

Scania

Land of fury and Pride



 NOEMARA

*To Daniel J. Leveratto the Danish Bear
that stole my soul from eternity*

Scania

NOEMARA

SCANIA-LAND OF FURY AND PRIDE

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Ruiz, Marcela Noemi

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Email: noemara2@gmail.com Internet: www.noemara.com

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index

PROLOGUE	7
CHAPTER ONE: FROM SCANDIA TO DOMMOC	9
CHAPTER TWO: A ONE WAY TRIP	53
CHAPTER THREE: A NEGOTIATED LOVE	125
CHAPTER FOUR: BETRAYALS AND LOYALTIES	181
CHAPTER FIVE: YOUR DEATH BELONGS TO ME	239
CHAPTER SIX: VIDAR	284
EPILOGUE	356
SPECIAL THANKS	359
INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR	361
OTHER DOWNLOADABLE BOOKS	362

PROLOGUE

This story of drama and romance transports us to a time where family mandates and repressed emotions dominate the lives of its protagonists. The love that cannot be contained, the overflowing passion, the unexpected death, the calculated revenge and the greed that corrupts are feelings as human as those we still experience today, regardless of our genders, inclinations or desires.

Throughout each chapter, the irreversible consequences of our actions and the sometimes futile search for redemption through revenge are reflected. The justice we demand and obtain, often in bloody ways, is also present.

The work invites us to understand the links and roles that grow, mature and break due to the contradictions between the thinking, feeling and acting of each character. Distrust, fear and greed weave a web of lies, connivance and disloyalty.

However, love, although damaged and wounded, teaches us that it is the lighthouse that guides us towards redemption, even in pain. Guilt makes us humble and drives us to seek forgiveness to overcome it and find peace.

Death and life are part of our tragic and beautiful existence.

The author shows how this love, which did not have enough time to develop into mutual trust and loyalty, lost peace in the intensity of its own passion. It shows us that it is necessary for those who love each other to build their walls to avoid being pawns in a chess game of power and greed. They must allow themselves the necessary time to wait for their loved one, listen and be listened to to clear up doubts. Give each other temperance and patience, despite the days, the years, the storms and outbursts of anger, to be able to support each other.

Otherwise, failure will come sooner or later and rising like the Phoenix will be the final destination.

DOEMARA

A dramatic landscape with a Viking ship on the water, a circular runic pattern on the ground, and a sunset sky.

CHAPTER 1

“Generous and brave men live better and rarely suffer; but the coward fears everything.”

Anonymous

In the early 8th century, Britain was a collection of small kingdoms, which suffered from pillaging, raiding and skirmishing by Vikings, terrorising them all. The Vikings were then small in number, but they were determined and cunning, making repeated raids, always knowing where and strategically; they did not delay or risk more than necessary; they sought out the most favourable places and circumstances to enter by surprise, choosing the date for a raid, taking hostage characters for whom they could demand a ransom or an extortionate alliance. They would attack places that were disorganised, without fortifications, without defences and thanks to their quick reactions, precise senses and clear objectives, they would look for the vulnerable points, setting fire to everything, after loading

themselves with booty, hostages, slaves, men, women and animals, embarking what they had obtained and then returning quickly to their camp. The invasions were intended to achieve colonisation with intermittent periods of truce that would come and go again and again. The Danes collaborated with the non-Russians in pursuit of colonisation while the Swedes tried to open trade routes, but all agreed in their methods. When the enemy did not pay for their defeat with large sums of money, gold or goods, or even animals or women, they only left systematic devastation. Some Danish Vikings only wanted to return to their homeland; others dreamed of taking over more fertile lands where they could settle.

England was in its dark ages; small kingdoms with alliances, betrayals, mistrust and political divisions in seven kingdoms that betrayed each other to survive, allowing one of them to be conquered by the Danes. Here began what was to become Danelaw years later. In a fiefdom called Dommoc.

To the north of that land and to the west, the sea, more fearsome than the northern sea, was visible; the defensive constructions built by the Anglo-Saxons, made of earth, crossed the paths laid out from the marshes to the forests to prevent the advance of the troops to those settlers who came from the Celtic tribe of the Icenii and King Anna of Stanglia, the royal family of Wuffinga. Their territory was flat, the hills no higher than a hundred metres, but the forests pro-

vided shelter and protection. That morning in Dommoc the The wind was humid and with strong breezes, the town was looking forward to the warm and sultry summer, the winter had been very cold and windy, it was still wet and partly cloudy like all those days. The routine of the port and the dockyard had stopped for the festivities of St. George and the merchants were busy starting a new intense day of work. They were coming and going with their goods, setting up their stalls, negotiating among themselves, dealing with petty theft by children and others who were learning the art of theft.

But the silence of the birds and the murmur of the sea brought with it an ephemeral tranquillity that intermingled with the noise of people buying and selling, no one noticed the silence of nature, busy as they were in the joyous atmosphere. At that time Edmund's reign in Wessex was a curse on their lives, the death of the legendary Viking Ragnar brought three horsemen of the apocalypse to those latitudes, his three sons Halfdan, Ivar and Ubbe and with them hundreds of Vikings ravaging monasteries and cities. This would be a morning where fire and shouting would silence the laughter and joy.

In one of these invading contingents came a young man, one of the sons of Einar, one of the kings of Scania, who in his old age sent his sons to the invasions to further increase his power, but also out of obligation to his clan, on this occasion his son, one of the youngest, Björk, who was to undertake his first battle in distant lands, had or-

ders from his father to bring with him a duke's daughter or whatever he found suitable, previously negotiating for her life and bringing her with him as a hostage and concubine to learn the culture of those lands he had dreamed of conquering since his youth and for which he had so often been absent for long periods.

Björk was in command of one of the drakkar, one of the longest, fastest and swiftest ships, made with woollen sails reinforced with leather and easy to move in low water because of their flat keel. He liked to look out to sea from the bow with the dragon's head carved in wood, he felt free with the horizon in the distance and the icy wind on his weather-beaten face, as he was the tallest of his brothers since he was little, his father had him called Björk which meant white bear, of slender but strong build and with a broad back, like almost all Danes unlike many Norwegians. His snow-white hair was natural, while many other Vikings bleached their beards and hair with a paste of goat fat and ha-ya ash, on the other hand, Björk had been born with hair, eyelashes and eyebrows as white as clouds, with some golden reflections that on stormy days could be seen and, like omens anticipating the rains, contrasted with her intense brown eyes, They were no bigger than usual, but the sparkle they radiated had an intensity that froze, whether in a fit of rage or in the same calm, his gaze tried to pierce the intentions or thoughts of whomever he looked at, as if measuring the spirit he harboured. With a handsome

face, with a prominent, slender nose, a broad forehead with flowing locks, long hair, as was common, and a rough, abundant beard, along the corners of her lips, braided plaits commanded respect and bravery. And the charm of many women who wished to be his wife. His hands were calloused and large from working with iron and metal in the cauldrons. He loved to sail, for he had a clear knowledge of the stars and the maritime climate, never liked riding or farming, land was not his thing and he longed to flee the continent for the impetuous northern sea. Of few words in battle or rather on excursions of robbery and pillage, but eloquent in the tavern and somewhat of a womaniser or as he liked to say, what are the eyes the gods gave us for if not to see the beauty of women. He was not his father's equal in libidinousness, but in power and battle he tried with all his might to be his father's equal and even harder to surpass his brothers. His effort to surpass himself made him intemperate and arrogant, but in his innermost self he struggled to adapt himself to the cruelty of his time and to paternal expectations at the cost of numbing himself and proving himself at every opportunity to be a stronger and more ruthless warrior than his ancestor. He was not intimate in personal conversations, for his life of betrayal had moulded his distrustful character with a cynical view of others. Women were not his weakness, but a strong mutual attraction, a world in which to relax in warmth and voluptuousness, games of intensity and

flashes of passion, but after moments of mild reverie he quickly discarded them, intentionally looking for flaws in them in order to discharacterise them and continue his search for new women. Nor did he like to take by force young women or girls, virgins or any woman who did not willingly come to him of her own free will. He had already seen the lechery of his father and uncles as a child, seeing his mother's tears, with a tormented childhood. These memories and first impressions of violent events, such as when his father and others stoned to death the king of the neighbouring clan and those who followed him. He was nine years old when the event happened and had been playing so many times with the king's sons, who were slaughtered and buried next to him, that he could never get over seeing the coldness of his father that day when he took the power and the lands, with the blood of his former friend and his relatives, with whom he had ventured on so many expeditions to Britain and shared endless nights of mead and beer.

From that day on he knew that no one could be trusted, not even his own blood.



Britain was losing land to the Danish Viking-gas excursions from the north and Eastanglia was in constant danger. The attack on the monastery of Lindisfarne was the beginning and Hunn, the lord of those lands of Dommoc knew it, always in the shadow of his brothers

Beonna and Ethelberht, reigned without the esteem of his vassals, hypocritically living, avoiding responsibility, always blaming anyone for his mistakes and believing himself to be an intellectual sage, when he was only a hedonist with an ego higher than his small stature. His words and deeds, always in constant contradiction, were reflected in his loves and loyalties, which he adjusted to suit himself. His sense of justice was largely by virtue of his state of mind so there was no certainty on a cloudy day that he would make a fair decision for anyone. He claimed to love his sons Osric and Wynn, but he loved them only because he regarded them as his property and as jewels to be sold at the right moment by means of some beneficial alliance. The women in his life were allies and objects of pleasure; he loved them for beauty and intelligence but not for long. His daughter Wynn, sixteen years old and ready for proper marriage, was vivid and cheerful, intensely angry unlike her brother Osric, more like her father in his coldness and cruel pragmatism, though a fanatical believer, she always felt that she was secretly judging him in every act of his life.



