I sensed movement under the bridge's gold-thatched roof and a figure emerged from within. She was huge, standing close to twelve feet tall, so huge in fact that she couldn't stand upright inside the massive bridge. Aside from being a bit on the muscular side she was actually quite pretty, and had she been my height she could have easily passed for human.

"Who calls me?" she asked her eyes moving to each member of the party.

"I did," I said, staring up at her defiantly.

Modgud stared down at me thoughtfully then spoke, "And who are you to speak my name so freely?"

"I am Brynhilde, daughter of Aryanna le Fey of the Seidskati and Prince Heime of the Lejosálfar." I stared up at her feeling my breath catch in my throat.

"Your lineage means nothing to me, half-elf," the Jotun woman glared down at me coldly.

"Let us pass," I demanded meeting her glare.

Modgud shook her head and laughed, "You are a bold one, I'll give you that, but I cannot let you pass."

"Let me rephrase that. Let us pass or I'll flatten your ass with Mjölfnir," I replied coldly raising Thor's hammer for the Jotun to see.

Modgud threw her head back and let out a great booming laugh, "This is my task, girl, I must not let just anyone pass, even one who wields power such as yours."

I racked my brain trying to think of something that would help persuade the giantess to let me pass, but I had no idea what would persuade her. If I chose to fight, I somehow doubted I could win, yet I knew I couldn't convince her to let me pass. She was Jotun, and I was seeking to resurrect beings who were her sworn enemies.

"Modgud, what is it that you desire above all else?" Eva asked, suddenly stepping forward.

"To be free, but my oath binds me here as surely as if I had been cast in chains," the Jotun spat bitterly.

"Oath to whom?" I suddenly thought perhaps there was another way after all.

"Odin."

"Dost thou know why we are come hither?" Heime stepped forward.

"It does not matter. It is a fool's errand. Turn back or suffer my wraith!" the Jotun howled.

"We've come here seeking to free the dead gods from Hel's clutches," Gramor added, appearing next to Heime.

"Then you are even bigger fools than I had realized! Begone from my presence!"

"We have to press forward, even if that means fighting you. I was conceived for this purpose, and I will not be deterred, even by the likes of you," I stared up at her defiantly.

"And if I let you through, what will you do for me?" Modgud asked, stroking her chin thoughtfully.

"You wish to be free, don't you? Perhaps we can convince Odin to free you from your debt!" I replied.

"I would have your word, little elfling. If I let you pass you will do all within your power to convince Odin to free me."

I hesitated, what Modgud asked seemed simple enough, but I didn't want to be bound by another oath. And there was no telling what I would have to do in order to fulfill such an oath. Yet I didn't have any choice... and it was as simple as that. If I wanted to pass I had no choice but to make the promise.

"I swear it," I said and felt a familiar click in the back of my head as my innate magic surged to life and forged the link in the back of my mind that would compel me to fulfill my oath.

"You and your companions may pass... Be warned. Hel will not welcome you with welcome arms. If she finds you, and find you she will, she will stop at nothing to destroy you."

"Thanks," I muttered quietly then I motioned to the others to follow and stepped past Modgud without another word.

No one spoke as we passed across the bridge. After a walk of about thirty minutes we made it to the other side and I looked down a long winding path. I swallowed hard and started forward. My destiny was waiting for me.



I lost track of all time as we journeyed that last little ways to Helheim. It could have minutes, or hours or days and I wouldn't have been able to tell the difference. My thoughts turned to Sophie, Marion, Leif and Sam. Would I see them again? Would I get to speak with them and say my final goodbyes? Or was I destined to join them?

The dead walked along with us as we made our way down to Helheim. I tried my best to ignore

them, but it was difficult when they were following the same route.

When we finally reached the gates to Helheim, Hel was waiting for us, and she just was as horrifying as I had imagined. She was standing in front of the entrance with a wicked grin on her face. One half of her face was that of pale-skinned beauty, while the other was the stuff born of nightmares. It was coarse and black and was all broken and twisted. Her split-faced countenance reminded me of Mengele, and I suppressed a shudder as I pulled Mjölfnir loose from my belt.

"I've been waiting for you," she stared at us with a predatory smile.

I didn't stop to think before I acted. I knew what I had to do. No one tried to stop me. Maybe they understood that what I was doing was necessary or maybe I caught them by surprise, I still don't know. I heard footsteps pounding on the ground behind me and I knew that my companions were following on my heels. I was just a few feet away from Hel when I swung the hammer at her. I let out a loud gasp as I felt it reverberate against the pale blue bubble that had appeared suddenly around her.

"Did you really think you could match the power of a goddess? Even with the power of the hammer you are nothing," she sneered.

I scowled back at her, lifted the hammer and hit it against her shield as hard as I could. The second blow didn't do a thing, so I hit it again and kept on pounding.

Hel scowled at me and I could feel her weave the magic just enough time to dive out of the way as a blast of fire came soaring my way. Pain exploded in my back, but I gritted my teeth and forced myself back to my feet. It hurt pretty bad, but I could still move and I was pretty sure the injury was superficial.

"Bryn watch out!" Eva called from behind and I swirled around in just enough time to see a large blood-drenched dog that could only have been Garmr jump right at me.

I brought the hammer down, swept it in a wide arc, hit the dog right in the snout and sent it soaring into the air. I didn't even wait to see it land before swirling back around to face Hel. She hadn't been twiddling her thumbs while I'd been distracted. Sickly green light filled my vision and I thought that it was the end. Then suddenly there was a bright flash of light and Gna appeared from out of thin air between me and Hel.

"Bet you weren't expecting that!" Gna grinned before pounding her spear into the ground. Pale light leapt up and down the haft of the spear and Gna brought it down to pound against the goddess of death's shield.

I felt a pair of hands on my shoulder, and winced in pain as I looked back to find Eva tracing her hands across my injured back. Light poured out from her hands and the pain faded to a dull throb as she worked a spell to heal the wound.

"Thanks, I needed that.," I grinned up at her, and shared a brief kiss just before leaping back into action.

"Pitiful!" Hel spat. "Is this the best Frigg could do? A half-elf, and a messenger. Neither of you have the power to undo me. Even together you don't have what it takes! Why am I even bothering with you?!"

Gna and Heime were both doing their best to fend off Hel's attacks. Gramor and Garik were duking it out with Gramr while Sogvor kept a safe distance mounted atop Eksel. Garik and my grandmother seemed to be doing a pretty good job keeping the beast at bay, so I moved in to assist Heime and the messenger goddess who were struggling to keep Hel at arm's length. Both Heime and Gna were more skilled fighters, but Hel's magic cut through their attacks like they were butter. Each time Hel sent a burst of magic at my father he would raise his sword and it somehow seemed to dissipate nearly the entire brunt of the attack. That's not to say he escaped her attacks unscathed, as he had sustained several burns and a gash from a particularly wicked wind-spell.

I got as close as I dared, waiting for an opening, then jumped in the moment one became available. The hammer came down so hard on Hel's spirit barrier that the shield began to waiver. I let out a shout of triumph and moved in to follow up with another hammer strike, but that proved to be a mistake. Another, burst of sickly light came pouring out of Hel's hands and hit me square in the chest. It had happened so fast that I couldn't do anything to avoid getting hit, and I knew I was royally screwed.

White-agonizing pain shot through every single pore in my body and I fell to the ground, unable to maintain motor control of my limbs. I heard several voices call out my name, but by then I was so lost to the pain that I had no idea who they belonged to. Darkness crept into the edge of my vision, but it wasn't unconsciousness that threatened to overtake me, it was complete and utter oblivion. Not just death, but a total unraveling of my existence. I don't know exactly how I knew this, but I understood it to be true with every fiber of my being.

"No!" I screamed out in defiance. I would not let Hel win! I wasn't going to fade into the darkness and let everything I had worked for be for nothing. I clenched my teeth and fought against Hel's spell. At first, it seemed to work, as I could feel the darkness withdraw, but then it was back with even greater force and I wept from the sheering agony of it. I felt as if I were on fire, but the pain transcended the physical. Hel was attacking me at the very core of my being. She was trying to destroy my soul.

"No! I won't let you win!" I screamed with renewed determination and did the only thing I could think to do. I let my magic wash over me and summoned a spirit shield to block her attack. Hel shattered my spell with almost no effort and continued her assault as I writhed helplessly on the ground.

Just, when I thought I was doomed I felt Eva reach out to me through our bond and I knew what I had to do. I reached back and anchored my consciousness to her. As one we reached across the cosmos to Álfheim, where Hervor's mind was waiting to be touched. Just as I had with Eva, I anchored myself to Hervor, but it wasn't enough. I extended my magic and looking for something, anything, that would help me stop Hel and I found it. I reached out to Garik and my father in desperation. I could feel their emotions join Eva's and Hervor's as I formed a bond between them and me. Hel's spell of nothingness receded further and I knew I was so close from defeating it, and yet I sensed it still wasn't enough.

There were no more minds for me to join with so I lashed out with the hammer. A bolt of lightning struck out at Hel and hit her right in the chest. Hel's concentration broke just enough for me to gain an edge. The bond gave me the last of the strength I needed to fend off the evil that was attempting to destroy me. I erected another spirit barrier and funneled all the energy into it that I could muster. Sickly green light flashed in front of my eyes, then vanished as I sat bolt upright watching as the dark power consumed the one who had summoned it. Hel let out an inhuman wail, her face filled with horror as a whirling cyclone of pure black energy swirled around her flailing limbs.

The tips of her fingers turned from solid flesh to sand which was sucked into the cyclone then slowly the rest of her body dissolved into the same black dust. It started with her fingers then moved up past her wrists and soon consumed both of her arms, and finally her entire body was gone and nothing remained. The dark swirls of power faded away and I was left staring up in wide-eyed disbelief at an empty patch of ground.

I'd done it, I'd done the impossible, I'd turned the power of a goddess against her and killed her. No, she wasn't just dead, she was destroyed, her very soul had been ripped apart and nothing remained, not even a body. I let out a sigh of relief and fell into a fit of hysterical laughter.

"Frizzing Hel yeah!" I called out, the irony of invoking the dead goddesses name not lost on me.

"Bryn, are you alright? What happened?" Eva asked.

"I'm fine," I muttered and stretched out to touch Eva through the bond to reassure her and I felt Heime and Garik minds reach out to me at the same time. Heime's and Garik's concern for me matched Eva's, and was so strong that it nearly brought me to tears.

I felt my breathe catch in my throat and shook my head in a vain attempt to clear my thoughts. I looked over to Garik and remembered for the first time that he and my grandmother had been fighting Gramr before Hel had tried to destroy me. My eyes scanned the area nearby and I noted the hound of Hel's dead body and its severed head just a few feet away.

"Bryn, what happened?" my gramor asked.

I shook my head and looked up at her, but I didn't get a chance to talk since Gna spoke first, "Hel tried to use the vilest sort of magic on our young friend. Had she been successful, Bryn's entire being, her very soul, would have been destroyed."

"Norns," Gramor said biting her lips and wrapped her arms around me.

"So Hel is dead then?" Garik muttered from nearby.

"Not just dead. I think her spell backfired," I sighed shaking my head and moved to stand.

"Daughter, thou must rest," Heime said putting a restraining hand on my shoulder.

I shook my head again and stared up at him defiantly, "There isn't time."

"Bryn, Prince Heime is right, Hel's attack on you was traumatic and you've expended a lot of magical energy. You need to rest at least for a few minutes." Eva added staring into my eyes her concern flaring up through the bond.

I closed my eyes and let out a long steady sigh, "We don't have the time, Eva. I need to get into Helheim."

"She's not going to change her mind. I know that look, she's just as stubborn as her mother," Gramor added quietly.

I gently moved Heime's hand off my shoulder then grabbed Mjölfnir from the ground and stumbled back onto my feet. Eva was right, I was weak, but I didn't think I had any choice other than to continue on. There was this sense of urgency compelling me to keep going and it was getting stronger by the minute. With it was a growing certainty that if I allowed myself to stop something terrible would happen.

