

Baltic Dragonsmeade

I shoved the door shut behind me by laying against it, only to be smacked by the smell of alcohol in the room. I pulled the hood of my sable fur cloak away and my eyes met a strange scene. A barrel had been set upon the stone counter in the kitchen, a pitcher carved from a burl was on the tree-slice table, and at the other end of a heavily engraved Circinian white steel stein was Atlas - *drinking*. He didn't look up, he simply toyed with the bone handle carved to look like an elk antler. I took a deep breath in of the smell; honey, fir tree, dragon fire. Baltic dragonsmeade, made from fir tree amber formed by dragon fire. It was a drink I had only heard of, but knew it was a Viking man's coveted favorite. "It smells like a frat house in here," I grumbled. He blinked his eyes unevenly and slowly raised his head to face me, "I *still* have no bloody inclination to what in Thor's name that is."

He kicked the chair across from him out from under the table with a long, tree trunk leg and motioned to a less engraved stein in the kitchen, "That one is for you." I could hear the slight slur in his thick Norse accent. As I settled into the massive chair across from him, he threw back the remainder of his stein and started to pour more, "Did I ever tell you how my parents met one another?" I unclasped the fibulae of my cloak and pulled it around myself like a blanket, "Atlas, I thought you didn't like to talk about your parents?" He ran his hands through his mid-back length unbraided hair. The stygian strands caught the reflection of the roaring fire just over his shoulder, and so did his glacier-white eyes. He shrugged, "I am drunk, it matters not what I talk about now, *mein liebe*." He let his arm fall from his hair to the table with a monstrous thud. He stared into the knots of the wood and then started again, "She came here with my great grandfather, Orrin Kyrre Fuhr. He had raised her in Munich because after the war in 1946 he had himself married a Circinian healer. Their daughter, Ellas, became pregnant on two separate occasions by a low ranking Norwegian navagiak on his way to Ariban," He paused and sipped his drink. I smelled the opaque gold liquid and did my best to hide my repulsion.

"So, what happened to your mom's parents?" Atlas snorted and half a sarcastic smile flitted across his face, "My grandmother died while giving birth to my mother, despite already having birthed my aunt, and my grandfather never made it to Ariban, or any other of the four Great Cities after she died. My mother was named for her, though, Sayren Ellas Fuhr." He shot

me a look through his lashes to see if I was still listening and then shrugged, "My father, Callahn Thyssin Elkkhart, was raised as any Viking boy traditionally is in Norway. Born in the snow, first strides in the snow, raised all Hel in the snow." He beamed and I could see his unusual set of triple canines. I smiled back at him and tried to get some of the drink down, "Sounds like you." He groaned with a sheepish, open mouthed grin and threw his head back, rubbing his face. I coughed out the taste of the dragonsmeade, "So what next, they came here, and?" He looked straight into me with his piercing eyes and crossed his arms, "Well, my father was here for the navagiak trials. He wanted to be the Commander, like I am now. At the time he was my age, almost twenty four." I interrupted him, "What about your mom?" He flicked one brow up momentarily as if he had not considered it, "She was your age, about nineteen. I think my father first saw her in the apothecary, when he was looking for something for his frostsnap-" I stopped him "Its frostbite, Atlas." He wagged his head at me, partially rolling one eye, and kept going, "He tried to talk to her, but she gave him one glance and promptly told him he had no chance in Helheim."

I spit my drink a little at his attempt to merge our euphemisms. He laughed heartily at himself and as I cleaned my face I asked, "How'd she say that?" He pulled one leg to his chest and rested his arm on it, motioning and changing his voice to try to imitate their conversation, "Well she snapped at him with something like, 'I am not going to squander my time on some Glaciatic Norwegian boy, especially a *navagiak*.' To which my father riposted by sitting with her at feast for a week running. He was mad over her, it did not matter that she was a Solarid. Ultimately she posed the question of what he hoped for from her, and he told her this old navagiak saying." He calmly slugged down about half of his full stein. I found myself on the edge of my chair, "Well, what's the saying?" Atlas drug his lip through his bleached teeth and narrowed his eyes, "It is such an old form of Norse... It effectively says 'When a navigator finds a woman who reminds him that he knows how to walk, that is when he will know he has found love.' Something of that sort. And she, for once, had nothing to say back to him. She knew that my father lived to fly, and hearing that left her with not a single word to respond with."

He threw back his meade and slammed the stein to the table, tapping his finger on the antler handle. I smiled like a love-struck hatchling, "That sounds like its straight out of a romance novel." He raised his eyebrows at me and I quickly realized he had no idea what that was. I corrected my statement, "Why didn't she say anything back?" His rich voice rattled like

there was rust and gravel in it, "Well, she did eventually. My father had asked her what she was worried over, and she admitted to him that she did not want to make the wrong decision. He knew that she was fearful of having her heart broken." I ran my finger around the rim of my stein and followed the line of the white ink tattoo that ran horizontal across the peak of his features. He turned his head as he rubbed his neck and revealed the white Helm of Awe tattoo that was underneath his jaw. I felt a symbolic warmth in the room that I had never felt before and I wondered if it was because for the first time in the five months that I had been with him, he had decided to reveal his more hidden self to me. I ruminated on the tale for a moment, "I thought your mother wasn't afraid of anything." Atlas reclined into the chair, "She did not think she was either. For all of that, though, do you know what he told her?" I was playing with the valknut ring he had made for me, but I caught his gaze long enough to shake my head. He leaned forwards onto the table, splayed his enormous hands out underneath mine, then let his white-blue eyes lazily lock onto mine. His impossibly strong accent came out overwhelmed in a drunken hoarseness that had a certain sweetness to it. "Love, hearts do not break here."