Wynn was of short stature like his father and features, but of harmonious figure like his mother, who had been dead for many years, not outstanding in beauty unlike her, but his spirit embellished his man-

ner, combining intelligence with the sensitivity he had inherited from his mother, dead in childhood of influenza. She had large almond eyes with bushy eyebrows framing them and Roman features from some intentionally forgotten ancestor that no one dared remember, much less in front of Hunn, her father who lamented the waste of her intelligence having been born a woman, always saying to her: 'If you had been born a man I would see in you a great future, but sadly you were born a woman. The only obligation you have is to marry and to be a solicitous, faithful, and untalkative wife.

Three things very difficult to see in her future, the submissiveness and the secluded existence of a bucolic lady did not suit her wild and proud nature.

He feared he could not marry her into a prosperous alliance because of her somewhat rebellious character behind her apparent docility. The young woman was unpredictable, her mind played against her when it came to controlling her impulses, she would not be silent in the face of injustice and if she did, her whole countenance screamed her anger.

Proud and haughty in the face of those she considered enemies, but loyal and kind to those who had her sympathy. She knew that her time was not the most favourable with her womanhood, but still she held out the hope of being mistress of her life and destiny, little did she imagine that her own character would be her sword and her ruin.

Her father's love was as changeable as the weather; if she submitted to him she could be calm, if unhappy, but when she confronted him she had to suffer his indifference and disdain, his irony and his denigrating phrases in her condition of daughter and woman, but still they were moments when she enjoyed the freedom of not feeling continually watched. Osric fared no better, though he felt no need for brotherly love, in general he needed no one's love, he craved absolute power and to throw off the yoke of parental whims in order to fulfil fully the divine designs that his unwavering faith demanded of him.

Instead, Wynn needed love behind his demands for justice, he sought it in the innocence of children, the docility and tenderness of animals, pitying his servants and grieving when he saw greed and power struggles in his family and friends that led to betrayals and labyrinthine lies. Nothing was simple in his life, everything was interwoven with the forces of power and ambition. She spent her time learning the feminine tasks that her status required her to know, but she secretly observed the emotions of the people around her, profiling their characters and personalities. This often led her to anticipate future events, the one domain she tried to continue: anticipating storms.



That morning, Wynn reluctantly went out to the market with two women who served her, on the way a presentiment stopped her, the wind, the birds, she did not know what, the moment froze and slowly she heard the whistling of stones and arrows and then people who fell to be wounded, the trees creaked and the earth like a blizzard brought the unrestrained shouting of men who howled wielding axes and swords, only the arms could be seen spinning arms like a blizzard.

The trees creaked and the earth, like a blizzard, brought the unrestrained shouting of howling men wielding axes and swords, only their arms could be seen swinging to one side and the other, wounding and massacring everything in their path. Then the fire grew among the houses and the screams of the victims mimicked the bells and horns that sounded, warning in vain of the Viking's slow approach. They began to run among the people looking for shelter, everything was flying through the air, the fire and smoke added to the stupor and bewilderment around them, she only wanted to focus her eyes on something that would not move or roll, she was looking for a way out, but she could not see any despite her emotional paralysis.

Time returned to its maddening rhythm and within seconds she saw them rush at her, next to her rolled one of the women accompanying

her, a slash left her with her throat open and she heard the other one scream; - Don't kill us, it's Hunn's daughter.

As she finished the sentence the barbarian swung an axe at her, her stomach was stained with blood and, stunned by the blow, she fell to her knees with her eyes open. Wynn was paralysed and felt herself lifted up and the Viking with the intense smell of the sea and sweat put her on his shoulders and in a whirlwind the darkness enveloped her, losing consciousness in a stupor.

Ulf entered the barn and unloaded the woman he had brought as if she were a bag of potatoes; there were thirty of them, women, badly wounded men and horrified children, weeping and wailing at their tragedy and fearing the end.

Björk paid no attention to his companion, intent on organising the burning of the barn and storming the castle in a second raid to negotiate with the lord of the land.

-I bring you Hunn's daughter,' one of the women with her pointed out.

-Well, I hope you haven't tasted her before, I don't want to explain. You told me that your father ordered you to bring a woman for you to take, if you don't want her we'll leave her here, I'm not in the mood for women right now. I'd just like to get back to our Scania, let's get it over with.

Björk looked at her more closely, she was very young, had delicately embroidered cloth clothes without ostentation, brown hair and a small figure, she would be easy to subdue, and a good hostage to negotiate with, he thought.

The headache together with a generalised pain in her muscles prevented her from locating herself in the space-time in which she found herself, she managed with effort to clear her mind and open her eyes to look around her, but a huge hand squeezed her arm and lifted her up at the same time as it pulled her hair, pulling her head back. She saw several huge men, dishevelled Vikings with murderous looks on their faces, her whole body trembled and she wished she was dead, they dragged her outside, she heard the desperate screams of people burning alive, while several men set fire to the roof of the barn.

Pushing her into the presence of the hostages in the palace, as she passed by she saw the corpses of her people and burning houses, she did not want to think about what awaited her because she could not imagine any worse hell than what she was seeing.

Her father was flanked by two Vikings, her brother beaten and bleeding beside him. The cold and calculating look on his face as he saw her enter did nothing but hurt her soul, she couldn't and wouldn't think that he didn't see any concern or pain for her, in that instant she knew she would die or hopefully be kept alive in exchange for

gold or slaves, she didn't imagine that the pledge to be delivered would be herself.

Björk surveyed the scene subtly as she roamed her gaze over the tapestries hanging from the ceiling, while she prepared the brief and fair words with which to frighten the little man who wore contempt on his face.

- I am Björk son of Einar, I come from the lands of the Gauts, I demand that you submit to our terms.

--As Lord of these lands, do I have a choice?

The irony and contempt in his tone only encouraged Björk to be clearer, which he could only do with few, vio-slow words. She did not speak or understand the Saxon dialect at all, so she did not want to elaborate in order to avoid misunderstandings.

-No.

-What are your terms, if it is your pleasure to inform me.

The Viking was on the point of slapping him in the face, this pedantic energu-minus.

-The gold you have, ten women and all the cattle on your land. Is this your daughter? I want her too.

-I can give you the gold, half the cattle and twenty women. Why do you want a useless maiden like my daughter?

-To give me the pleasure of fucking her.

The answer threw Hunn off balance, and assuming he was at a distinct disadvantage despite his pride, and that irony would be of no use with these beasts, he would at least try to salvage some of his possessions.

-Don't think I have that much gold, my brother can give you more, you should go for it. If you want to keep my daughter, you take away the most precious thing from me and deprive me of marrying her to one of ours. Take the cattle and the ten women you asked for.

-You offered me twenty

-In exchange for my daughter, but she is worth the ten I would have given you.

-I will take your son too and return him to you in exchange for your brother's gold. You probably won't want your used daughter back. And I taste every word returning the mutual contempt.

-You can keep her, but leave my son with me, in exchange I will tell you everything I know so you can enter Beonna's lands.

-I will return it to you when I have entered and looted.

-How will I know that you will keep your word?

-You won't know until you fulfill it.

Wynn was pale and about to faint, kneeling on the ground listening to how her life was worth less than cattle, she couldn't clarify her feelings, discern who she hated the most, at that moment it was dif-

difficult for her, the Viking and her father. . They were equally miserable and cruel to him.

The Viking as a barbarian was justifiable although Hunn exceeded in perversity and heartbreak.

Deep down he wished it was just another strategy of his father's, but no matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't find a reason for it. And the pain in his soul was more tangible and real than what his body felt. The contingent returned to the camp carrying hostages and loot, leaving some warriors stationed to guard Hunn and the few men who had survived him. While Björk left for Beonna's lands with Osric to negotiate, he took about thirty of the one hundred and fifty warriors who had arrived with him, Beonna was already alerted to the situation, having escalated and fortified the city, but with every intention of negotiating, Unlike his brother, he truly felt appreciation for his blood and his people. He had no intention of being guilty of his nephew's death, leaving him in front of his people as a heartless and cruel monarch, so he He had already prepared a large amount of grain, livestock and gold to deliver to the barbarians and hoped that there would be as few deaths as possible.

Björk was determined to negotiate with the purpose of leaving the seed of discord between the brothers, so she would not destroy the city by ingraining in Hunn the resentment of having been decimated



unlike his brother.

The entry was peaceful and an agreement was reached between both parties, Beonna gave him land for a settlement and resources for two years with a somewhat weak treaty of peace and coexistence, but the bloodshed had been stopped at least for a time. .

The Vikings handed Osric over to his uncle, without even bothering to return to the lands of Hunn, some men had already gone ahead to retreat and gather all their men on the banks where they had the camp. They returned to their peninsula, leaving those who wanted to stay in the settlement of Beonna, while Wynn marched with the barbarians, split in the middle in his soul, feeling the greatest of loneliness; betrayed and sold, she did not know what to owe her melancholy to. Looking into the uncertain future and surviving on her own was the only thing she was certain of at that moment.

Björk watched her from a distance without looking directly at her, she was a couple of years younger than him, however, she seemed younger, perhaps because of her petite body and the lost, disheveled look and the visible fear she suffered from. He did not want to feel sorry for her, destiny was observed by the Gods and thus they determined favors and misfortunes for each one.

Even the gods were at the mercy of destiny, chaos and order, manifested in each one, men or gods through the sacred lot that had been given to them; being passed down, as in the ancient Asir and Vanir families, from generation to generation by a collective sacred pact.

While he was thinking about his own destiny, darkness and cold enveloped the night over the ship, the stench was lost at times thanks to the intensifying winds, Ulf approached him.