I walked over to Helheim's gate and I shuddered at the sight of the place. The very air around us seemed to radiate a sense of foreboding and malevolence and I could barely contain my terror as I drew closer to the entryway. The gate itself was black, resembling wrought iron, but I doubted it was made of something so mundane. The walls on either side of the gate were solid black, completely devoid of color or light, but were smooth and solid to the touch.

With shaking hands I reached out to touch the gate's latch. It was freezing cold, but I didn't let that stop me as I lifted the latch and forced the gate open. It swung open without any resistance and I took one step forward and turned back to my companions.

"I go on alone," I muttered staring back at them.

"Bryn no!" Eva muttered immediately and her protests were joined by similar protestations from the rest of the party, well everyone except Gna and Sogvor. Sogvor had kept herself apart from the rest of us since coming to Niflheim and she had been perfectly content for things to remain that way. Gna, on the other hand actually agreed with me.

"Bryn must do this alone. The task is hers and hers alone," Gna said quietly.

A few minutes more and Eva and everyone finally relented and agreed that I had to go inside alone. We said out goodbyes and then I turned back toward the gates to Helheim, stepped inside and didn't look back.



A sort of pale luminescence permeated the air, but nearly as I could tell it didn't have an discernible source. Once I moved a couple dozen feet inside I began to make out the forms of the dead. They stood in row after unending row, looking blankly off into the distance. I suppressed a shudder and started forward again.

I moved through the rows of the dead, not really sure what I was doing or whether the gods could

be found intermingled among the other dead. All the people I passed by were wearing modern clothing and none of them were old. I passed unfamiliar face after unfamiliar face and time seemed to have no meaning as I wandered aimlessly through the crowds of dead. I stopped suddenly in surprise when I realized I recognized one of those faces.

"Sophie," I whispered and moved closer to where she was standing amongst the columns of the dead.

I stared at her for a moment and I reached out to touch her face and quickly withdrew it when I realized that she was solid to the touch. I hesitated for a another moment then I reached out to her with my magic and watched in amazement as color slowly returned to her face and the rest of her body. She blinked suddenly and she looked at me with a look of confusion.

"W-Where am I?" she asked.

"You're in Helheim," I muttered smiling sadly.

"I'm dead then. That explains a lot. I was in a happy place, Mom and Dad were there and my grandmother."

I could feel tears beginning to form in the corner of my eyes and I did my best to hold them at bay. "Goddesses, I've missed you Sophie."

Sophie blinked at me, "Do I know you?"

I sighed and shook my head, "Sophie it's me, Neil."

"Neil? Right! And I'm the Goddess Frigg. I'll give you credit you sort of look like him, but last I checked Neil was a boy."

"Sophie, it's really me."

"Prove it," she said folding her arms across her chest.

"Last year, I walked in on you and Ham having sex," I replied quietly.

"That bastard! He swore he'd never tell anyone!"

I grabbed Sophie by the head and forced her to look me in the eyes, "Sophie I never told anyone. It's me."

Sophie's eyes grew wide and she gasped, "Holy frizz! It is you!"

"Look Sophie--"

"You're a girl! How did this happen?!"

"It's a really long story and I'd love to tell you all about it, but I don't think I have the time."

"Neil what are talking about? You're dead, you have all the time in the world."

"Sophie, I'm not dead."

"What? Than how'd you get here?"

"Ragnarok has come. I've been sent here to resurrect the dead gods."

"Okay, you know that sounds crenking thached don't you?"

"Like I said, it's a long story."

"Obviously," she replied back folding her arms across her chest with a thoughtful expression on her face.

"Sophie... I don't know how to tell you this... but Sam and Leif... They didn't make it."

"How?"

I explained about their deaths and I saw a slow smile creep onto her face.

"If they're dead then they've gotta be here! Let's find them!"

"Sophie, I wish I could, but I have to find the gods before it's too late."

"Did you know where they can be found?"

"No."

"Well then we can look for Sam and Leif while we're looking for them!"

"Yeah, I guess we could do that," I muttered quietly.

"So what's your plan?"

"Well... I thought I'd just keep looking."

"That's it? That's your plan?"

"You have any better suggestions?" I shot back sticking my tongue out at her.

Sophie snorted, "Well, you could always ask for help."

"Help? Where on Midgard am I going to find anyone to help me?"

Sophie shook her head and grinned at me mischievously, "Could you be any thicker? I see getting changed into a girl hasn't made you any smarter. Neil, look around you."

I did as she suggested and winced as I realized she'd meant I should ask the dead for help. Why not? I'd already awakened one dead person. Why not a few more?

"Call me Bryn," I muttered, then took off running through the columns of the dead. I got the feeling that waking too many of the dead was a bad idea, and I really didn't know which of them I could trust, so I looked for a familiar face. I stepped into another column and found that the people around me were wearing clothing that was several hundred years old. I almost turned back when I caught sight of a face that made me momentarily panic.

"Hey, what's the deal running off like that!" Sophie growled, appearing from behind a row of the dead.

I didn't answer, I could only stare at woman I had stopped in front of in utter confusion. "Oh, N-Bryn. I'm so sorry."

"It's not Mom," I said finally. The woman looked like Mom, and she was about the same height, but her hair was black which pretty much gave it away. Well that and the old-style clothes.

"Holy frizz!" I yelled suddenly.

I knew who the woman was, she was Lilith le Fey, my ancestor. I once again summoned up my magic and touched the woman on the cheek.

"Why have you awakened me?" she asked abruptly as color slowly returned to her face and body.

"Are you Lilith le Fey?" I asked her quietly.

"I am," she replied cautiously. "Who are you?"

"I'm Brynhilde le Fey. You're my ancestor."

Lilith stared at me with an appraising look that reminded me of my mother, "It's nice to meet you Brynhilde, but I don't understand why you've woken me."

"We're looking for dead gods! We thought you could help!" Sophie interjected enthusiastically.

"Dead gods... Oh, I see you're not dead. The fact that you've managed to get this far is astounding, but I'm afraid I can't help. I don't know where Hel has hidden the Allfather or any of the others. For all I know this gentlemen standing here next to me could Baldr."

"Any help you could give would be appreciated. Time's running short and I have no idea what I'm doing here," I replied.

Suddenly, Lilith looked down at my waist where I had the hammer of Thor strapped to my belt. "Maybe you already have what you need to find them," she muttered.

Of course! Why hadn't I seen it before? As soon as she said it I knew Mjölfnir was the key.

"Thanks!" I beamed at her.

Lilith nodded then her skin turned gray and then it was just me and Sophie again.

"You can probably go back to sleep too. I think I can find them on my own," I said quietly.

"You're kidding, right? I wouldn't miss this for the world!"

"I thought you might say that," I grinned back at her, then tossed Mjölfnir up in the air and willed it find its target, namely its master Thor.



Mjölfnir flew through the air and went soaring through the rows of the dead and we followed after it at a dead run. We swept past row after row of the dead, and I thought we might keep running forever when suddenly a building appeared suddenly from out of the abyss. The building looked like something out of the history books. It was built from what appeared to be ordinary stone, it was long and narrow and had a thatched roof.

I yanked the hammer back out of the air and clenched my fist around it. I expected some sort of guard as we entered the building, but there was no resistance whatsoever. My ears filled with the sound of laughter when I stepped into the main room and I felt my eyes widen at the sight before me. I'd found the gods, and they were sitting around a long table laughing and drinking.

They didn't seem to register our presence and I just sort of stood there trying to think of something to say. Of course, Sophie took care of that.

"Heya!" she said enthusiastically.

The laughter died down and all eyes in the room turned to look on us.

"Why do you disturb us?" a voice said at the other end of the room.

"YOU! What are you doing here!?" I said in shocked disbelief.

"Well last I checked it was because I was dead," Loki answered back staring at me blankly.

"No, you escaped. You attacked me at the dingha months ago. Why would you come back?"

Loki laughed and stared at me with a bemused expression, "Escaped? As appealing as that sounds, I haven't left Helheim since my death."

"Lies! I saw you! You trick me into releasing my power!"

"Enough, of this nonsense!" a voice said from the end of the table. He was missing an eye, and he looking every bit the image of an old viking warrior.

"You come here and disturb our rest and then you make accusations that cannot be true. Loki has been here by my side for all these centuries. He is bound by the same chains that bind us all," the old warrior, whom I presumed to be Odin, growled, pointing down at the floor where each of the gods was chained.

I stared at him in disbelief. If it hadn't been Loki who had attacked me, then who had it been? Obviously, someone had been masquerading as him, but with the sort of power the doppelganger Loki had displayed, it could only have been another god or Jotun.

"I was attacked by a god. He claimed to be Loki and he looked just like him."

"You were attacked by a god and you're still alive? Your story is getting harder and hard to believe!" another voice accused in disbelief. He had long gold hair and looked like a much younger and larger version of Odin.

"Be calm, my son. Let the girl speak," Odin said quietly eyeing me thoughtfully.

"Allfather, I'm incapable of telling lies. I'm a half-elf," I said staring up at the god defiantly.

"You're a what?!" Sophie asked from my side.

"She's speaking the truth, she is a half-elf as she claims. I can see the truth of it glow around her," another god said, thoughtfully stroking at his long-brown beard.

"She has Mjölfnir!" the younger-looking Odin called out suddenly and extended his open hand.

The hammer suddenly flew out of my hands and shot toward its master. Thor let out a howl of glee as he grasped the weapon in his hand. Abruptly, lightning flooded my vision and when it cleared, Mjölfnir had returned to its proper size in the grasp of the god's hand.

"Girl, why have you come here?" Odin said quietly.

"I was sent by my grandmother Hervor, the Queen of the Lejosálfar, and my mother, Aryanna le Fey, on behalf of Frigg to free you."

"Hervor?! Queen of the light elves?!" A god with a long-brown beard suddenly leaped to his feet angrily.

"Freyr, be at ease, we have been gone for a very long time," Odin said quietly. then turned back to me.

"You say you were attacked by a god. There is only one of us that has been free to roam Midgard for all these centuries and that would be Lodur."

"Lodur?" I asked in disbelief. "Why would one of the creators align himself with the Jotun?"

Odin sighed and shook his head, "Long ago, when the Aesir and Vanir were at war, Frigg foresaw

our end."

"Ragnarok!" Sophie hissed.

Odin nodded, "Lodur, my brother, grew angry at the pronouncement. He didn't wish to die, so he killed Skuld."

"What?!" Sophie asked suddenly.

Skuld, was one of the Norns, the trio of goddesses that controlled the fates of gods and men alike. Urd the oldest sister had control over the past, Verdani the middle sister kept watch over the present, and Skuld the youngest, kept watch over the future.

"With Skuld out of the way Lodur was able to manipulate events in his favor. He knew that the best way to do that was to ally himself with the Jotun. The Aesir and the Vanir were at war and he manipulated events to keep us fighting, instead of making peace as was foretold." Odin finished.

"You weren't supposed to die! Why didn't you try to stop him?" I called out in sudden realization.

"Because, we didn't realize the truth until it was too late!" Thor howled angrily, swinging Mjölfnir at the open air.

"But the codices and eddas all say that all the male gods died! Why didn't the goddesses know Lodur hadn't died with the rest of you?!" I asked.

"I don't know," Odin said quietly.

So many things were beginning to make sense, but that mysterious sense of urgency was beginning to creep up on me again. I had so many questions, but I knew that they would have to wait. Ragnarok was lurking at our doorstep and I wasn't about to let it come tearing into the house and catch me unaware.

"Allfather, Ragnarok comes. We have need of you. Will you join in the final battle to help save Midgard?" I asked urgently.

"You need not ask, girl," Thor spat.

"Lodur must be stopped," Odin agreed.

"Then what are you waiting for? Come on, let's get going!" Sophie exclaimed.

Odin cocked his head and furrowed his eyebrows, but didn't respond to Sophie's pronouncement. Instead, he turned to Thor. "You know what to do."

Thor grinned and let out a long bellow. Then with a mighty swing he threw the hammer out of his hands and let it soar right at his father. Mjölfnir hit the shackle on Odin's right foot and shattered it, but instead of returning to Thor, the hammer blasted into the shackle on the other ankle and blew it into pieces. The hammer flew through the room, and destroyed the chains about each of the

gods' feet before finally returning to its master hands.

I felt a pang of regret as I realized that my time wielding the war hammer was at an end, but I took solace in knowing that it would do far more good in the hands of the one it had been crafted for.

"Shall we get going then?" I asked quietly.

"Not yet," another of the gods, whom I later learned was Hoenir said with a shake of his head and a toothy grin. "There's one more of our number that needs freed."



Odin and the other gods led us out of their prison, then, just as I had done, Thor threw Mjölfnir up in the air and we went chasing after it to find Skuld's prison.

"Allfather," Skuld said, her voice full of wonder as we approached.

Unlike the other gods she had been left outside among the other dead, but like the other gods she was still aware of her surrounding. She was chained to a tall post and she had a sort of hollow sunken look to her.

"Skuld, what has been done to you?" Odin asked with fists clenched at his side.

"As the eons passed. I have been forced to watch the future unfurl without my guiding hand. Nothing is as it should be. It is painful for me to see such things, knowing I cannot fix them," the norn said, staring up at Odin with a haunted look in her eyes.

Thor moved forward and slammed the hammer into the chains about Skuld's feet. "Then let's make a new future!" he bellowed.

Skuld nodded and took Thor's hand as he helped her to her feet.

"Now, we are ready," Odin pronounced turning back to me.



PART 11

Manadag, the twelfth of Harpa (cont'd)

We found our way back to the entryway and just as we were about to leave Sophie turned to me and smiled sadly.

"I guess, this is goodbye."

I stared at her and slowly started to shake my head. It didn't have to be goodbye at least not yet.

"No!" I cried defiantly and let my magic flood through me.

I poured wind energy into my throat and called across all of Helheim. My voice carried through the entire realm as I spoke: "I would speak to all that dwell here in Helheim! It is time for you to come awake."

Slowly, color returned to dead all around us and I heard Thor growl, "What is she doing!?" before I continued.

The dead were awake, most of them looked confused, but a few looked angry. "I am Princess Brynhilde le Fey of the Lejosálfar! Ragnarok is at our doorsteps. I was sent here to bring Odin and the other gods back from the dead to help in the fight. I did not intend to wake the rest of you, but as I look around I realize that many of you have friends and family who are still alive. They need your help! The Jotun seek to destroy the entirety of human existence! I ask... No, I beg for your assistance. Please, there are far too many lives at stake!"

My pronouncement was met with dead silence, literally, but then a tall woman with long auburn hair stepped forward. She looked sort of familiar, but I couldn't quite place her.

"Who is your mother, child?" she asked with a very slight tilt of her head.

"Aryanna," I answered.

The woman nodded and smiled, "I thought so. I see she has passed along her spirit of defiance onto you."

"Who are you?"

"Athilda le Fey," she answered with a very slight smirk.

Mom had known Athilda when she was a very old woman, and yet the woman before me looked to be in the prime of her youth. Apparently if you were old when you died, you didn't stay old.

"Will you help us? You could use your knowledge and experience, and I bet Mom and Gramor would be glad to see you too," I said quietly.

"I passed from life when my time came, child. It seems unnatural that I should return now. This is where I belong," Athilda replied quietly.

"The girl is right," Hoenir growled from behind me. "Everything has been skewed. Nothing is as it should be, and the one responsible must be stopped. Join us, so that we bring some sanity back to the world."

Athilda seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then Lilith appeared from among the throngs of the dead, "Mother, please. Our descendant is pleading for our help. Don't let her calls fall on deaf ears."

Athilda nodded, "It appears that I have little recourse. Let us begone so that we may end this quickly."

"What of the rest of you?! Who else will join in the fight? Your descendants need your help!"

"I will!" a familiar face with long-blond hair said stepping forward.

"Marion!" I cried.

"Hello, Bryn. It's good to see you again," Marion replied with one of her lop-sided grins.

Another blond woman came up to stand next to my aunt and place her hand on Marion's shoulder, "You're just as beautiful as your mother. I'll answer your call. It's the least I can do for Aryanna and Brigit after they watched over my sister all these years."

It started out at a trickle. At first, just a few more people pledged to join the fight. There were a few familiar faces, Kona Peterson my third-grade teacher, Cindy Lawson a girl I knew who died in a steamcar accident a few years ago, and there were some not familiar faces. Then they came in a great flood and I was overwhelmed at the sheer number of those who stepped forward. People from all walks of life, and people who were garbed in modern clothes people, people in tights, people in loincloths, people in chain mail, people wearing nothing at all, elves, humans, dwarves, and all manner of creatures. They had all come because I'd called them. They were mine to command, they were my army of dead.

Of course there were those who refused to join. Many of them were creatures of a darker nature, or else humans of the most unsavory sort, but I paid them no mind. It was time to leave.

"Thank you, we march for the future of humans, elves and all creatures who walk in the light!" I called then I turned my back and moved through the exit and back into the cold of Niflheim.

"Bryn!" Eva proclaimed as I stepped through, flinging her arm's around me. Garik joined her in the embrace a moment later and I shared a brief kiss with each of them before turning back toward the entry way.

Odin was the first to emerge, but the other gods were right on his heels as they passed through the gates.

"Norns! Marion!" Gramor let out a wide-eyed cry as Marion and emerged.

"Mom!" Marion cried just as loudly and embraced my grandmother in a hug.

"Hello, Brigit," Marion's sister, Penelope, said quietly with an awkward smile.

"Penelope," Gramor replied back with a curt nod.

Athilda and Lilith appeared next, at first Gramor didn't recognize Athilda, but as soon as the ancient Spellbinder spoke my grandmother's eyes widened and she flung her arms around the other woman with a delighted laugh.

Sophie emerged next and I saw the disappointed look as she looked around, "Why aren't Leif and Sam among the dead?"

"Mayhap, they be taken as Einherjar," Heime interjected suddenly.

"Yeah, that's probably it!" I beamed back at my father. "Just wait, Soph, we'll get to see them soon enough."

Odin appeared at my side, "The final battle is nearly upon us. I can feel it in my bones. We must go."

I nodded in agreement, and within a few moments we were on our way.



When we entered the roofed entrance to the Gjoll bridge and Modgud appeared to block our path.

"So you survived. Why am I not surprised?" she asked, staring down at me with a wry smile.

"Modgud let us pass," Odin commanded from my side.

"The girl made a promise. I intend to see that it kept," Modgud replied staring down me.

That familiar buzzing sprang to life in the back of my head and I was barely able to remain standing against its wheezing onslaught.

I winced and turned to the Allfather, "She wants free of her oath. I promised I would try to persuade you in exchange for safe passage across the bridge."

The buzzing faded away to a faint tingle and I let out a long sigh of relief.

"If I agree to free you from your oath, what would you do?" the creator god asked.

"Rejoin my people of course," she replied eying Odin thoughtfully.

Odin shook his head and looked up into her face, "You are free to go, but I fear you will not like what you find waiting for you."

"I'm never going to make another oath like that again, not if I can help it," I muttered with a shake of my head as the buzzing faded away. When I turned back to Modgud she was gone.



When we emerged on the other side of the bridge we found an army of elves waiting for us, but they weren't the same elves that had followed us down the root.

"Lejosálfar!" Freyr proclaimed with a smile.

"No," I replied with a shake of my head. "These are exiled elves."

Freyr seemed taken aback by this, but didn't say a word as a tall elf dressed in woodland garb appeared to greet us.

"Lord Freyr!" He proclaimed falling to one knee.

"Rise," Freyr muttered quietly.

"Princess Brynhilde, we have defeated the Dokkálfar who followed you here," the elf said casting an apprehensive look toward Freyr.

"So you have," I replied.

"Lord Freyr, I want you to know that the Fellálfar have stayed loyal all these years, as have all the exiled tribes. After Hervor proclaimed herself queen, we refused her rule and left Álfheim," the elf said staring at the god apprehensively.

"Your loyalty is appreciated," Freyr replied. He didn't look very happy, but I had a feeling his ire was directed at Hervor and not the Fellálfar.

So, that was why the exiled tribes had broken off from the Lejosálfar. Everyone knew that Freyr had once ruled over Álfheim, but after his death it appeared that Hervor had taken his place as ruler. I somehow doubted Hervor would willingly step down from the throne, and I was pretty sure Freyr wasn't going to take no for an answer.

"As interesting as all this is. We don't have any time to waste on idle chit chat," I muttered.

It took a good thirty minutes to mobilize the Fellálfar army, but after that we finally got underway there weren't any more stops. It was pretty difficult marching such massive armies across the root of the Yggdrasil, but with so many magic users, magic pooled from both the Fellálfar and the army of the dead, we were able to get the people moving up the root and on the path to Midgard.



Eirdag, the thirteenth of Harpa

When we reached Midgard the battle had already begun. I've seen battles before that day, but never ones on such a scale. I was among the first among our numbers to appear in the battlefield in New Copenhagen. A massive sail-ship that dwarfed some of the largest buildings I had ever seen rested on the ground near where the Seidskati's dinga had once stood. Jotun fought beside draugar, dark elves trolls, dragons and their human allies, while the forces of good battled desperately against them.

Goddesses summoned spells that could have shattered whole worlds, and Jotun countered with magic that was just as powerful. Tanks rolled across the battlefield, blowing everything in their path to smithereens, airplanes and zeppelins soared in the sky spewing explosive rounds at any number of flying horrors as destruction rained down from all directions. Fairies and other small vattir whizzed through the battlefield magic whirling all around them as they fought much larger opponents.

For a moment all I could do was stand and watch in horror at all the death laid out before my eyes. It seemed so senseless. Yes, people were fighting for their survival, but they should not have had to. I clenched my hands around the Hyrklufar rifle I carried and slowly shook my head.

"No more," I whispered.

I felt Eva, Garik, Heime, and Hervor's emotions through the bond, and knew their thoughts mirrored my own.

"Fyr lejos!" I cried and leapt into motion.

The army of the dead followed behind me, and the Fellálfar weren't too far behind. Odin and the other gods held back for just a moment, then they too leapt into the foray and joined the fight.

Gramor didn't stay with the main group, insisting that she should be of better use tending to the wounded, so she disappeared into the camps where the wounded were being kept. I don't know

exactly when, but it was about this time that Sophie disappeared.

I wished, not for the first time, that I had a better handle on my magic, but I did with it what I could. Mostly, I used it to form spirit shields to block attacks to both myself and my companions, but occasionally I was able to summon a small thread of fire, or use a gust of wind magic to send an enemy combatant soaring. My bond with Heime, Garik, and Eva allowed us to coordinate our attacks with unparalleled precision. As the only one who could feel the emotions of all three I was the one responsible for relaying any possible dangers that might have cropped up.

I raised my rifle, blasting a hole through the nearest dark elf, then quickly dove to the ground as I felt my father direct a warning at me through the bond. A massive fireball flew across the space I had just vacated and I rolled back to my feet just in time to block an attack from a dark elf who had just jumped at me. I hit my enemy across the face with the butt of the rifle then I brought it back around and emptied several rounds into his chest. I felt another warning of danger, this one from Garik, and whipped around in time to fire a blast into the neck of a human soldier who had sneaked up on me from behind.

It went on like this for some time, and for each enemy I killed two more appeared to take his or her place. Then finally, I felt a sudden agonizing burst of emotion from Hervor and felt a sense of urgent need through the bond. I hesitated only a moment before breaking out in a run toward where I sensed that she was waiting. Heime, was right on my tail, and my other two companions weren't far behind, but by the time we reached my grandmother there was nothing we could do.