-We have more of a stench than usual, one of the women has died, we must throw her into the sea or she will make everyone sick, in addition to bringing bad luck on the remaining journey.

-Do it and bring me Hunn's daughter, she is valuable for now, I will watch her myself.

Wynn could not feel relief in his wrists when they untied him, his numb arms seemed oblivious to the rest of his body, as well as his ears and nose. Nor did he feel the wood of the ship under his feet, because with one push he ended up at the feet of the tall Viking with a passionless look who had negotiated with his father, if this barbarian's plundering could be called negotiation.

She lay there, wrapped around herself in a piece of oiled skin as the only shelter they had thrown at her, as the only act of civilization they had demonstrated. But she still felt the stench of that cold, bluish woman dead in front of her among all the crowded bodies of the

women they had taken as slaves. The men and livestock they had kidnapped were distributed among the rest of the contingent's drakars.

The Viking approached him and cut the rope that tied his hands. He gave him a small dagger.

- Have a knife you will probably need it. But understand that you won't be able to defeat any of us, much less the sea, if you try to flee. You have a chance to earn some of my trust.

She nodded her head, it didn't matter to her whether she earned his trust or not, he was her jailer and she had no escape, although perhaps one, which haunted her mind because of so much sadness.

Ulf watched the scene and approached Björk

-She's weak, use her before she dies.

-I left her a dagger so she can take care of herself. If she is to be my wife, tying her up like a lamb is not a good start.

- You are crazy, that girl has the shadow of death over her, she will kill herself because she doesn't have the courage to stand up to one of us.

His heart jumped and his friend's coherence became true, he went to the bow where he had left her, he saw her back looking at the sea, in two strides he stood next to her and saw that she was holding the knife. In his heart, with a sharp blow he took out the weapon. And he took her by the waist, pressing her against him.

-Don't try it again. You are mine, I will tell you when you are going to die.

-Be merciful, I beg you, finish what surely awaits me, please let me die.

He dragged it holding it on his waist, it was so light and small-boned that he thought he was carrying a sheep. He cried without moaning, which made him feel the great pain that the young woman was enduring, but he did not flinch in front of her.

He turned to his men and ordered them:

-No one hurts this woman who wants to die so much, protect her and let her not be in danger, don't give her the pleasure of dying.

He left her in the care of two of his men, with so much to do, they did not find it any fun to be a girl's companion, just like that. But orders were orders.

The heavy gray clouds that seemed to mix with the mist and the sea could no longer be seen, the night was immense like the desire to die, however cowardice did not reach life enough to throw oneself into the icy and tempestuous waters of the sea. northern. She recreated it again and again, tilting and letting herself be carried away by the impulse, but she was terrified of drowning, of giving in to the waters entering her, taking out all the air that tied her to life.

Lost in her indecision of whether to live or die, the hours passed and her stomach got rid of all its fluids, vomiting along with others on the

journey, only some Vikings seemed not to feel anything, not even the blows of the waves that beat them mercilessly. .

Björk looked into the darkness, secretly seeking to see the god she admired the most and to whom she always turned when fear made her feel.

He had never felt panic, only a little anguish in the face of uncertainty, which generated something similar to fear, because his temperance was like the iron that he liked to dominate when he was far from what he loved most, the sea.

Njord was the peaceful deity whom he asked to calm the wind and waves at that moment to successfully reach the peninsula without further losses; He had blessed him in the last negotiations, the seagulls that saw him off on the Anglo-Saxon coast seemed to him a good omen. Out of respect for the god she idolized, Björk had a secret habit of keeping her feet as clean as possible. It was known that the god's second wife was the deity Skaoi who, seeking revenge in Asgard, was repaid by the gods by allowing her to choose among the single gods with the condition that she could only see the feet of the candidates, she thought when she saw such feet. beautiful and clean that belonged to Balder, the most beautiful and well-known among the gods, but, on the other hand, they were those of Njord who was chief of the Vanes before becoming an Aesir god. Unlike Aeger who was the god of the wild, turbulent sea, where you cannot fish or nav-

igate, the great ocean being his world; Njord, on the other hand, was the calm and beneficent sea that helped in the enterprises of men.

Björk liked to remember the stories of those gods who, together with Mimer, another maritime god, were owners of the world of the seas that she longed to conquer. He had learned some verses attributed to Njord that began like this:

"I'm tired of the mountains
I haven't been there long
Nine nights only,
The howling of the wolves
It sounded bad, I think.
Compared to the song of swans."

Both young men were lost in their thoughts on the bow of the ship, one next to the other, one in the glory of his adventures and the other unhappy in his misfortune, but equally the two did not consider the existence so close to the other.

The destinies of both were two lines that would cross at a point in the distance, without knowing that that destiny would have neither time nor place, crossing eternity, repeating itself in other unknown worlds, healing wounds that the present would mark for a thousand years.

Wynn had been baptized in the Christian rite, but her pagan origins influenced her worldview, so she still did not know how they agreed

with Björk and her pagan gods. Although the polytheistic Anglo-Saxons had separated the Viking gods, so similar to humans, by gods familiar with them they were less Without so much ostentation of power, they related to nature, a world full of elves and gods like Woden, Punor, Tiw and Frig. They shared similar origins yet the order offered by Christianity gave Wynn a peaceful place to put the chaos of his emotions. So both worlds prevailed in an incredibly peaceful way.



The dawn woke them both up in unison, coincidentally their gazes met with intense distrust and contempt, Björk did not know what bothered her most about the presence of this little girl and she was very clear about the reasons why she despised him. and I feared him.

-Are you Christian? He asked him imperatively. The Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon languages intermingled, making themselves understood as best they could, the same thing happened to her, they had to take a few seconds to understand the words, so the sentences they pronounced were brief and concise.

-Yes, but I do not forget my ancestors, we share gods

-You forgot, you decided for only one god

-Do you hate Christians?

-No, we have many gods, one more doesn't bother me.

-I have heard the bard Taliesin singing the poems of Ulster, where kings and heroes are helped by the gods. Those gods were brothers of yours, who love passions and war, mine love trees and the magic of stones, nature is respected.

-Odin gives us nature to serve us, not to worship it. I don't understand, make up your mind, are you a Christian or not?

-I am a Christian, but the world is more about how we assimilate it, there are more truths that we do not know. What fate awaits me in your lands?

-Only the gods know if the Norna Verdandi will visit you or if you have offended Skuld, the goddesses of destiny, but perhaps you should ask your God or your ancient Wurd. They say that she "snatches the joys of life from the earls and the weary mind of man

cannot resist her because her decrees change the whole world under the heavens."

By reciting it he showed him that he knew his oldest beliefs and had also learned something besides the ax and the sword. Something inside sought the girl's admiration and became irritated with himself without stopping to think much about it. Since she was a child, Wynn was always enthusiastic about her father's debates and the scholars. When she grew up she already had gymnastics and a taste for the world of ideas, so she forgot about the pain in her muscles and the cold, feeling encouraged by the talk.

-You have Odin, Ve and Vili; I have Woden, Thunor and Tiw and as a Christian a Deus et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. They are very similar, if your big head could understand that.

The Viking's icy gaze made him realize that for a moment he had forgotten his place on the ship, he feared the worst. He approached in two strides and, taking her by the neck with huge hands like pliers, he brought her face closer, making her feel the icy breath of every word.

- As a woman or slave understand that you are less valuable than a sheep. Hopefully you'll be good for a beer night. You don't own your life, you belong to me.

It was not necessary to explain to him that his wit had been a lack of respect, he let her go when she, with her chin up and her eyes down,

remained silent without responding to the threat, he walked away without speaking to her again or looking at her in what was left. of the trip. That relieved her, like when her father got angry with her, punishing her with indifference, it was like recovering a little of herself in that solitude, without the pressure of having to establish a relationship or dialogue with him, the same thing happened to her now, Being invisible seemed libertarian to her, no one took her into account, in return no one bothered her or hurt her in any way.

He remembered "The Song of the Sea" to himself:

"When the wind rises from the south across
the land of the bright-shielded Saxons,
the wave hits the island of Scit, rises to the top
Caladnet,
And lashes the gray-green mouth of the Shannon"

The women had not drunk water or eaten since they set sail, to avoid more death the sailors distributed a pair of wellies and smelly raw fish. The longships, with their monstrous dragon figureheads on their prows, had been favored by the winds without the need for sails, guided by the speed of the ships due to the lack of stars; They managed to reach a speed of fourteen knots, they had little draft to be able to navigate the rivers if necessary; The snekkar of almost thirty meters in length and forty oars that they carried to transport overland on the raids had also managed it without losing any, they

weathered the stormy night thanks to their construction with oak wood and the hulls lashed with overlapping boards. with iron rivets, they were open boats that were not very habitable. Now with the sun rising, they could be sure of the shadows it cast despite the cloudy day. The coast was close to being seen, so the figurehead had to be dismantled to prevent the protective spirits of the land from being threatened.

Björk was leading the fleet, already in sight of the coast, she imagined seeing the families and horses that would be waiting for them, the mood was generally happy, except for the slaves, fearful of the future that awaited them.

Scania, was then a region that included Blekinge and Halland, located in the Scandinavian peninsula and formed the eastern part of the Danish kingdom, as in the rest of Scandinavia, it was made up of farmers and ranchers, the distribution of wealth was very unequal, so like the lands. The plains were divided into large agricultural holdings, much larger than the small properties grouped in villages. The tribes, each led by chiefs, depended on their size and wealth to hold power. Scania had five main tribes, each with their own Thanes (leaders) and their own group of warriors, all under the command of the King of Scania. Björk belonged to one of them.