A massive ring of fire surrounded Hervor, and she was doing all within her power to hold it at bay. She was fighting a losing battle and we all knew it. The source of the fire was a Jotun sorceress who had a cruel smile on her face as she loosed her power against the elven queen. The bodies of dozens of elven soldiers surrounded the circle, and half-again as many were heavily wounded. Two elven spellcasters were doing their best to fend off the Jotun sorceress, but nothing they did seemed to do the trick.

I clenched my fists and did something really, really stupid. I grabbed hold of my magic, and summoned as much of it as I could possibly hold and I channeled it all at the Jotun sorceress.

"Get down!" I warned as I felt my control slip.

White hot power erupted from my hands and shot toward my target. The magic was on her in an instant and slammed into her with such force that she simply exploded. I tried to bat the magic down. There was something new there, something lurking just below the surface and it didn't want to be contained. I fought down panic and I closed my eyes, and emptied my mind of all thought as Hervor had taught me and felt the magic fade away.

Heime let out a strangled gasp and I followed his gaze to where Hervor was laying on the ground. It was a miracle she was even still alive with the burns she had sustained. Her face was the only part of her body that had been left untouched, and her arms and legs ended in stumps where her hands and feet had been burned away.

"Brynhilde come," Hervor called weakly and I rushed to her side.

It was no secret that I'd never gotten along with my grandmother, but I would have never wished such horrendous injury upon her. How she continued to breathe, let alone talk, was beyond me, but somehow she was still alive.

"Brynhilde, I sorrow for the burden that I am about to place upon thee, but now that my daughters be gone thou art the only one capable of maintaining the bond," Hervor gasped.

"Mother, please preserve thy strength. Speak not. We must find a healer we must--"

"No Heime, this body is beyond repair. Twilight is nearly upon me, as Frigg didst foresee. Allow me to speak, my son, what I must say is of great import."

"Brynhilde, I have kept the true reason of thy conception from thee. Thou wert born to take my place as queen," Hervor pronounced, wheezing for breath.

"What?! No, you can't be serious. No, I can't... Please, anything but that!" I protested, shaking my head in disbelief.

"Who then shall take my place Brynhilde? Both of my daughters have fallen, and none of my grandchildren save thyself have the power to maintain the queen's bond."

"The queen's bond?"

"Aye, it shall bind thee to all Lejosálfar."

"Mother, Brynhilde is ill prepared for this. Mayhap another can--" Heime protested.

"Nay son, she is the only one. Thou must guide her. Under thy tutelage she shall become a great queen."

"And if I refuse?" I whispered quietly.

"Without the bond... The Lejosálfar they shall fall! It gives them strength. It lets them become as one. Without this bond the battle shall be lost, and all thou dost care about shall fall into ruin," Hervor replied quietly.

Hot tears stung my eyes, "Do it then!"

"One more thing," she croaked, gasping for air.

"What?"

"Whatever thou dost do, whatever thou dost say... our people must remain free of Freyr. Thou must swear it!"

"I swear it, Hervor," I muttered, binding myself to my grandmother's dying wishes.

I felt the stub of Hervor's arm reach out to touch my chest and suddenly millions of minds joined

with mine all at once. I clutched at my head and screamed out in terror. I became lost in an endless river of emotions that did not belong to me. I tried to swim free, but the currents kept pulling me back in. I called out desperately for help, and felt three minds reach out to me with love and encouragement. I swam towards them, but the endless river engulfed them and I thrashed about in desperation. No matter how much I tried I couldn't break free. There were just too many minds holding me at bay.

Then I remembered my training sessions with Hervor and her lessons on meditation. With a start I realized she had been trying to prepare me for this very moment. I couldn't fight the river. No, I had to embrace it before I could contain it. I stopped struggling and let the emptiness seep into my mind. Then I let the river drain away into a corner of my mind where I locked it in place. The river would always be there waiting where I could use it, but I could never let myself become immersed in it. I could lose myself that way.

I opened my eyes and looked down to find that Hervor had passed on.

"Grandmother... Why didn't you tell me?" I whispered with tear-filled eyes before staggering back to my feet. Goddesses I was dizzy and... I felt so strange!

"Bryn!" Eva called moving to help me to stand.

"The battle!" I exclaimed with a weak voice.

"It's all right, Bryn. The enemy troops have withdrawn... for now," Garik muttered from beside Eva.

"What why?"

"I think our appearance caught them off guard. They've likely withdrawn in order to regroup."

I shook my head and felt some the dizziness fade away. "We need to get to the command tent. I'll need to speak with Mom and our other allies."

"Father, I need you," I said turning back to Heime who was on the ground clutching at Hervor's broken body.

Heime turned to me and I could see the tears streaming down his face as he released Hervor and came over to stand beside me. "Aye, daughter."



We never made it to the command tent. The hiatus was very brief and we had just enough time to gather our wits before the battle commenced. As new queen of the Lejosálfar it was my job to lead my people into battle. The elves didn't seem to express any reservations, and I felt none through the bond. It was strange, really, despite having them practically forced upon me I felt responsible for the light elves. I had become irrevocably bound to them and they to me. I couldn't stand idly by and let those people ... my people fight for their lives

while I stood on the sidelines.

Sophie reappeared just before our return to battle. She had been searching for Leif and Sam, but had been unable to find them from among either the Einherjar or the dead from Helheim. She was convinced that they were alive, but I didn't share her optimism. If they were alive where were they? Shouldn't we have found them by now?

The ground shook under me as the enemy fighters renewed their assault. Magic coursed all around me and there was a release of energy nearby as one of my subjects released a spell of dissipative earth magic under our feet. The ground ceased to shake and I raised my rifle as Dokkálfar appeared from the distance, leaping at our front line with reckless abandon.

A wall of blue magic flared to life as I summoned a spirit shield to ward against the dark elf assault. Our enemies flailed uselessly against the shield, and my troops cheered triumphantly as our spellcasters and bowmen began pelting them with their projectiles and magic. While the bow and arrow was considered a laughably antiquated weapon by modern human standards, our arrowheads had been magically enhanced, and they were often just as effective as any human or dwarven firearm.

Bright ribbons of fire magic began pelting my shield and I felt several more spellcasters raise up shields to help support mine, and others still cast their spells to counter the enemy attacks. I fired my Hyrklufar rifle into the opposing forces, directing it through my shield. Eva fought beside me, hurling her magic through the shield at the nearest enemies, while my father issued orders to the troops.

Humans and light elves fought side by side and the lines between the allied armies became blurred as more soldiers on each side moved in to help fill in the gaps in each others lines. Humans and elves on both sides died. Power the likes of which the world had never seen was unleashed before my eyes. Together we fought and survived.



We fought for hours, and the human troops were beginning to tire. The elves and all the other vattir possessed superior endurance, but as mortals, humans didn't have that advantage. The Spellbinders used their magic to help keep the human troops going, but there was only so much they could do and it was only a matter of time before they succumbed to exhaustion. Of course, if it happened to our troops, it would happen to the human soldiers on the other side, but they were fewer in number and would not feel the loss as greatly as we would.

"We have to end this!" I called over the roar of battle.

"How, daughter?" Heime called back.

I shook my head and looked him in the eyes, "You stay here. I need to go find my mother."



"Come hither, young Garik," Heime called with a crooked finger as we were about to depart.

Garik quickly moved over to my father. Heime unstrapped his sword belt and held it out Garik with both hands. "Take it."

"My Prince! I cannot take your blade!" Garik replied staring at Heime in utter shock.

"Garik, I have lost both my sisters and my mother. I will not suffer the loss of my daughter, not when I hath known her so short a time. Thou art a skilled swordsman. By thy hands Gram shall cut thine enemies in twain," Heime insisted.

'Gram?' So I had been right. The legendary sword, once reforged by the dwarven blacksmith Regin, was said to be nearly unbreakable and would cut through just about anything.

Garik smiled graciously and took Gram from my father. He unstrapped his own sword belt and handed it to my father, "I fear that a simple soldier's blade would be unsuitable for you, your highness, but I have no other to give."

Heime grasped hold of Garik's sword with a sad smile, "'Tis a fine blade. It shall suffice."

After, the exchange of weapons, Garik, Eva, Sophie and I set out with a hundred soldiers and a dozen spellcasters in tow. It didn't take long at all for me to find my mother. She was leading troops near the front line alongside Daniella, Nick Flint, Athilda and a red-haired woman dressed in flowing blue robes I didn't recognize.

The fighting was very intense, and I moved in to fight beside my mother.

"My friends and I thought we'd stop by for a visit," I said with a crooked grin.

"Bryn! What...?"

"We need to talk," I muttered.

I felt mother's hand on my shoulder and hurriedly grabbed at Eva, Sophie and Garik before I felt the winds of my mother's travel spell swirl around me as she whisked us away.

"This better be important," her disembodied voice said mid-transit.

We reappeared atop a hill cresting the battle and I shook my head to clear away some of the lingering dizziness. I looked around and noted that Daniella had come along for the ride. A swirling whirlwind appeared nearby and from it emerged Athilda, along with the red-haired woman.

"I think it's time to end this."

"End it? How?" the red-haired woman demanded.

"We need to get out there where the gods are fighting... It's important. I don't know why. I just feel

it."

"Child, this is no time for foolish notions! If you go out there you could get yourself killed!" The red-haired woman said irritably.

"Hold your tongue, human! You're speaking to the queen of the Lejosálfar!" Garik growled.

"The what?!" Daniella asked, eyes bulging out of her head.

"Hervor's dead... I took her place. It's what she intended all along. It's a long story and under different circumstances I'd love to tell it, but now's not the time."

"This is a waste of time. We need to get back to the battle," the red-haired woman growled suddenly.

"Who are you?" I asked staring at the woman curiously.

"I am but one of many Einherjar. In life I was known as Morgana le Fey," the woman answered back.

Morgana le Fey an Einherjar? That could only mean she had died in combat, and was chosen by the Valkyries to fight in the final battle.

"Look, we need to end this. I know it. I don't know why, I just do. Ever since I've killed Hel something is different. There's this sense of urgency goading me on."

Morgana's eyes widened as did Mom and Daniella's, but it was our ancestor that spoke. She pursed her lips and stared at me thoughtfully, "This sense of urgency... You say you first felt it after killing the goddess Hel?"

"Yes, but that's not important. It's time to take action," I replied eying her suspiciously.

"Oh, I disagree, child. I think it very important. Nevertheless, now is not the time for discussion. I believe you are right, child. I will go with you," Morgana stated resolutely.

The sudden turnabout was quite odd, but I got this sense that she had been testing me. I glanced briefly at Athilda, who nodded briefly and gave me a knowing smile. I got the sense that she too was willing to follow me.

"And the rest of you?"

Eva smiled and placed her hand on my shoulder, "You are my lifkyn. There is no place I won't follow you."

Garik nodded and stepped forward, "You are more precious to me than all the jewels and precious metals in the nine worlds. I go where you go."

Sophie grinned. "Hey, I'm already dead. What do I have to lose?"

Mom shook her head and stared at me for a moment in wonder, "I don't know about this sense of urgency, but you are my child. I'll go, if only to keep you safe."

Daniella nodded in agreement. "Bryn, I feel the same way as Aryanna. I love you. I can't stay behind and let you take this risk without doing something to help. I'm not much of a fighter, but maybe I can help in some small way."

"It is decided then. We go to put an end to this madness," Athilda spoke quietly.



We returned to the battle-line and Mom stopped to confer with Flint and her other advisers. We were nearly ready to head out when familiar raspy laugh sounded from the front lines. It had been unnaturally enhanced, and boomed through the battlefield. I didn't even need to look to know who that laugh belonged to. I'd only ever met one person with such a laugh: Mengele. When I'd last seen her, she'd seemed almost sane, but this Mengele looked every bit the madwoman I knew her to be. Her clothing had been nearly torn to shreds, so much so that she might as well have been wearing nothing. Her hair was a mess, and she was covered in dirt and blood.

A strange purplish hue surrounded her as she sent bursts of magic in all directions, completely heedless of whether they hit allies or enemies. For a brief moment, I stared at her in morbid fascination. Then I felt that strange sense of urgency shift focus. Mengele had to be stopped, but it wasn't me that moved to confront her. It was Daniella.

"She's mine!" Daniella said suddenly.

She didn't look angry as she jumped into the throng of fighters around the madwoman. Daniella had never been one for violence, but in recent years she had resigned herself to using it in order to protect the ones she loved. I would never know for sure, but I got the impression that she wasn't making a move against Mengele out a need for revenge. That wasn't Daniella's way. She had never hated Mengele for what she had done to her, but she recognized that she was dangerous.

We would have helped, but we had problems of our own to deal with. A group of Dokkálfar sorceresses had surrounded us, and we were doing all in our power to fend them off. I held a spirit shield and fired my rifle at the dark elves and watched Daniella battling Mengele out of the corner of my eye.

Daniella hit Mengele with a rain of icy spears which shattered against the other woman's shield, sending pieces of ice flying in all directions. Mengele countered with a bright bursts of blue fire which Daniella sent careening back into the doctor with a gust of wind. Mengele howled in frustration before calling up a travel spell and disappearing, only to reappear a moment later at Daniella's side. Daniella was ready for her, and summoned a ring of fire shooting out in all directions around her. It caught Mengele unprepared, but before it could do any real damage Mengele stumbled backward with an agonized scream.

I was forced to turn my attention back to the Dokkálfar as one of them came running right at me. I jumped aside and brought my rifle around like a club, hitting the creature across the back of the knees as it shot past me. The dark elf went careening to the ground and Garik stepped in to lop it's head off with Gram.

When the dark elves were taken care of we all turned back to Daniella and Mengele. By this time the rest of Mengele's clothing and most of her hair had burned away. She was completely naked, and she had first, and second degree burns all over her body. She let out a mad howl and ran right at Daniella, but she never made it. With a gust of wind Daniella sent a icicle about a foot in length shooting right at Mengele. The icicle hit the doctor directly in one of her eyes. Her head snapped back and she was dead before her body hit the ground.

We all let out a collective sigh of relief, but it was short lived, as Daniella's hands moved down to grasp at something protruding from her ribs. It turned out to a small combat knife. No one had any doubt as to how it had gotten there, Mengele. Her side was covered in blood and her face seemed to drain of color as she stared at us with wide eyes.

"Guess, I won't be coming with you after all," she mumbled. Then her eyes rolled into the back of her head and she fell to the ground unconscious.



Garik carried Daniella back to the allied encampment where the healing tent was located. We stayed only long enough to receive assurances that Daniella would live before we set out again. Mom was loath to leave her, but that sense of urgency that was by now all too familiar seemed to insist that waiting around would not turn out well. We lingered long enough for Mom to give Daniella a brief kiss and to mutter a few whispered words. I have no idea what she said, and I didn't ask...



Swirling white beads of energy appeared all around us and I watched as they shot outward in all directions killing dozens of Dokkálfar in the process. Waves of magic shot in all directions as the magic users loosed their magic against our foes. Elven soldiers fired bow and arrow, while human soldiers loosed automatic weapons fire into the foray. Fairies, pixies and other small vattir wove in and out of the crowds of human and elves soldiers, splattering magic wherever they went.

We fought our way through the enemy lines with a vengeance, and time seemed to come to a standstill. We suffered losses, and through the bond I felt the sting of death as each of the elven soldiers passed into the next life. Tears ran down my face, but despite the pain I fought on.

Had I know exactly where we needed to go I would have had my mother send us there with a travel spell, but my odd sense of urgency wasn't specific enough to allow for that. All I had going for me was a sense of the general direction we had to head, so I remained at the forefront to guide us in the right direction.

I wished time and time again that I still had use of Mjölmir, but it wasn't meant to be, and I didn't allow myself to dwell on it. I fought as best I could and held a spirit barrier around us.

Then abruptly we weren't fighting for our lives anymore. The dark elves withdrew and kept a wide berth of us... No, that wasn't right. They weren't avoiding us, they were avoiding the gods and the Jotun as they clashed.

I let my spirit shield fall and slip away, then glanced briefly at my mother before moving forward again. The gods and Jotun seemed to ignore us as we passed among them, but that didn't mean there was no danger. They were using power the likes of which few humans, or elves for that matter, had ever seen and the residue of it splattered all around us.

Thor fought against Jormungand, Odin against Fenrir, Freyr against a massive Jotun who had blood splattered down the length of a long gray beard, and Loki (the real one) didn't do much fighting at all. Instead he moved among the battling gods issuing insults and throwing things at both gods and Jotun alike. I knew the other gods and goddesses were there too, but I only caught brief glimpses of them and the residue of their powerful spells.

I came to an abrupt stop as something clicked in the back of my head and I knew that we had reached our destination...



The sense of urgency reared back to life and I didn't hesitate as I summoned up my magic. I reacted instinctively, and I'm glad I did, as a blast of energy pounded into the shield I just formed. I gasped and fell to my knees as the unknown power pried into my shield. My barrier collapsed, and I felt as if I were going to be torn apart. Then I felt it again, a sort of power lurking inside of me. What it was or where it came from I have no idea, but I knew that it was my only hope of surviving.

I let it rip through me, and there came a fundamental change from within. The strange new power became a part of me and I became a part of it. I was reforged, into what exactly I still don't know, but something had changed at the very core of my being. New power flooded into me and I reached out to it in order to form a new spirit shield around myself.

"Impossible!" a voice gasped.

The voice turned out to be, the impostor-Loki.

"You!" I breathed.

"It's not possible... That should have killed you. No elf has that sort of power!" he yelled with a wild-eyed look.

I shook my head and scowled at him. "Why do you continue to hide behind that mask, Lodur?" I asked.

Lodur smiled and shook his head, "I'm a better Loki than Loki ever was. Look at the chaos I've created! Everything has changed! Humans were never meant to have real magical power! Elves weren't supposed to be involved in any of this, and yet look around you"

"Why!? Why do this?" Mother demanded.

"So that I might live... Had I let things happen the way they're supposed to I would have died! And now nothing will stop me. All who stand in my way will be annihilated, and I will remake the Nine worlds the way I see fit, and most importantly, I'll never have to die."

"No, brother," a cold voice said from behind.

Lodur quickly swirled around to reveal the form of Odin holding a bloody spear. The body of Fenrir lay just a few feet away.

"That's not possible! Fenrir should have finished you!" Lodur cried.

"You said it yourself brother, everything has changed," Odin growled and brought his spear around, hitting his brother across the chest with its shaft.

"It doesn't matter either way. You will die, if not by Fenrir's jaws, then by my sword!" Lodur screamed, a sword suddenly appearing in his hands.

Odin brought up the haft of his spear to deflect a blow from his brother's weapon then dropped it to draw the sword strapped to his back and thrust it at Lodur's chest. Lodur parried the blow and slammed his left fist into his brother's face. Odin laughed, shrugging off the blow and ducked as his brother's sword swept above his head in what would have been a killing blow. Odin threw himself at his brother and the two went down in a tangle of fists and limbs.

The two brothers battled back and forth, and we watched in amazement as two of the most powerful beings in existence beat one another with their fists. Odin was the larger and more powerfully built of the two, but Lodur was quicker on his feet, and used his superior agility to dodge his brother's attacks. When Odin's blows did hit home they were devastating, and left his brother in a dazed state. Lodur hit his brother in quick jabs and cheap shots that left the older brother howling in pain.

Suddenly, there was a blast of energy from Lodur's hands and Odin went flying away, screaming in agony. Lodur staggered back to his feet and started toward us again, but Loki appeared in front of us with a loud boom.

"There can only be one, Loki!" He laughed, staring at the pretender with a sort of crazed look on his face.

"Loki, surely you're not going to side with the likes of these! You were meant to fight alongside the Jotun," Lodur retorted.

"I side with no one! Not the Aesir! Not the Vanir! Not the Jotun! I side only against you! You masqueraded as me and manipulated events that resulted in my death, and I really don't appreciate

that!" Loki shouted, sticking his tongue out at Lodur.

"Join with me! Together we can recreate the worlds in our image!"

"No! I don't wanna!" Loki cried, a foolish grin on his face before leaping at Lodur.

The two went down in a tangle of limbs, and it was difficult to tell which was which as they landed blow after blow on each other. Finally one of the Lokis emerged victorious, but instead of turning back to us, he turned to the other Loki and started dancing merrily, kicking the body of the other Loki periodically through the silly display. When he finished, he landed a powerful kick into the side of the other god then turned back to us with a deep bow.

"What? No applause?" he asked staring at us expectantly.

No one moved.

"Oh, fine! Be that way!" He muttered with a dramatic sigh.

"Now where were we?" he asked. "Oh, yes. That's right. I was about to kill you," he finished smiling wickedly.

"Lodur!" Mom growled.

The god smiled and shook his head, "Nope, its me, the one and only Loki. See that dead guy? That's Lodur. You forget who and what I am. I thought it would be fun to kill you. So I'm going to kill you. Then I think I'm going to co-opt Lodur's insane plan and declare myself supreme god."

Without another word Loki leapt at me and unleashed a torrent of fire. I blocked it with a spirit shield, but it was all I could do to contain the powerful blast. With my new found power I was more powerful than any elf or human magic user, but against Loki it wasn't enough. He was simply too powerful.

"You've gotten much to big for those britches of yours. You have far too much magic for a half-elf. Sadly, it's still not enough. My magic is far more powerful than yours!" he laughed gleefully.

His magic? Men couldn't use magic. Gods were no exception to the rule... Or were they? Something just didn't add up. Yet, he was using some form of power against me, and certainly it could be described as magic. It didn't make any sense!

He bounded against my shield and I could feel my hold begin to slip away as he relentlessly pressed against it. I didn't know what to do... I tried unleashing my magic against him in erratic uncontrolled bursts, but he batted them away effortlessly. Again I found myself upon the precipice of death, helplessly teetering over the edge and I had no way of getting my balance back. It was only a matter of time before I toppled helplessly into death's dark abyss.

"Lady Aryanna!" Garik's voice called out and there was a flash of steel as something flew over my head.

Abruptly, Loki's head slid off his neck and fell to the ground at his side. The power he had summoned faded away, and I could see well enough to identify my mother standing behind the still standing body of Loki with Gram in her hands. The body tottered, then fell to the ground chest-forward at my feet.

"Well, that takes care of that," my mother said with a grim frown.



With both Loki and Lodur defeated, we moved in to assist the other gods. We proved to be of little actual help, but our presence served as a distraction, and helped Thor defeat Jörmungand. Soon Thor joined Freyr, and together they defeated the great bearded giant that Freyr had been combating. Odin appeared to join his son and former rival, and together the three of them blasted the Jotun with a vengeance. Soon, Heonir and Baldr joined, then Sif and Frigg. The Jotun lines fell before this new onslaught, but they didn't flee. Instead they fought on until every last one of them had fallen. I even recognized Modgud among their numbers.

With the Jotun defeated, the gods joined in the fight against the dark elves. Their attack proved devastating, and the Dokkálfar fled, leaving their human allies to suffer the vengeful wrath of the gods.

It was over, I realized with a long sigh of relief. We had won.



PART 12

Vordag, the fourteenth of Harpa

Midgard is in ruins, and the total death toll numbers in the hundreds of millions and that's just for the humans. The Lejosálfar and the exiled elves losses were much fewer, but their numbers were much lower to begin with, and it will take them many more years to recover their numbers. The Dokkálfar suffered even more devastating losses, and it will take them centuries before they pose a serious threat again.