The rocky coasts and white cliffs where the sea met the highest parts of the sloping landscape could already be seen, emerging as impos-

ing ice fortresses, it seemed that they reached Asgar where the gods dwelt, the eyes of those never tired. who loved their land to see the majesty it offered them. In the distance you could see the peaks of the volcanoes that had slept centuries ago, like penitent observers of their departures and arrivals, silently witnessing eras of change and times of peace, of intermittent fights between tribes and the succession of leaders who They murdered each other for power.

Inside Scania had the secrets of a preglacial era with erosions and deposits caused by Quaternary glaciers, plains fertile in cereals, fruits and various crops, its narrow lakes with complex shapes and no apparent direction, some small ones attracted the young sea eagles. With valleys and forests full of pines, oaks, alders and firs, but the most beautiful were the beech trees. And on each farm there were fruits such as apples, cherries, raspberries and blackberries among others, they were everyone's delight. All that land was loved by Björk, but he loved even more the history of his ancestors, his brothers and parents, their blood was the most valuable thing to him despite the internal struggles and brotherly disappointments.

Sighting land awakened the happy spirits of the warriors, they longed to get there to see their family or a woman, relax with a beer, and heal their wounds.

While the prisoners had mixed feelings, fear was mixed with the need to touch the ground and loosen their bodies, but eating and

washing were dreams sustained by a slight hope of those who do not know if they will live to tomorrow.

The Viking fleet took a few hours given the number of them to disembark, the heavy armor of thick padded leather and the weapons, provisions and loot had to be lowered and taken to safety, arranging the prisoners, keeping an eye on them so that they did not become excited. to escape and take the ships to the shipyards to repair the damage to the boats.

Björk changed her dirty clothes and, almost naked, washed some parts; He put on a blue tunic and clean ankle-length breeches, he put on the folded and sewn leather shoes again but changing the leggings with garters. He put on his belt with a metal plate engraved with a knot that symbolized eternity, the cycle of infinite reincarnations continued, cinching it to his tunic and hanging his pen and knife from his belt. Ulf, his most faithful and furious berserker, as they called the most fearsome warriors, brought him his mantle of thick embroidered sackcloth without a hood, so he could wear the leather helmet and strips of skin. He took his ax and sword called ulfberht with a straight double blade. blade that he had forged himself, decorated with runes and sacred symbols.

His fearsome appearance disappeared, giving way to a manly and beautiful man, with broad shoulders and noticeable muscles, reveal-

ing his status adorned with clean and decorated clothes and without the rictus of the battle he had experienced.

He passed by Wynn and she did not recognize him immediately. Upon realizing that it was Björk, she took note that she was a notable character in imprint and social position among her people. He was clear that this did not mean that the places of power were blessed by the gods, who knew the destiny woven into his shoulders? At what point did these Vikings stop being the merchants they used to be and become these murderous and devouring pagans? Her destiny, he was certain, was a heavy fabric that time would tear when the time came.



Osric rode from his uncle's castle, through wide areas of swamps and marshes with lagoons. Beaten and badly injured, he left in despair without having healed even though he knew that he had to go through areas of sand, silt and swamps with little vegetation, crossing underwater at high tide that could only be seen when it went

down and at that time he reached up to his jaw. of his horse. He had a moment to rest in the freshwater marshes called fens, with abundant vegetation around them and peat bogs everywhere, wondering what else could have happened in his absence. He thought about his young sister, about the fullness of his youth violently torn from his home, his peaceful and civilized life at the hands of those barbarians. He blamed himself for not having been able to do more and he did not know what he could do when he arrived, perhaps join the group of warrior monks, look for them and leave with them, seek revenge, rescue his sister in those distant lands where they only knew about greed. Despair and helplessness made him realize for the first time that humanity was no stranger to him, Wynn, his blood, that girl he always admired for her candor, her irreverent character and her idealistic ideas, -poor thing- he lamented, she never spoke. with her from the dark side of men, from the brutality, the greed, the evil that she had seen throughout her years, she preferred to keep her away from the misery of life with her silence. How innocent he himself was, he deprived her of conceiving reality itself. They never talked about politics, about barbarians, about their father. She rarely complained about paternal treatment, but the frustration she experienced with a father who loved himself and his possessions was evident. He knew another side, even more human and contemptible, that of man and his arrogance, lacking empathy, as well as the ab-

sence of remorse or guilt. He manipulated, exploited and violated the rights of others without any remorse, whether man, woman or child. But Osric knew his father's weak point, the fear that he would remove the veil and everyone would know his way of scheming, and since he felt a true contempt for everyone, if he was exposed that would make him lose control and he would lose his ability to manipulate. He sank into depression, feeling persecuted and watched, spending days locked in his rooms afraid to come out because of rumors.

Over the years Osric began to despise him, sharing political meetings where Hunn his father had no scruples about making deals or alliances, where he did not mind sending him at the head of his army, again and again in the wars with Mercia or Wessex, demanding even his life if he defended his interests with it. Hunn never stood in front of his men, he cowardly harangued from his pedestal, hiding his uselessness as a warrior and his lack of courage. But he cynically hurt himself by making a spectacle of it, by sending his dearest son around. "Hypocrite," Osric said to himself, remembering how his father, between sobs without tears and scandalous gestures, embraced his mother's grave. And days later he married Isabel, from lover to mistress, and as if it were a divine punishment, he never gave her a child. That did not make Osric feel happy, on the contrary, over the years, seeing the anguish. aunt of that woman and how her mind

was worn out by abortion after abortion, suffering the contempt of her husband for not giving her a child and seeing lover after lover passing by, increasingly younger and prettier, night after night in vain, was born in him, the fear of the Christian God in which he was baptized, faith became flesh in the fear of punishment for bad habits. Of his father's lovers none could give him a son.

It was evident that the subject was him, possibly some venereal disease that left him infertile, but to protect his pride, he adopted two strangers' bastards, spreading the rumor that they were his. To Osric, his detestable father and profligate women did not deserve the blessing of a noble child.

He fell asleep with his head boiling with fever, sweating and shivering from the cold in the swamps near some marshes.

At a distance from where he was, some farmers were returning in their empty cart after selling the little of their harvest that they had left after the massacre they had suffered at the hands of the Vikings. They saw a horse with a saddle. It was strange that when the sun was setting there was no bonfire and the rider could not be seen. In times of need they saw no harm in getting a horse. They stopped, got off the cart and approached. Among the foliage they saw a man. Delirious and with blood-stained bandages on his body, the saddle and boots he was wearing showed that he was a knight, as they approached they discovered his face, it was young Osric.

Hunn looked at the torn upholstery, feeling angry at the loss of such a valuable gift that he had received from those Spaniards who had passed through his lands. How much waste of objects and merchandise as well as crops that will cause hunger to befall the people of his town, he will surely have to deal with brutality in the face of the furious demands of the plebs. And his daughter is no longer able to make a profitable alliance, poor unhappy girl, but it was not his fault, he convinced himself, but he feared the gossip, the intrigues that would surround him, claiming that he was a weak old man who simply gave up his own daughter to save his own neck. But what could he do? Thought. Everything was lost, at the end of the day he was not the maker of destinies, if his daughter was taken by the barbarians God would have a plan for it, probably death in one way or another would happen to her at least in this way vile his daughter gave her life for her people. He calmed his conscience in case it revealed itself in anguishing guilt, unnecessary by the way, he felt that he had done the best and in the best possible way. At least he saved Osric, who was ultimately his successor, who was better; He was skilled and skilled with weapons, serious and with a temper of steel, he showed his father respect and a cold but loyal love, although sometimes he doubted, when he surprised him with an icy look at some point while passing by. But no, he was his son, he must surely love him. I had never found him a betrayal or even opposed him. His son was the

only one who served him now and he depended on his absolute loyalty. He saw him despair when the Viking blurted out that he would take his sister, but he did not contradict him when he negotiated with the barbarian, that was enough for him to feel that he agreed with his decisions.

In reality, Hunn loved himself so much that he did not realize the contempt around him, he assumed it was respect and submission to his power, he did not imagine how frustrated his children felt, and the hatred hidden from those close to him. There was no guilt in him, he was convinced of what he should do and he did not allow himself to become unnecessarily sensitive because that would only make him stop having a cool head to cope with the disaster that had devastated his peace. The news had already reached him that Osric was returning and that his brother, damn him, was better off than him negotiating with the Vikings, -wow, my dear brother is as clever as always. The resentment grew within him again, imagining the intelligent and sagacious brother, as skilled a warrior as he was a politician; He could never overcome the differences with his brothers, his father always showed him that they were more valuable than him, always afraid, locked in his rooms, reading and learning from every monk or scholar who appeared there.

Without character, but with envy as his motivation, he managed to demand the lands he had today, as if it were a political war, he poi-

soned his relationships with his brothers, reviling them and accusing them of any childhood memory that came to him. mind, his brothers never schemed to disinherit him, much less, they let him distill his poison and giving him what they had never thought to take from him, they distanced themselves from him, with the wisdom of the hatred that he harbored for them. He was exposed in his cynicism and greed without trying to disguise it even to his elderly mother, she was the only one who understood his perfidious nature and in vain were his attempts in so many years to direct his soul to compassion and tolerance, he only managed to isolate her. of everything and everyone without voice or presence, becoming almost a ghost in the castle until his death when his children were still small.

Now Hunn was only afraid to leave his room, he was haunted by the questions he asked himself and answered with excuses and justifications with which only he could be content; No one dared to oppose him, despite this, everyone had their hope in Osric, they hoped that he would overthrow him once and for all and this great loss and the events were the crossroads that kept them expectant.

They told him that some farmers had found Osric exhausted on the way there and brought him along with Beonna's horse, he had a letter with him from his uncle. His hand shook as he took the letter in his hands, he did not ask about his son, it was not important, he had already arrived alive, more than enough for him, given the context in

which they found themselves. He was concerned about the content of this letter.