Relief efforts have started, and we're beginning the long process of rebuilding. The Lejosálfar are helping in whatever way we can, but it will likely be many years before the wounds from what people are beginning to call the Ragnarok War will be completely healed.

Daniella is a little bit worse for the wear. She's still recovering, with so many wounded the healers have been working hard to keep as many as they can alive. Many of the wounded have only been healed enough to ensure they'll live. Daniella is no exception. She's up and walking, but she's still in a good amount of pain. I'm glad she survived. It would have been hard to suffer another personal loss like I did when Marion and Sophie passed.

As for me, I'm still trying to get a grasp on being queen. The Lejosálfar accept me as their leader, but exiled tribes still refuse to accept any queen. I wish I knew how I could reunify the two people, but my final oath to Hervor prevents me from doing the one thing that would allow that. The exiled tribes believe Freyr to be their rightful ruler, and nothing I say or do will change that.

And then there's the issue of my new found power... I still don't understand where it came from, but it seems to be here to stay. I'm more powerful than any elf alive, and I even rival some of the goddesses in raw potential. Which begs the question: am I a goddess, or something else entirely? How and why was I given this power and what am I supposed to do with it? So many questions and I don't have the answers to any of them... I know of one person who might have the answers, but Frigg has yet to grace me with her presence.

Since our victory the gods have retreated from Midgard and no one knows when they might return or even why they've disappeared.

There has been so much death and destruction, but at least it's all over. Everyone suffered horrible losses and there's one more loss that I had not expected. Nick Flint. We found his remains tangled with those of Jonas Talman, and it appears that the two did each other in. Maybe now he and Marion can be together. I hope he's happier in the next life than he was in this one.

The dead are returning to Helheim in droves, and we all got a chance to say goodbye...

"Oh Bryn," Sophie whispered, tears streaming down her face as she we embraced for one final time.

"At least this time we get to say goodbye," I whispered back, feeling tears of my own well up.

"I envy you. You have this amazing life ahead you." She smiled wistfully, grabbing hold of each of my hands.

I squeezed her hands and shook my head. One of the many things that that really been hit home since I'd taken Hervor's place as queen was that I might live forever. I was immortal, and unless someone took it into their head to kill me, I would never die. I know there were some people that would do anything to trade places with me for that very reason, but it scared me that I might never see my loved ones again once they had passed on.

"You could stay. Maybe I could convince Gna to let you—" I pleaded.

"No, Bryn. I'm dead. Mom and Dad are waiting for me. I want to be with them."

"What about Sam and Leif? You said yourself that you think they're both still alive."

"Then I hope you find them, but I still have to go. I'll see them when they die," she shook her head.

I nodded and wiped the tears out of my eyes, "Goodbye Sophie."

"Goodbye Bryn," she whispered then her hands slipped out from mine and she disappeared into the lines of the dead.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and I looked back to find Garik staring at me with a gentle smile on his face. I wrapped my arms around him and started to sob hysterically. Eva came up and wrapped her arms around my back and the three of us just stood there holding each other.

"Bryn," Marion's voice called and I broke away from Garik and Eva to watch as she approached with Penelope at her side.

"I guess this is goodbye." A new voice, and I turned to see my mother accompanied by Daniella and my gramor.

"Aryanna, I'm sorry for all the pain I caused you. Thank you for looking after my sister. I'm glad you could find someone that could make you happy," Penelope said.

Penelope, Marion and Mom all muttered their own regrets. Then they each said goodbye and Marion's gaze met my own.

I walked slowly over to her and I felt her arms around me, "I'm going to miss you Bryn," she whispered.

"Oh, Marion. I'm so afraid," I said.

"Don't be, you're going to do just fine. It's time to go. Flint is waiting for me in Helheim." She smiled, then I felt her arms withdraw.

"Goodbye, Aunt Mare," I said.

"Goodbye Bryn," she called and was gone within moments.

Heime came up next to me and put his arm on my shoulder. Neither one of us spoke and everyone gathered around us.

A figure mounted atop a tall white horse appeared in the distance and started galloping right at us. The animal came to a sudden stop in front of us and the rider leapt to the ground in front of us.

"Gna!" Mom called out.

The goddess grinned and looked us each over, "So, it is done then. Ragnarok has been averted."

"Yes..." I whispered with a shake of my head.

"Is this it then? Is this how it all ends? With Hel gone, who will watch over the dead?" Mom asked.

"I will," Gna said with a very slight frown.

"So you are to become the new goddess of death?" I asked incredulously.

"No," Gna said with a shake of her head, placing her hand on the pommel of the horse's saddle.

"Then who?" Daniella asked.

Gna shrugged and remounted her horse. "I couldn't tell you. There isn't anyone... yet," she said just before spurring her horse into motion and speeding off into the horizon.



Sunadag, the eighteenth of Harpa

Mom reached up to touch the lock of hair that marked me as an apprentice. Suddenly there was a

flash of light and when I reached over to put the lock in front of my face I realized it had returned to its previous auburn color.

"What did you do that for? My training isn't complete." I asked staring at her in confusion.

Mom smiled sadly, "It's not appropriate for the queen of the Lejosálfar to remain a spellbinder's apprentice."

"Well, I must admit you seem to be doing quite well in your new position," a voice said off to my side.

I felt my heart leap in my chest and my head darted to my side where a woman with long brown hair was staring at me with an amused grin. Light seemed to dance in her eyes and there was a sort of soft glow that swirled around her.

"Frigg," my mother whispered.

"Good, you're both here. This will make things easier," the Allmother grinned.

"So," I said glaring at Frigg. "The great manipulator has come to explain her actions."

Frigg seemed momentarily taken aback as she stared at me with wide eyes. Then she threw her head back in a hearty laugh, "Such defiance! You are your mother's child, I'll give you that! I suppose I deserve your scorn after the things I've done."

"Then tell me... What am I?" I asked with a shake of my head.

Frigg smiled sadly, "I think you already suspect the truth, but do you understand how it happened?"

"How what happened? What have you done to my child?" My mother demanded.

"It was never something I intended to happen, and somehow I failed to foresee the possibility," Frigg said with a shake of her head.

"Foresee what?!" Mom demanded.

"Your daughter is a goddess," Frigg said with a slight frown.

"So it's true... but how?" I asked.

The goddess grinned, "When Hel attacked you, her spell backfired. It destroyed both her body and soul, but all that magical energy was left behind and it had to go somewhere..."

"...so it went into me," I finished.

Frigg nodded, "The magic changed you... It didn't happen immediately, it took your body a while before it could begin to assimilate all that power."

"Oh frizz... Finding out I was a half-elf was weird enough, but this... I don't even know what I'll do with this sort of power."

"Whatever you like, girl."

"Whatever I like? You know as well as I do that my choices are limited."

Frigg frowned and looked me in the eyes, "I know all too well. Hervor and I ... we planned it all together almost from the beginning, I regret what had to be done. I wish there had been another way, but the route we chose had the highest likeliness of success."

"We're just pawns to you. Pieces to be moved around on a damn game board! Tell me! Why did you do this to us! Why? What did it gain you?" Mom yelled between gritted teeth.

"It gained us the edge we needed, Mortal," Frigg said, glaring at my mother with narrowed eyes. "Lodur had changed so much so that in order to beat him we had to make changes of our own. Of course, we didn't know it was him that had been changing things. We always assumed it was the Jotun. The first step was granting human women the use of magic all those years ago. We spent centuries watching over your family, knowing that the ones we needed would be born from the Le Fey line."

"You've been manipulating the family for that long!?" I gasped.

Frigg nodded and continued, "By seeing that both of you were transformed we were able to change your fates. It gave us an advantage we wouldn't have otherwise had."

"And Daniella?" Mom asked.

"Her contribution wasn't as great as yours, but without her by your side it would have been much harder for you," Frigg stated.

"What about Flint? You had a bargain with him. Now that's he's dead. What of that deal?" Mom asked.

"I always keep my promises, mortal. Always. There's something we have kept from the world. Men can use magic." Frigg stated.

"What? But if they can use it why haven't the been given use of it?"

Frigg shook her head, "Because there was no one around who could give it to them. Magic works differently for men and women. It comes from the same source, but it's like two different sides of the same coin. I can't use it, and I can't pass it on. Only a powerful male magic user, such as Odin may pass it on."

"And you're going to convince Odin to pass along the power to men?" Mom asked.

Hervor smiled and nodded her head, "It has already been done. My promise to Flint has been fulfilled."

"And what will happen to them? How will they learn to control their magic?"

"They'll have help. Just as early spellbinders did," she replied in a matter of fact manner.

"Now that our purpose has been fulfilled, what will we do with our lives?" Mom asked.

"You and Daniella are free to take whatever path you like, mortal. I'll even return you to your original forms if you desire," Frigg responded.

"But... Not me. I'm stuck with the life you and Hervor made for me," I said running my hand through my hair.

Frigg nodded, "I swore an oath to Hervor. I cannot undo what has been done to you. Your fate has been set in stone."

"So this is how it must be... I know of no way to break my bond with the Lejosálfar. I'm stuck with them, and they're stuck with me," I said, feeling the weight of my statement bearing down on me.

There was no one to pass the bond onto, and somehow I doubted there was a way to remove it even with Frigg's help. The weaves that had created the bond were ridiculously complicated, and it would be like trying untangling a massive ball of knots, but it was far worse than that. Unweaving it was dangerous in the extreme, unravel it the wrong way or use the wrong amount of power and it could very well blow up in your face.

"I-I need to be alone!" I cried as I finally let it all set in and fled out the tent and into the darkness of the night.



I still couldn't hardly believe it... In just a few months time I'd gone from believing I was an ordinary teenage boy, to being transformed into a girl and becoming the immortal queen of the light elves. Then there was this business about me being a goddess. Physically I was still a half-elf. Of that much I was sure, but I was a goddess too. The very idea scared the frizz out of me.

"May I join you?" an unfamiliar voice asked from my side.

I nearly jumped out of my skin as I swirled around to meet the gaze of a tall willowy woman with long silver-blue hair and unnaturally bright-blue eyes. She wasn't human, that much was pretty obvious, but I was pretty sure she wasn't an elf or goddess either.

"I apologize, it was not my intent to startle you," she said with a very slight tilt of her head.

I gripped my hand around the railing of the bridge and stared at her with my brows furrowed. "I'm sorry but who are you?"

"There is no reason to feel sorrow for me, young one. Among most I am known only as the Gray Queen, but you may call me by my given name, Alia."

I felt myself give a sharp intake of breathe. "The Gray Queen? But your... I mean you're not a faery!"

Alia nodded and smiled, "I am a halfling like you. My father was an exiled elf, my mother a water sprite. I was orphaned at a young age, and raised by the faekyn. I am a faery in spirit, if not in actuality."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you and I have many things in common, Queen Brynhilde."

"How do you know my name?" I said staring at her with wide eyes,

"Why should it come as such a surprise? Much of your story is well know. I have desired to speak with you for some time, and as a creature of dual natures I was able to recognize that same dual nature within you."

"Because I'm a half-elf."

Alia nodded and moved toward me, her hands gripping the railing next to me, "So much of this city has been destroyed. It seems so strange that this bridge would have remained intact among all this wreckage."

"I was born here, you know. Save for a short time in Álfheim I've lived in this place all my life and now almost nothing of it remains," I felt tears start to form in the corner of my eyes.

"They will rebuild it. Humans are a resilient people," she said wrapping a delicate arm around my shoulders.

"I know, but I can't afford to be one anymore. I can't let my humanity get in my way," I stated suddenly. Frizz why was I telling her this?

"Can't you? Tell me Brynhilde, do you know why the Jotun sought to destroy humanity?"

I stared at her a moment in consternation, "They're enemies of the gods. They wanted to destroy all of the gods' creation."

"Yes, but there is so much more to it. To understand their reasons you must understand who and what they are. They are vattir, and like all vattir they are limited by their passions. Dvergar for their greed, Lejosálfar and exiled elves by their sexuality, Dokkálfar for their hatred, fairies for their love of nature, Aesir and the Vanir for their need to control and Jotun for their single-mindedness. The Jotun hated the Aesir because they had destroyed Ymir, their forefather. They fostered that hatred for eons because they could not move past it. It was a part of who and what they were. Over time that hatred extended to everything the Aesir had created, and eventually to the Vanir because of their alliance with the Aesir."

"I assume there's a point to all this?"

The Gray Queen nodded, "Yes, you are vattir, and yet you are not. Your human nature gives you the ability to move past your passions and become so much more than what you are. Do not be so quick to give up your humanity, it is a precious jewel. You shouldn't keep it locked away. You should display it proudly for all to see."

"Look around you, Alia, look at what has been done to this city. It was destroyed by humans! How am I supposed to be proud of that?!"

She shook her head, "All creatures have their darker sides. Look no further than the light elves. Within them is the capacity to become completely depraved of all that is good."

"So that means I should embrace my humanity?"

"Humans are not perfect. They have many flaws, but in one respect at least they are superior to vattir. They can move past their flaws, vattir cannot. Ask yourself, do you really wish to give that up?"

I bowed my head and closed my eyes. I felt Alia's arms slip away and when I opened my eyes again the Gray Queen was gone.



"Bryn," Eva's soft voice said from out of the darkness.

"Hey..." I said turning to look her in the eyes.

"What's wrong?"

"It's just... It's finally starting to set in. I'm stuck being the queen of Lejosálfar."

"Oh, Bryn... I'm sorry," she responded reaching up to touch my cheek.

"How can I be a queen to these people? I barely know anything about them. I don't even know their language well enough to hold a frizzing conversation!"

"I don't know, but I'll be here by your side every step of the way."

"As will I," said Garik appearing on my other side.

"How long have you been there, Garik?" I asked.

"Just as long as Eva," he said with an awkward smile as he scratched at the back of his head.

"You came looking for me together." It wasn't so much a question as a statement of fact.

Neither, gave an immediate response and I didn't wait for one before kissing first Garik, then Eva on the lips. I was still a bit squeamish about our odd love triangle, but the last lingering bits of my resistance were gradually falling away.

I had changed, I realized, and not necessarily in a good way. The Gray Queen had been right to caution me. I'd let my elven side slowly grow more dominant, and my humanity had started to slip away, but I couldn't allow that to happen. I couldn't allow myself to turn into Hervor's image of a perfect Lejosálfar. I had to strike a balance between my two sides... Strike that, my three sides. I was after all, a goddess now too I reminded myself. There was nothing saying I couldn't embrace my humanity and my elven side too. And frizz, why not throw a little goddess into the mix too? If I had to be queen, I was going to be the sort of queen I wanted to be.

"Come on," I whispered with a weary sigh, "It's time for me to get to work."



It has been quite a journey. Sometimes I wish I could go back to the simple life I knew before it all began... And yet the more time I spend among the Lejosálfar the more I come to care for them. That's not to say I've completely come to accept my predicament. I still resent what's been done to me, and I continue to writhe under the net that has been thrown over me. The elves are my people, of that much I am sure, but I will always feel separate from them. In many ways I'll always be human at heart, and I don't know if I'll be able to completely understand them, or they me.

Eva understands me better than any of them, and yet in many ways she is more like them than I am. She is, after all, technically a light elf now. It happened when the queen's bond was passed on to me. The weaves for the bond between us became tangled with those of the queen bond, and in that moment Eva effectively became an unwitting light elf. Eva doesn't seem to be bothered by this in the slightest. She insists that it's for the best. If she's going to spend the rest of her life with me it's only natural that she should become a light elf.

My weird romance with Garik and Eva has continued to bloom, and there already whispers among the people that it's time for us to wed. I don't know if I'm ready to take that step, but the thought of marriage really doesn't scare me as it once might have. The thought of being married to two people is pretty unusual to humans, but I'm working to get past that particular cultural constraint.

Ruling isn't at all what I might have expected, but the elves are an unusual people, so it stands to reason that ruling over them would be an unusual experience. I have a lot more free time than any human ruler might and yet there's one thing that bothers me. The elves have no drive to better themselves. They're content with who and what they are. They make use of no advancement, technological or otherwise. A human civilization would stagnate and decline under these conditions and yet the elves thrive. I think it's time I give the people a little push.



"Lord Freyr, I've been waiting for you," I said staring across the throne room.

He stormed through the room, climbed the raised platform where my throne was situated and came to stand just a few feet away, glaring down at me.

Heime, appeared at my side, his fist clenched around Gram in a defensive posture. Garik appeared beside my father with his own sword drawn, and there was a flicker of power nearby as Eva summoned up her magic.

"I've come for what is mine," he said, shaking with rage.

I looked up at him, traced my hand across the intricate carvings on my newly crafted throne, then calmly stood to meet his gaze.

"Freyr, the Lejosálfar were never yours. The Vanir came as conquerors, and took Álfheim with your superior powers. You were a brutal and merciless leader, and I cannot fathom why the exiled tribes love you so. I will not allow my people to suffer under your rule again," I said, pacing back and forth in front of him. My people, I don't know if I'd ever get used to calling the Lejosálfar that!

"You speak of things you cannot possibly know! You usurped my throne! I will not stand for it!"

"Usurped your throne, Lord Freyr? For me to have done that it would have had to have belonged to you in the first place! You took what rightfully belonged to the light elves, and selfishly took it for yourself! I am not the usurper! You are!"

"You insolent little child!" He growled and suddenly drew his sword.

I let my magic flow through me and quickly constructed the all too familiar weave for a spirit shield just before his weapon bounced into it. Heime and Garik quickly moved in, and within moments Freyr had been disarmed.

Heime slammed his fist into Freyr's chest and sent the god tumbling to the ground at the base of platform.

"Dad," I said, quietly holding out my hand. Dad, that one felt a little weird on my tongue too, but I thought it would be far easier to become accustomed too.

I felt Gram's weight in my hand, then I calmly walked over to where Freyr had fallen and knelt down next to him. "I freed you from Helheim, and this is how you repay me? By trying to kill me!? You should be ashamed of yourself Lord Freyr. I thought the Vanir prided themselves on their honor!"

"Álfheim is mine!"

"I swore an oath to my dying grandmother to keep the Lejosálfar out of your grasp. The only way for you to get it is to kill me. Do you really think the light elves will welcome you with open your arms after you kill their queen? Father told me about your conquest of our world. The people resisted you for some time before submitting. Do you think it will be any different this time around?" I whispered holding the edge of the blade against his neck.

"It is mine!" he repeated.

"Then you will die," I said, my eyes locked onto his.

"You wouldn't dare!?"

I edged the blade closer to his neck and watched the tiniest bit of his blood trickle down his throat as Gram made a very slight cut into his flesh. "Are you willing to take that risk? Do you think there will be anyone to bring you back from the dead this time around? How many centuries did you languish in Helheim the last time?"

Freyr stared up at me for a moment with wide-eyes, then he started to laugh. "Freya told me you were a feisty one, but I believe that to be an understatement! I will leave Álfheim to the light elves."

"And the exiled tribes?"

"Do with them as you will," he replied with a sigh.

"Good. Consider yourself absolved of your debt to me," I said, carefully removing the sword from his throat and stood over him with my hand out.

"Never could get used to elf maidens being so infernally strong," he grumbled as I pulled him back up onto his feet.

"I just wish I could get used to being a maiden," I replied.

"Your highness," a tall elven woman said seeming to appear from thin air.

"Sigvit, isn't it? How can I help you?" I asked.

She averted her eyes, "Yes, your highness. A patrol found a pair of humans wandering the roots of the Yggdrasil."

"A pair of humans? Are they here in the city?" I asked, feeling cold chills run down the length of my spine. It couldn't be, could it? After weeks of being missing, could Sam and Leif actually be alive?

"Yes, my queen," Sigvit said cocking her head to the side.

"Have them brought to the palace immediately. I wish to see these humans," I said feeling as if my heart might leap out of my chest.

Sigvit nodded and disappeared with a bright flash of light.

I turned back to Freyr, but found that he was gone.



I returned to my seat to wait. The throne was nothing like the one Hervor had used. Elves cared nothing for precious metals or riches of any kind, and her throne had reflected that. Mine on the other hand had been hand carved with elaborate designs of dragons and other creatures. Precious gems had been set into the eyes of each of the creatures and a gold overlay had been laid over much of the chair.

I don't know who was responsible for its creation, but the seat was one of the most beautiful pieces of furniture I had ever laid my eyes on. Even with the gold and gems, the craftsman had somehow managed to keep it from looking gaudy. My subjects had gotten the idea that because I was half-human I had an appreciation for fine things. They were in the process of completely redecorating the palace-tree, and the few clothes that I had, had been replaced with ones made from the finest cloth. There was even talk of celebrating my nineteenth birthday when it came around next month. I suspected that either Heime, Garik, Eva or perhaps all three were behind these changes, but I had yet to confront them about it.

"Your highness!" Sigvit proclaimed, entering the throne room with two very worn figures trailing behind her.

"Bryn?" the taller of the two asked.

I jumped from my throne, ran across the throne room, flinging my arms around Leif and Sam in a hug and let out a pure squeal of delight.

"That's Queen Brynhilde to you!" I proclaimed with lopsided grin, and couldn't help but laugh as both Leif and Sam's eyes grew wide in surprise.



BRYN'S EPILOGUE

Vordag, the seventeenth of Ylir

Garik's strong hands worked their way down my back and I let out a long sigh of pleasure. I'd had a rather stressful week dealing with the Seidskati, and Garik's back rubs had become a regular part of our daily routine since I'd learned I was pregnant. It came as real shock. Despite having the powers and abilities of a goddess, I was still biologically a half-elf and I was far more fertile than any other elf. Elven women, though much slower to reproduce, have the ability to control whether they could become pregnant. I didn't have that control, and because of that I had to suffer the results of my night activities. Once this child is delivered I think Garik and I are going to have a long talk about contraceptives.

At first, I'd had mixed feelings about the child, but after some soul searching I'd come to realize that a part of me really wanted it, while the other side was scared shitless by the idea of motherhood. My human side was especially terrified by the idea, and every time I looked at my pregnant self in the mirror I felt that fear rise to the surface, but I thought that maybe with Eva and Garik at my side it wouldn't be too bad. She was a girl, the magic of the elven healers told me that much at least, but I wondered how human would she be? Would she share my dual nature? Would her existence be a constant battle between her two halves as it had become for me?

"Is something the matter, my asynja?" Garik whispered in my ear.

I turned to look Garik in the face and smiled up at him. He seemed to find immense amusement in called me his asynja. At first, I'd found his pet name more than a little annoying, but over time it had grown on me.

"I was thinking about our child," I said, tracing my hand over my bulging belly and felt his love and warmth rise up through the bond.

He smiled down at me, but he never had the opportunity to reply.

"Another bad day?" Eva asked, poking her head inside the room.

Garik nodded, "Theodora has been raising a fuss again."

Eva nodded, "She doesn't wish to give up her power. I doubt she will ever come around."

"Oh, I wouldn't be too sure about that," I replied with a huge grin on my face.

Eva came over and placed her hand on her shoulder and looked down at me with accusing eyes, "What did you do this time?"

"I threatened to take her magic away," I said with a shrug.

"You really shouldn't antagonize that woman," she leaned down to plant a kiss on my lips.

I shrugged, "She's standing in the way of progress. If I'm going to help the humans form this new joint-ruled magical council, I can't have that damn woman standing in the way. She is a relic from an age that has come to an end. If she can't change her ways then she has no place in this new order. Men must have an equal say, or they'll be stuck repeating the mistakes of the past."

"I should probably tell you that Leif is waiting outside. He wants to speak with you, but after the last time he wanted to be sure that... How did he put it? Oh, yes, that you were 'properly clothed'," she said with a tinkle of amusement in her eyes.