“Dear Brother Hunn, may God grant that you are in good health and that the misdeeds we have suffered because of these barbarians have not been so serious. I have reached a deal with them that I hope will give us a respite to recover. Osric has been a great help in realizing everything that happened, I am very sorry that my niece Wynn has been kidnapped by this Viking Björk, if you agree, let's call all the kingdoms to evaluate the situation and confront the invaders and put everything the determination to recover our beloved girl. I await your words as well as your visit and that of our brother to whom I have sent a letter similar to the one you have in your hands, in order to embrace each other as in the past to fight for all our peoples.”

-Damned!!! Who does he think he is to become everyone's spokesperson, talking about his children as if they were his own, pretending to be the leader of the defense, when not one acre of his has been burned and his women outraged, let them take him as many demons as they want. Put politics up your ass!!!

Hatred consumed him and he cursed because the Vikings had not devastated the lands of his brothers. If they thought he would make an alliance with them, he would wait for the right moment to return the favor of so much fraternal mistreatment and humiliation. He

would hand them over to the barbarians as soon as they were done. set foot on its coasts, I would feed them and give them shelter so that with all their enemy forces they could ruin these unfortunates who claim to be their brothers. Nothing mattered to him more than revenge for his wounded pride, there was no one to blame but the others, he was only a victim. He was the victimizer of himself, but he would never know it. The response to his brother was vague, postponing any action, entangling the words in a political game. Her brother felt great disappointment when he saw that even for his daughter Hunn was still a coward.



Osric appeared in front of his father after days of convalescence, his wounds had healed although inside they were bleeding more than ever. Something had changed in him in those days, perhaps his vision of the world. He knew the cruelty and killing that any man was capable of, but the level of hypocrisy and cynicism had been surpassed by his father. He turned to his faith to find relief, and an increasingly intense religious fanaticism came over him. He recognized only one father and it was the heavenly one, the one who had

touched him on earth, was nothing more than a sinner who did not deserve the heaven promised by the sacred scriptures. There was no tie that united him anymore, he only belonged to God. He was determined to go to Normandy, join the Franks and give his life to defeat the heretics; he did not want to feel lukewarm when reality had knocked on his door. The influence of the Benedictine monks devoted to Saint Augustine They would be proud to see the roots of the teachings given to Osric in his childhood grow so fanatically. Surely his father would object, it would be a long confrontation with his father, however, it was possible that it would only be a couple of words, exile and a slamming door, he was about to see it. He entered the living room and sat at the table, greeting his father with an obligatory hug.

-Father, I finally arrived, a few days ago.

-Osric!! Son, how are you? Tell me the details. Hunn threw himself on his son in a big hug, he was honestly happy to see him although he had not bothered in all these days that his son had been convalescing, his urgencies varied with his moods.

-Tell me, tell me everything, I want to hear it from you this time, how did my brother treat you? What did you agree with the Viking?

-My uncle was very noble, he truly feels affection for me.

He said it with the full intention of secretly reproaching him for his lack of paternal love. Hunn noticed the reproach, but showed no at-

tention to it, he distanced himself from Osric and the coldness returned to him. He understood the message and knew that he had lost his son's loyalty, his best bishop had fallen into the intrigues of one of his brothers.

-Well, tell me what happened, what has my dear brother decided?

-It is a good arrangement with the Viking that would give him the opportunity to descend this land, so they are going to bring a contingent of people to work on it.

-Your uncle, the unfortunate one, knew the dirt when they cut me down, isn't that treason?

-Depending on how you see it, it seems to me that it is intelligence

-To me, on the other hand, it seems to me that this Viking used me to be able to negotiate with my brother.

-They can both be clever then

-You're irritating me, it's like you don't care. Do you see something positive that I don't see?

-No, I only admit the facts, just as you admitted that you had to hand my sister over to those barbarians.

He could not contain the resentment that was burning in his gut; he saw his father as the only one to blame for his entire life and for all the misfortunes that had occurred with the Viking ships. He just wanted to escape, deep inside he wanted to see his father dead, it made his stomach turn to see him so painless without even a tear for

his sister or for the deaths that the Vikings had left. He was only concerned about intrigues and disputes with his brothers.

- I know that you have already read the letter that my uncle sent you, I have discussed it with him, what do you think?

-Which is stupid. I'm not going to face the barbarians when they've shaved my nails off, it's very easy for your uncle, he knows he negotiated so he wouldn't end up like us.

-The Viking was the one who imposed the conditions, he already had the goods and the gold, he sought to negotiate a treaty with him. I had it planned obviously. It wasn't your brother's trick.

-I don't know and you are influenced by emotions and family affections, you don't see between the lines, you don't know my brothers like I do.

-It's true, it's enough for me to know you. Hunn understood the sarcasm as praise, but it was far from Osric's intention, but as his face was impassive, his father failed to see the true intention.

-Calm down son, let's let the storm pass.

-But Wynn is in the hands of those barbarians! Are you not thinking of doing anything?

-Can't!!! Fate is cast, God willing they marry her to that Björk so she will survive, but at this point there is nothing left but to pray for her soul, deep down I hope that she is already dead, so she will not continue suffering what she has until now surely he has lived.

-I have made a decision father.-Más que una decisión necesitaría unas cuantas ideas para ver cómo continuamos. Yo no pienso continuar nada, pienso seguir mi camino tú tienes tus políticas tu forma de concebir la realidad y no es la mía

-What are you talking about?

- I'm talking about how I'm going to appear before the Carolingian house of Wessex, I will place myself at their service.

-To Wessex? That?

-It seems that you forgot that we have a god and that we have to give an account when the time comes, that there is a heaven and a hell and that they dispute for our souls

-Don't give me that! God seems to have forgotten us or at least does not care about me, he has no pity for me, my suffering, my sorrows.

-And you feel sorry for someone? Did you cry, did you suffer, did you feel sorry for Wynn?

-Are you reproaching me?

-I ask you or is the answer so difficult?

-It seems that you have not yet recovered from your injuries. Let's talk another time.

-It's never a good time to contradict you, right? It's never a good time to ask uncomfortable questions.

-Enough Osric, I prefer to end this stupid conversation here

-As you prefer.

Osric turned around, he felt a pain in his chest, he didn't know what it was, but there was also a little relief. Today someone else had also died, his father was buried deep in his heart and he would only dedicate his life to the only father who never failed him, God himself. He marched to Wessex without further ado, the monasteries and abbeys were the core of Europe's agrarian economy, the Scandinavian invasions destroyed monastic properties on a large scale and although their wealth came more from tithes and taxes were being drastically reduced. Bishops and abbes co-ruled alongside the kings and Osric wanted to be part of the defense and protection of the faith and wealth of his lands from the Scandinavian invaders who generated panic and terror.

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CHAPTER 2

“As a guest you must be cautious when arriving at the banquet, shut up and listen; attentive ears, eyes alert: this is how you protect yourself wise man.”

Anonymous

Σ

They got off the boat, Björk walked ahead of the group waiting for her; They were men and women his father trusted, including three of his older brothers Bjarne, Sven and Ingolf. The only one who looked like him was Leif the youngest, who Björk surely thought when counting his siblings, must have been sleeping after sex and drunkenness; He shared a mother with him, in addition to the color of her hair, with a small difference, the youngest's was like silver, a metallic gray and

similar in build to his brother, but shorter, sanguine, with intense emotions, choleric. at the slightest offense and seducer without mercy with women, he already had to his credit, despite his youth, two children with a difficult young woman, a foreigner with a bad character and unfaithful with several lovers that she did not hide, just as her husband did not lose opportunity to test every woman that crossed his path or hunted its prey like a wolf. Strange couple thought Björk Björk loved this brother, she protected and defended him in every fight that Leif often provoked with his quarrelsome nature.

Both were affectionate with their mother, who had helped them since childhood, trying to keep them away from their older brothers, always fighting for the father's sympathy and attentive to earning his appreciation to take his place one day when the gods decided. But it was not enough to be children, they had to demonstrate to the clan their worth and leadership abilities in battle and in the organization of life in general. The three older brothers did not care about the two brothers of their father's last wife, because they did not see in them the greed for the power they were fighting for; one wanted to live in the sea and the other among the skirts of women.

They greeted each other affectionately with shouts and fist bumps, eager to tell and listen to the anecdotes of the raid. While the Anglo-Saxon women they had brought were loaded onto carts to be taken to the settlement, Wynn was separated from the group and dragged

into the crowd around the new arrivals. The men looked at her as if they were looking at a sheep in size, shape and color, even a woman with a shield and spear stepped away from the group to open her mouth and look at her teeth.

She felt humiliated, however she assumed this was just the beginning.

They brought the horses and each of the group the escort, the brothers and Björk mounted, Wynn, tired and sore from the bad journey, climbed onto one too, between laughter and songs they marched away from the coast with everything they had to carry, it would take a while. a full day to arrive at the skali, a type of large granary designated for meetings where a banquet was waiting for them.

Within an hour, the chanting stopped and the walking became tiring, Wynn nodded, the lack of food and water was beginning to be felt. Björk noticed that the young woman was about to fall from the horse and stood next to her. He himself did not know if it was concern for fear of her getting hurt and being able to support her in the event of a fall or to help her as she would have done with any other person. slave. He realized that first thing if he had been a slave, he wouldn't even be on a horse.

Jette, the woman who had counted Wynn's teeth on the pier, also approached a short distance; warned by the approach of Björk, whom she secretly loved, after having shared a bed with him a couple of

times, in the hope that he would make her his wife, an intention that he never had and filled her with frustration. So the arrival of the Anglo-Saxon woman he sensed was not good for his desires.

-Wake up, if you break your head when you fall, I will leave you under a rock to be eaten by worms. Björk told him, looking at the horizon and without turning to look at Wynn.