I let out a soft chuckle and shook my head as I reached over to grab my blouse from the chair it had been draped across. Despite my resolution to maintain my humanity, some Lejosálfar ways had begun to rub off on me and I'd almost completely lost my human sense of modesty. Elven modesty only extended to the outdoors, and that was mostly to protect oneself against the elements. Once indoors it was considered completely acceptable to roam about naked, even when you were a guest in another person's home. You saw this far less frequently within the palace-tree, but it still wasn't that uncommon an occurrence.

"Leif, I'm dressed. You can come in," I called through the entryway as I finished with the last button.

After, Leif and Sam had been lost in our descent into Niflheim I had given up hope that the two were alive, but somehow they had survived. Leif told me that they come awake near the spring of Urd and had survived off its water and small insects that inhabited the roots of the Yggdrasil. Initially, no one understood how or why he and Sam had been spared, but after some time we'd come up with a pretty interesting theory. We think the goddesses spared them. The Eddas spoke of two humans, a male and a female, that would survive Ragnarok by hiding within the roots of the world tree. What if Leif and Sam were those humans, and the goddesses had hidden them there in the eventuality that we wouldn't succeed?

"I came to say goodbye," Leif said with a sad smile.

"You're not staying for the wedding?" Eva asked.

"No, I am, but I'll be leaving afterward and I might not get to see you. So I thought..." he mumbled trailing off.

"Say no more. So where are you headed?" I said.

"Back to Midgard. They're setting up a school for male magic users in Epegard," he responded.

I moved across the room and flung my arms around in a great big hug, "Oh Leif, I'm going miss you. Please, try to stop by and visit from time to time."

"You're my best friend, Bryn. Of course, I'll visit, but I kind of hoped you might visit me too... At least, whenever you're on Midgard that is."

"Of course. What about Sam? Will she be going with you?"

"Yeah, and believe it not that Matoaka lady has offered to take her on as an apprentice. It's weird, but apparently Sam's a descendant of hers from a really obscure line," Leif replied.

"That's great! Matoaka has a home in Nehrburg that's just outside Epegard. You two will be able to see each other whenever you want."

"Yeah, it'll be pretty great. Well, I guess I better get going. I still have some packing to do before I leave tomorrow. I hope your wedding goes well." Then he disappeared back out the doorway.

"You know... The wedding is in the morning. I think it's about time you get to bed," Eva said a moment later.

I shook my head and glared at Eva in mock indignation. It was one of the many drawbacks to being pregnant. Everyone had been treating me with kid gloves. Especially my future bride and my groom to be. Eva would never share any blood relation to the child, but she showed the same concern for the child's well-being as Garik. Of course, she'd been there the night the child had been conceived, so that might have something to do with it. Garik and Eva didn't love one another as they loved me, but once the two had stopped competing, their relationship had become much more amicable. They shared their bodies with each other when we made love, but I doubted they'd ever share their hearts with anyone but me.

"You were up half the night last night. You need to take care of yourself if you're going to deliver a healthy child," Garik chided.

"Fine, fine," I shook my head with a dramatic sigh.

"You know..." Garik said with the barest hint of a smile. "It's not really that late, and the wedding isn't that early. I think we could afford to have a little fun before bed."

"Fun you say? What exactly were you thinking?" Eva asked with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

I traced a hand across Eva's face and embraced first her then Garik in a deep kiss, "Oh, I think I can suggest a few things."



ARYANNA'S EPILOGUE

Siffendag 18. Ylir

I clutched at Daniella's hand, doing my best to keep my apprehension at bay. I had accomplished everything I had ever dreamed of since learning of Ragnarok, and yet nothing I could have done would have prepared me for this. Bryn was getting married.

Elves had no temples or churches, because they had no gods to worship. So the marriage was being held outside in the foothills surrounding the city as all marriages in Dagdedar were held. Thousands of Lejosálfar, along with a handful of human guests had gathered for the occasion to watch the new queen be wed.

I took a look at that beautiful girl and I have a hard time believing that she was ever my son. Yet, there's still a lot of Neil in Brynhilde, whether she realizes it or not. When I learned she was getting married, I believed she was making a mistake. She was only nineteen for Frigg's sake! She was too young, and she wasn't just marrying one person she was getting married to two! To further complicate matters she was six months pregnant with Garik's child. The very idea seemed appalling to me and my human sensibilities. Then I realized something: Bryn wasn't human, not entirely, anyway. As strange as that relationship was to me, Garik and Eva made my daughter happy, so I held my tongue and kept myself from saying anything. Bryn'd had a terrible burden placed on her shoulders, and she would spend the rest of her life, and potentially all of eternity as ruler of the light elves. She would need the love and support of both Garik and Eva to help maintain her throughout the eons.

I felt Daniella squeeze my hand. I looked over at her and smiled. Frigg had offered to return us to our original forms, but we had both declined. We had been in these bodies now for many years, and we'd grown accustomed to them and to each other. Before our transformations we'd both been heterosexual men. While we cared and loved each other deeply, we didn't care to test the limits of that love.

We couldn't understand any of the ceremony, as it was all being recited in the Elvish language, but

as we were both included, we had both been advised on what to expect. Bryn, Eva and Garik were standing in a triangle facing one another. Daniella and I, Heime, as well as a man and a woman who were Garik's parents stood in a circle around the trio. There were no priests or anyone to officiate as the three spoke their parts.

Each were supposed to name what they felt were the others greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses, which probably explained why Bryn looked so embarrassed and humiliated as her two lovers finished what they were saying. The elves believed that if a marriage was to last, that it must be tested from the very beginning, so that the bond between those being wed would be forged to become stronger than steel.

When it was Bryn's turn to speak, she turned to Garik, and I saw his eyes widen with shock and surprise and a pleased smile crept onto his face. Her grasp on the Elvish language, while still imperfect, had become good enough that she could hold a conversation and be understood. Slowly the smile turned into a frown and he lowered his head in shame and nodded in understanding.

When it came Eva's turn, she eyed Bryn thoughtfully and threw her head back and laughed as Bryn listed her weaknesses. Eva was odd, even by elven standards, but considering what she used to be, that really was no surprise.

Finally, they each repeated the words, 'bundr allilifu,' separately and then together. They kissed and turned to the crowd and repeated 'bundr allilifu' one final time before there was a flash of light and the three disappeared with the light of Bryn's travel spell.

Daniella turned to me and smiled thoughtfully, "So what now?"

"I don't know," I said, squeezing her hand and shaking my head. I'd never intended to have a child, but doing so had brought a completeness and fullness to my life that I never would have expected, and now that she had moved on to a new life I didn't know how I would cope.

"You know, our lives are going to be empty without a child in our home," her words mirroring my thoughts.

"I was just thinking the same thing," I replied back.

Daniella kissed me lightly on the lips, "There are so many children who have been orphaned by this terrible war. Maybe we could adopt a few."

I place a hand on either of her shoulders and kissed her back, "I think I'd like that."



MYTHOS

In the beginning there was only the vast emptiness of Ginnungagap. From out of its great gaping abyss formed Niflheim, a place of everlasting frost and cold. Soon thereafter rose up the primeval world of fire and insatiable heat, which is so named Muspellsheim. It came to pass that the frost from the world of Niflheim met with the heat from Muspellsheim and from that collision Ymir the giant was born. And Ymir fell into a great slumber as he journeyed near Muspellsheim. Now it came to pass that he began to perspire and from under each arm was born a daughter and son. And from them all giants sprang.

Now it just so happened from where Ymir had sprung, so too did Audumla, the great primal bovine. Ymir fed from her teats and was nourished. And Audumla hungered so she licked upon the ice of Niflheim and its salt sustained her. The heat from her tongue caused the ice to melt and from it emerged Buri.

Buri begat a son who he named Bor. And Bor took a fancy to Bestla a giant, and he wed her. From their union, Odin the Allfather and his brothers Lodur and Hoenir were born.

It came to pass that Ymir and the sons of Bor warred one with another and the brothers slew Ymir. And so much blood flowed from Ymir's veins that Ginnungagap filled and all the giants save Beregelmir and his wife did drown. Odin, Lodur and Hoenir, raised up Ymir's body from the great sea of blood and with it they formed Midgard. From his flesh, they formed the land, from his bones the mountains, and from his hair they created the trees and all plants and they poured blood of Ymir upon Midgard and formed the oceans, rivers and seas.

And they trapped the fires from Muspellsheim and with it they formed the stars, moon and the sun. Other gods appeared from out of the abyss and the brothers knew not from whence they came. And the gods called themselves the Aesir. From among them Odin took him a wife, who was named Frigg, and together they begat many sons and daughters. As one, the Aesir created Asgard, their home, which they placed in the heavens far above Midgard so that they might watch over it from afar.

And Odin looked upon Midgard, and found it lacking, but knew not what was lacking. So he took his wife and two brothers to Midgard and as they traveled upon the surface of the land they eventually came upon two dead trees. Now these trees were twisted and knotted and were most unsightly, but within them Frigg saw what her husband had been seeking. And she took the first tree and she gave it a form which mirrored her husband's, that of a man. Then she took the second tree and formed it into the shape of a woman after her own form, the shape of a woman.

Now it came to pass that the bodies which Frigg had formed were without life, so Odin gave them spirit. Now those first humans were without reason, like unto a beast, so Lodur gave them wit so that they might have understanding. Now, Hoenir saw that they could not perceive the world around them, so he granted them sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. And the man they named Ask after the ash tree, and the woman they named Embla after the elm tree.

And out of the abyss three more goddesses appeared and they called themselves the Norns, and they watched over the fates of men, women, gods and goddesses alike. Urd was the first to awaken and it was given unto her to watch the past, Verdani was second and the present was her domain, Skuld was the final and she sees that which has yet to come to pass. And the three goddesses of fate created Yggdrasil, the world tree. Now the roots of Yggdrasil came to connect all the worlds from Muspellsheim, Niflheim, Midgard, Nidarvellir, Svartalfheim, Alfheim, Asgard, Vanaheim, Jotunheim and many more beyond number. And the tree sprang up into the heavens and issued up the spring of Urd. There the Norns now reside so that they might water the roots of the world tree.

Now Jotunheim is the home of Beregelmir and all those that have sprung from his loins and they call themselves the Jotun and they are enemies of the gods. Alfheim, is the home of the Lejosálfar who are friends to man. Nidarvellir, is home of the ever crafty dvergar. It is said that Svartálfheim is home to the most vile svartálfar, which we now know as the Dokkálfar. And finally from Vanaheim sprang forth gods named the Vanir that did rival the Aesir in power.

Now it did so happened that a god named Loki—who delighted in causing much mischief among both gods and men—lay with a Angrboda, a Jotun. From their union was born Fenrir the wolf, Jormungand the serpent, and Hel who had death in her heart. When Odin saw this he took Jormungand and he did throw him into the depths of the ocean, and Jormungand grew so large that he came to encircle the world. Frigg foresaw that Fenrir would wreak havoc upon the world, so Odin took him and cast the beast in chains. And Odin seeing death within Hel's heart gave her dominion over the dead, and she took up residency within Niflheim and her domain within came to be known as Helheim or simply Hel. And she set her faithful hound, Garmr, at the gates of her abode to keep the dead within and the living without.

It came to pass that the Aesir and Vanir warred with one another over the hearts of men. They fought long and hard, and slowly their numbers dwindled until only the goddesses remained. Yea, even the Allfather, Odin did fall. It came to pass that those that remained did make peace and together they watch over Midgard and await the coming of Ragnarok and the final battle.

-From the Codex Morgana (Translated to Modern English by the hand of Athilda le Fey)

❖ THE END ❖

Comments, no matter how short, are very much appreciated. If you liked this story, I would be very appreciative if you left a review at [fictionmania](#), [tgstorytime](#) or [bigcloset topshelf](#). Criticism is welcome, but only when presented in a constructive and positive manner.

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