-It's not a bad idea, I thought about jumping into the sea and being food for the fish, but I fell asleep, so worms or fish don't matter to me.

-Our women here are strong, get used to living.

-Strong, beautiful and warriors, I am not like your women. I'm from Eastangia

-I will teach you to fight, weakness is not something you can enjoy in these lands.

-You will regret it, you will be the first one to kill.

And as he said it, he turned around surprised by the threat and found her eyes, lit with hatred and tears, feeling confused, he couldn't find the words nor did his hand release the reins to slap her. The hooves of a horse were heard and the cold metal of the knife with a beautiful filigree on its handle, an object brought from Rhineland of great value to its owner, Jette, was inches from her neck.

-How do you talk to my lord like that, you fucking Anglo-Saxon trash?

Wynn, coldly and without fear on his face, answered:

-Do me a favor, cut my neck and treat yourself.

And taking the knife with the palm of her hand, the edge entered her flesh and bathed her fingers in the knife with blood, dripping onto her skirt as if they were tears.

All the horses were with their riders stopped and silent, everything and nothing could happen without a foreshadowing of the end.

-Enough! Björk shouted in a hoarse and furious voice.

Jette contained his anger and slowly, enjoying his contempt for the Anglo-Saxon woman, he withdrew the knife while Wynn held on without releasing the blade; He felt how it cut his flesh and the hot blood ran down his wrist. With tears falling from his eyes, his gaze was one of rage and hatred, he held it fixed on the horizon without looking at any of the barbarians. The Viking warned that this little girl would give him more than one occasion to hate her, she had courage and courage even in her unfavorable situation, when the goddess Hel walked next to her waiting for her moment.

He was as surprised as the rest of the young woman's suicidal attitude, she was crazy or perhaps she was in the arms of that ghostly Celtic goddess called Morrigan, he couldn't believe seeing her small and exhausted that she had the courage facing physical pain, injuring himself or even throwing himself to die at Jette's hands. She must have gone crazy with so much shame at seeing herself sold by such an unhappy father.

-Wrap your hand and if you can, your tongue too.

He threw him a piece of cloth that he used to have to wrap his wounds, it was soaked in medicinal herbal water. But she took it and kept it, so as not to offend him even more, because her first intention would have been to throw it back in his face with fury, she tore a piece of cloth from her outfit and wrapped it around his hand in a clearly proud attitude and avoiding showing the burning of the wound.

Björk did not say anything else after ordering the intense women to calm down and for a long time everyone continued in silence. Almost a day after arriving, at a slow pace, he had more than enough time to study it. She was soft and delicate in her ways, but firm with the reins and the saddle, she seemed absent, always looking at the plain and the green of the birch forests through which they crossed, she looked sweetly at each animal they came across, denoting compassion for them; Every now and then he sighed like someone who leaves bundles along the road, lightening the weight of his shoulders. The sadness was evident and resignation transfigured his face, making it more serene. As if he knew that life was nothing more than a set of battles in which one lost many times and won many times. I had seen other women in her situation, some fell into fits of madness and crying, tried to escape or took their own lives, others sought to seduce and win over their captor to survive, but this woman was dif-

ferent, she plunged into her destiny no matter what. Outside, he fought with his proud spirit for his dignity not for his life, it was notorious that he preferred to die despite humiliations or outrages but with his independent and rebellious character. Strange females, the Anglo-Saxons, or just this one was peculiar.

His attention was drawn to his rebellious, wavy hair framed by his very lively eyes. At times his hair was ash gray in the open sea, at other times light brown when the sun bathed it and at night the moon wrapped it in gray. bluish, strange in behavior, he wondered if there was a Celtic deity disguised in this little girl. Always faced with a lack of certainty, man seeks divine answers seeking peace.

Wynn felt a little calm grow in her cracked soul, as she rode and felt the freedom of the open field, it was true that hunger and thirst were beginning to press on her, but she was physically and emotionally insensitive to hope and joy, not not because of being cautious or rational, but because of being involved in discouragement and disappointment. She did not expect anything from the future, still amazed by the events, disgusted and confused, she could not grasp life again.

From time to time during each break of the contingent to eat and rest, I observed the Vikings, the women were strong and these in particular were equal to the men, they laughed, fornicated freely and bet on games just like them. They were of greater build and height

than her. The young leader Björk behaved like an equal, laughter, blows, beer and women, all equally barbaric, unrestrained, releasing all the tension of the trip and the work of loading and unloading people and merchandise, they drank non-stop. Almost at sunrise, they were all drunk and asleep, only the few who had remained guarding the slaves had been moderate, at least they had their eyes half open.



Wynn was allowed to be at the party, supervised, but in greater privilege than her compatriots, sitting at one of the tables enduring the vomiting and the bizarreness of any gathering. She had fallen asleep on the table and a thunderous blow from a closed fist startled her, it was Björk grim and with her cold look she said: - Get ready, we have to arrive two moons ago (two months) since we have been far from our homes. families.

They arrived at the village where the reception was similar to the previous one, but this time with intense rain that day bathing them all, Einar was waiting for his son, he was an old warrior, loyal and honorable with his people but ruthless with foreigners. He had managed to sustain his clan at the cost of blood and sword, his greatest pride being all his scars and the loot from his excursions. He gloated over each of his old wounds to recount his exploits, enriching them at

every opportunity with details invented in his narcissism. Among his assets were also men and women as slaves, whom he assimilated by marrying one of them on occasion, if there was merit for that.

He was eager to know the news of the confrontation in Britain, he had planned an alliance with one of the Suion clans to raid alongside the Rus in Tsargrad.

-Björk, blessed by the gods! I have been told of the favorable fortune you bring us.

-It wasn't me alone, my men have been fierce and worthy of being part of your clan.

-Come let's celebrate, everything is ready. The skali, a large meeting hall, was full of spirited Vikings, and Einar took the opportunity to discuss his next objectives.

-Björk, I have decided that we will form an alliance with the Tors-ten clan that will give us access to the city of Hedeby. In exchange, we will support them with our men for their raids and they will provide us with sustenance and reinforcements for Britain. You will marry a of his daughters the one called Hanne. You will take the Anglo-Saxon woman you brought as your concubine and you will learn from her her speech and culture and all the information you can get from her about her land. I don't know how much I can inform you, but it will help you to know her and experience dealing with her.

-She is very young father, she is barely more than fifteen winters old, I don't see her being that useful.

-It will be a valuable experience although it may not seem like it, knowing your enemies is winning half the battle. If it is young, much better, you can shape it and taste it as you wish. The weakness of women, whatever it may be, is their greatest weapon, be careful. A man's heart when hot can burn him. And as for Hanne, do you agree?

-Yes, I haven't seen her, but I don't care, it's a good alliance, I hope she gives birth to children or eventually I'll ask for a divorce.

- Then it's done. Bring me the Breton woman, she wants to see with my own eyes and hear with these ears what you have brought.

-Father, he is very young and I understand that we must respect our rites, but in this case, could we make an exception?

-What are you taking about??

-Could you not take it tonight?-¿La quieres virgen para ti? That's new!! What has softened your heart? I thought you had it made of stone.

-He's very young, his father didn't shed a tear when he gave it to me, in fact the damn thing even haggled over it. It's not good to push a woman so much, they are more vindictive than us in some cases, I don't want to wake up without my phallus one morning.

-It's okay, in fact I'm tired and I've never liked Anglo-Saxon women, they feel like their God is looking at them from some cloud in the sky

hahaha, I like the fierceness of ours. But this will be a secret that is clear to you, some of my sons' wives have been a delicacy.

- While talking about strong women, where is my mother?

- As always, angry and locked in her rooms. She hasn't spoken to me for days, I guess she's jealous again, she hasn't gotten used to a concubine, she doesn't accept her old age and that she's been dry for a long time to have children. My mother was the same, don't worry, eat and sleep healthy if that worries you. A woman's thing. He spends his time consulting the poor godar who knows what.

The godar was, like the Christian priest, the one who guided the faith of the Nordics and to whom Margit, Björk and Leif's mother, turned for comfort.

-Here comes Leif!! In good time.

With large strides, Leif, happy as was his character, rushed onto the table and, taking his brother by the neck, hugged him and patted him affectionately.

-How is my angry brother?

-Waiting for you to take your ass off the sheets

-Oh brother, you should enjoy life a little.

-From women you mean coming from you. The next excursion you will come with me, it is time for you to demonstrate your manhood with the sword and not so much with that of your crotch

They laughed heartily and toasted each other with mead and beer.

Leif admired his brother and considered him a role model, which is why he allowed himself to be irresponsibly fun and provocative, which resulted in an almost irresistible seduction for women. But in reality the only woman he loved and considered, for whom he had a soft spot, was his mother. The rest were sex and fun partners and some mothers of their children. He was loving with them and had a predilection for some, the happy and extroverted ones defined him, identifying with the freedom of childhood. He was given to art and sensuality and he demonstrated it in his blacksmith creations that were even better than those of his brother Björk. But this one doubled it in strength and brutality in battle. Thus they competed between blacksmithing and fighting in a friendly manner.

-And where is the Anglo-Saxon or Breton or whatever shit you brought??

-I already sent for her, father wants to meet her now.

-AND??

-And?

- Rough! How about the woman, that's what she asked you. Is she pretty?

-She's almost a girl, but she was the daughter of one of the kings there, or count, well, I'm already lost with so many titles they give themselves. She's pretty, it's not a big deal, but she hasn't blossomed as a woman yet. There he comes.

-Man! It has already bloomed! Yes, it's true, she's small, but tall. She seems scared and docile.

-Mmm, don't let the little witch fool you, I don't trust her to be docile, but she's stubborn worse than a goat, she has character, that's for sure.

-You will have to entertain yourself, I want to see who tames who, hahaha.

Wynn took a seat at Einar's table, she looked astonished at the delicacies on the table, the beer was strong, but tasty, she drank it and ate what they offered her, meat, vegetables and other things that she had forgotten existed all those days, she observed As always around her as if she were in a dream or nightmare, they had cleaned her and dressed her in local clothing, a very long linen shirt and a kind of pants, the shirt closed above each breast with a wooden clasp, some stockings. wool and a one-piece folded and sewn leather shoe that felt very comfortable, one of the women had noticed the blue color of his feet and hands so she had put a triangular scarf over his shoulders, he felt like a little better than recovering his civilized humanity. They warned him that he could wear his long hair down, but after marrying Björk he had to put it up in a bun. So he should meet his father-in-law, and looking at the five men at the table that next to Björk, his father and younger brother were the three older brothers Bjarne stocky and with more scars than he had ever seen on

a man, Sven extremely thin and with an averted look and Ingolf was exaggeratedly overweight as well as his extroverted humor, the most similar to his father, she assumed that the oldest was the king or jarl as they called him and he assumed the word, fixing his gaze on her.

- I understand that you are Hunn's daughter, I am sure you are not happy, but you will soon get used to it, we are not as barbarians as they suppose. Einar told him.

Surely sir, that's what you say. Wynn replied.

-At least you are polite, you will help Björk a lot. I hope that you collaborate with our community and learn to be one of our women. We will be patient with you in return you will give us your loyalty.

-I understand that you will know how to win her over, my lord -Once again his proud character prevailed.

-HAHAHA, this little girl is intrepid; Björk, I predict that you will have a lot of fun- Addressing her son, who raised one of his eyebrows showing that he was far from thinking that.

-Young lady, you will be my son's concubine and this union will be celebrated these days, that of marriage by capture, you have lineage and your father is a nobody so we will make an exception because my son will marry Hanne who has been promised to him and with whom he should celebrate the marriage before you, but I don't think he will be bothered because he won't get to the planting until the sowing and maybe a little longer, because some arrangements still

have to be finalized. And understand clearly what I tell you now and forever: no child of your womb will have the right to inherit anything, unless Björk recognizes it in due time according to our customs, it will be he who will give it his name and join our family. Your marriage will be valid but with this reservation.

Wynn swallowed and was grateful to be sitting, her whole body trembling; He nodded and took a drink of beer.

Einar observed the wrapped hand that Wynn had when he took a piece of meat after drinking, his intense and changing character was typical of him, he went from happy and festive to angry, with a thunderous voice he asked:

-How did you get that wound? Who dared to hurt you knowing that you were destined for my son? Does anyone want you to make them sick with any of the pests of your land?

-It was Jette Sr., an argument between women, it was nothing. Björk came out.

Jette was rushing to defend himself when Wynn beat him to it.

-I did it to myself, I tried to take a sword and I cut myself, Jette just wanted to take it from me.

-You British women are useless with weapons, be careful. Einar said, calming his momentum at Wynn's excuse.

-Well, it's already late, let's try the Anglo-Saxon one if it tastes as sweet as a healthy Viking one. Ha ha ha

He got up from his seat and left, congratulating the men who had left with Björk as he passed.

Wynn, with astonished eyes and a trembling voice, looked at Björk and asked: -What did you mean by that? -Pale and fearful she waited for the answer.

-That the first night you will spend with my father. Thank your Saxon king for the custom.

-So double sacrifice, it was already one to be with you.

Björk smiled, finding the comment funny.

-Have you ever been with a man?

-No-And he didn't say more, but a tear ran down his face and he looked away.

Jette took advantage of Einar's absence to release the choked poison.

-You think you're very smart, but I can speak for myself and tell things as they were.

"You owe me one," Wynn replied.

-No one asked you for a favor.

-Then you would have spoken but you remained silent. Even if you don't want it, you owe me one, just once. I swear.

Saying it threateningly holding his gaze.

-Enough of women's stupidity, said Björk.

Jette stood up, knocking over the bench where she was sitting and hitting the beer mug on the table, she walked away haughty.

-I wish he had stayed with you and been faithful to you- He knew that Jette at the camp had enjoyed sex with several of his likes, including Björk. He only remained silent and gave no more room for conversation, if the unfriendly dialogue could be called that.

Leif watched them with amusement, however, he saw something different in his brother, despite the difference in age and build, these two made a couple, if not perfect, at least strangely united by something he did not know how to specify, love was not surely but singularly similar to each other.

The revelry continued all night, the first to leave was Einar, who sent for Wynn.



Einar had to try it in bed, but at his son's request he would not take it even though he had to sleep in his room, he made room for him on the floor to sleep there. Wynn understood with the passing of the minutes and the old man's snoring that he would not suffer the abusive sex he feared, so he slept or rather fainted from the exhaustion of his own mind, the events he had experienced gave him no respite from his thoughts. thoughts. But she was grateful that her father-in-law had not defiled her.

In the morning Einar got up with difficulty, his weight was extremely excessive and his immense size for his age made him slow in his movements. He looked at her sleepily from top to bottom.

- Go to bed and thank my son. Say that the king is the most virile and surpasses any Anglo-Saxon. Ha ha ha. Later get dressed and go with the rest of the women who earn their bread, you must work like the rest.

She barely slept a few hours when a corpulent, older woman with immense and beautiful blue eyes entered, who scrutinized her with a fierce gaze, telling her that she should go with her to start a day of work, she should learn to spin and weave as a priority, While Wynn got up and dressed, the woman casually asked him:

-How was the king?

-He is very virile, he has left me exhausted.

Wynn did not see the brush coming that hit him square in the face with the cry of "Anglo-Saxon bitch, useless whore, what the hell have they brought you to us, I will kill you." Witch, sorceress..." and all the Danish expletives unknown to Wynn, who tried to flee the room, but the woman was crazy trying to beat her up, she managed to get under the bed and while they were both screaming at each other, the woman grabbed her. one leg dragging her. The door opened and Björk quickly grabbed the older woman by the waist and shoved her out of the room, everyone shouting at everyone, one insulting, the

other demanding that the crazy old woman get off of her, and Björk trying to shout louder. than the women, demanding that they remain silent. He managed to close the door, leaving the deranged woman on the other side, and went to Wynn.

-What have you done to him?

-Nothing!!! I don't know where she came from, she's crazy, she asked me how the king had been last night, and he told me that I should tell anyone if they asked me, that he was very virile, but in reality he didn't even touch me.

Björk rubbed her forehead and, agitated from being so shaken, she could only laugh.

-That old woman you call crazy is my mother.

Wynn froze.

-Oh my God!!! - I couldn't believe it-If I say what I think I get in trouble, if I do what I'm told and said what I should, I get in trouble too!!!! I better cut my tongue out and everyone go to hell from the first ship they see.

Bjorn couldn't take it anymore, he found everything very funny, he started to laugh really hard and Wynn, realizing the same thing, became infected with laughter. They had a moment, a spark of seeing themselves as simple humans, similar without differences.

- Well, we can't tell her the truth or we'll all be exposed, so you'll have to deal with my mother's hatred. Have a knife you will probably

need it. But don't even think about using it with my mother!!!! Just in case he sends someone to kill you. And above all, do not use it against yourself, I repeat it again - But this time in the last sentence his voice was friendly, almost sweet - I forbid you to take the life that belongs to me.

Wynn blushed and looked away, nodding with a wave of her hand. Björk left the room, leaving her alone with her heart pounding, perhaps as a result of the scene she had experienced, and thinking: these Vikings are all crazy. Such brutal sincerity made her miss the intrigues and lies of Eastanglia. At least they were less direct when it came to hatred and revenge. This immense man clearly told her that there was a possibility that she could be dismembered at any moment and that he was the owner of her. At this point she imagined herself as the virgin she was, ascending to the heavens, after an ax blow from her quasi-mother-in-law.



Margit had been a beautiful woman, the daughter of a jarl of the clan decimated by Einar's father. He already had two children when he took her for himself, first as a slave for his wife and then as a concubine. When the first died, she took over. as a wife and all responsibility for the home, food, slaves, provisions and trunks containing jewelry and clothes finely made in Byzantium had passed to her property. Sincerely, she had given herself to her husband body and soul, she gave him two beautiful children, but the marital adventures and absences over the years had cracked the bond, her old age had plunged her into the sadness of being relegated to the command of household management, living with the concubines who are increasingly younger and prettier. She took it out on the foreigner for all the sustained silences and the contempt she thought she suffered, because in reality Margit was respected and admired, a good administrator and fair in her decisions, but this time she couldn't bear that

she was so young and slept with her husband and son, fury was unleashed in her without being able to contain herself, as she listened so calmly and languidly to how virile Einar had been, as if she were innocent and oblivious at the same time to what happened between the sheets. She went to the stove to check the firewood and, a little more composed, she joined the rest of the women in spinning, focusing on the manual work, trying to forget the bad feeling of the moment of fury.

It was better to postpone Wynn learning household chores and instead prepare her for married life, it was already Yul, that's what harvest time was called and a good time for it the next day would be the weekly bath day. of the Vikings and washing clothes, that day all that was left was to prepare the banquet that would last a couple of days. Ingolf, Björk's brother, son of one of Einar's concubines, had returned from a great expedition with a lot of gold and livestock. Only the members of the Einar family, their children and wives, would participate, but about fifty men of good palate ate and drank, so they were fully organizing.



Wynn still did not understand what his position would be when the marriage took place. He had to speak first, although the risk was high, with this troll Björk and his unbearable father-in-law. If there was a time to negotiate even though her position was terrible, it was now, at most she would have sex with this barbarian and they would kill her faster without any humiliation involved, or so she wanted to believe.

He went out to the countryside to look for Björk, but they told him that she was in the blacksmith's shop, she was engrossed there when she was not at sea. At a quick pace he arrived and found him dirty and sweaty hammering a piece of red-hot iron in the forge. He was surprised to see her, agitated and with a determined look; He put down his tools and, rubbing his hands with a cloth, asked:

-What are you doing here? Why aren't you setting things up with the rest of the women?

-I came because I do not plan to marry you until I am clear about the conditions. Firmly and defiantly, he blurted out the phrase as if he were demanding that he bring food to the house. Björk was astonished. Who did he think he was, this squirrel brought from the other side to demand answers and negotiations? More than stubborn, she was already insolent.

-That??

-What I just told you and I want to talk to your father about it, since I don't have my father or my brother to defend my dignity, I will do it myself, or do I not have the right to that either? Will I be your slave, your wife, your bitch or what? What am I forced to do?

- The only one forced will be me... To kill you, devil's squirrel!

And red with anger, he headed towards the big house without first saying who knows what Danish expletives as he passed by her.

Wynn's legs trembled, she watched him walk away and imagined that she would soon be dragged by her hair to be slit. She feared she had gone too far, perhaps it would have been better for her to keep her mouth shut and wait for events to happen. Because of his situation, he remembered having screwed up many times by not holding his tongue, but although he had tried to overcome those outbursts, he never succeeded and to make matters worse, over time he acquired

more language and knowledge to maintain political or religious discussions, earning enmities and losing suitors. He went home and stayed in his room falling asleep while thinking about what would happen later.



A shaking woke her up, it was one of the slaves telling her that the masters were waiting for her in the great hall. She combed her hair and washed her face in the jar prepared for it, she smoothed her dress and went to introduce herself, when she entered she saw Björk clean and with a grim face, Jarl Einar at her side and Leif on her left with a gesture. to be encouraged to witness something exceptional.

Einar spoke:

-Tell me Wynn, what do you want to negotiate with us? Do you have something valuable to offer?

-My dear king-

Einar interrupted her by clarifying some differences.

-Wynn, here there are no kings, nor counts or any of those things, I am the Jarl, leader of this clan and owner of a large part of these lands, here there are free men, others who govern our laws, others who They instruct us in our duties to our Gods, but women have a voice that we can hear, but they do not vote as freely or speak as much as you do in Eastanglia. I make an exception, understanding

that your father or brother are not there to speak for you, as they should be. So I hear you, what do you mean?

-With respect and loyalty I want to know what my position is regarding this marriage, for which they have not asked for my approval, although we could understand that my father approved it, it is true that under unfavorable conditions. Therefore I want my freedom as a slave to be proclaimed by Björk, I will occupy the place of wife with all the rights, except for the fact that you warned me that if I had a child, Björk had the power to incorporate him into the family and give him a name. bre. Even so, I claim the right to be free and have the same rights as any Viking, because my father, still forced by circumstances, paid my dowry with everything expropriated by his men from my lands, therefore, my family has paid for this union more than enough. Being thus free, my family of royal lineage will be united to you in reciprocity, and Björk will be able to obtain the right to return to Eastanglia as my father's son and not as a barbarian invader and without needing to give you any gift for this marriage.

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-Well thought out Wynn, I like it, your family has wealth, you have shown temperance and intelligence. What do you have to object to? - Looking at his children.

Leif was amused, the young girl had proven to be Anglo-Saxon in her political skills, something his brother lacked, and also promised to be a delicate beauty later on, he was determined that if his stubborn brother rejected her, he would offer and so he proposed.

-That's fine with me, your proposal seems fair to me, and we should also review this type of marriage by capture. Later on, other women as intelligent as this one may demand the same thing from us and then lawsuits will arise over who is the legitimate child and which one. No. If my brother does not agree, I offer myself in his place, although she will be my second wife, of course. But it's better than nothing. -Giving a friendly wink to Wynn.

-And you, Björk? Your word is necessary. -Björk was irritated with Wynn although in reality he was irritated with himself, he was torn internally between logic, bewilderment and admiration, but he did not want to lose power in front of this quasi-child who had turned into a woman overnight. And much less than his meddlesome brother hummingbird, he will win the dispute, competitive as they were in all the games, Leif had added a new rivalry just for fun, looking at her with seductive candor and sympathy.

-If my father considers it appropriate, it is my duty to comply with his wishes, but I hope that you make sufficient merit in marital obligations and household chores. As a woman, you are young and fer-

tile, which is something in your favor, although not very attractive by the way. , but we'll see.

Wynn felt humiliated while Björk in a few words told her that it was better for her to be good in bed and cleaning, and also insulted her by calling her unattractive!!! She tempered her furious mood to not confront him, given that the Things were going better than expected.

-Do you agree then Wynn? Einar asked him

-Yes, I appreciate it, I am blessed by your Gods to be the wife of Björk who comes from a powerful and admired family, he is an honorable and respected man, as well as gentle and handsome. I will do my best, you have my word. With all ironic intention, he reproached him for his lack of chivalry.

Everyone doubted the sincerity of her words, no one saw Björk as someone gentle. Honorable and handsome he might be, but gentle and tender not by chance, everyone inwardly laughed at the young girl's genius. On the other hand, for Björk the flattery fell like a bucket of cold water, she felt it was false and of a docility that was not permanent. Her first marriage and she already regretted having brought her with her, no wonder her father got her out of him so opportunely.



Wynn went to his room and lay down on his bed, sighing with relief, and strangely happy, he had made himself heard and these Vikings had respected his wish, of course in exchange for the diplomatic benefit he offered them, but even so he could see a hope of changing your destiny at some point. With the security of having rights like any other woman and as an alliance she could return to Britain and flee from the Vikings already in her land, that was her goal, despite the pain and resentment towards her father. He would see how to heal his soul when he faced it. But he found no other resource than politics to join a peaceful excursion with the Vikings. If things did not go as expected and she became pregnant despite herself, at least the child would have the right to inherit sooner or later, having a place in the family without risking his life. She remembered Björk grim with a solemn rictus as if she were always in battle, distrustful and taciturn, it hurt her when he called her unattractive, not that she was interested in being that way for him, but her femininity felt hurt and belittled. She said that to herself. , to think that she had Anglo-Saxon suitors brought by her father in search of alliances, which she constantly discarded, although it was true that none of them had bothered to fall in love with her with sincere interest. Only one, her brother's comrade-in-arms, her faithful friend, had confessed his love for her and given her condition she could not ask her father for it. She did not love him although she greatly valued the love of that

young man, she considered that nothing fell in love with her. It appeals more to a woman's lukewarm heart than a man sincerely in love. And she felt like she could have loved him if she hadn't been taken from his life.



The day began earlier than she would have liked, she felt tired, since the night brought her dreams and nightmares that intermingled with the latest events she had experienced. One of the women went to look for her to take her to where they weaved, another house not very far away with a single room where there were several looms that consisted of two vertical wooden bars resting on the ground and another thick one joining them with two forks. at her sides, not very different from the one they had in Eastanglia with the bone or metal needles, the difference or the big difference was that she had only once been in a spinning mill and only out of curiosity asking those ladies what they consisted of. what they were doing, he vaguely remembered the explanations they had given him and hoped that they would be useful at that moment.

A young woman approached and introduced herself with great enthusiasm and in a very warm manner.

-Welcome, how are you feeling? I'm Bliss from Ulster, Ireland.

Wynn could not contain himself and with tears in his eyes he rushed towards her, taking her by the hands.

-My God, how grateful I am to find a sister.

-I imagine, calm down, let's sit down and chat, then I'll explain the daily work to you. Tell me, how did you get here?

Wynn told him everything he had gone through and some of the feelings he had to endure in his soul. He kept the most painful ones to himself: his father's reaction, the negotiations for his kidnapping, and the humiliation he felt. Because she realized that Bliss was adapted and comfortable in these lands and she did not want to offend her, she was very happy to have a friend she could lean on and trust. Bliss in turn told him how she had arrived:

-It was the Good Fire festivities for the beginning of summer, we had to collect wood for the bonfires that we would make in the mountains and hills, but I stayed too long enjoying the river and the sunny day, I didn't see the small boats full of I hadn't even noticed the Vikings, anyway I was too far from the towers to escape towards them even if I had seen them. I only felt that they were taking me from behind, covering my mouth, a blow hit me and I fainted. The rest is just as you experienced it. I was lucky that Carl was in the group and took me on. He took care of me and protected me on the journey here; He gave me the time to discover his personality, he is somewhat rough but no more than my father and brothers or any Ulster farmer.

Give yourself time, I don't know if you were lucky or not in getting together with Björk, he is arrogant, however, I have not seen cruelty in him although he is violent at times. He does not have a gentle character.

-Why do you say you don't know if I've been lucky or not?

-You are in the eye of the storm, in the family that runs this clan, the power struggles are the same throughout the rest of the world. I know what you are going through, be strong, I went through the same ordeal, have faith in God. I still pray in secret silence and my faith is greater than before despite having married Carl and accepting his Gods, our God knows that he is more rooted in my heart than in my days in Ulster. Come on, I must teach you how to spin, but the first lesson will not be to your liking, I'm sorry, we have all been through this, be patient.

That's how it was, the first day she had to deal with the sheep and the smell of the stable, cutting off fleeces full of dirt and excrement, she ended up sweaty and exhausted and she was grateful that the Vikings honored washing continuously so no one objected to her. good bath at the end of the day, his fingers hurt from cutting the thin hair of the animals with the knife and his wrists hurt from holding the bodies of the sheep.

The next day did not go any better, he had to wash the wool with water boiled with urine and remove the nits and excrement. He did

not want to ask if the urine was animal or human because nausea came over him from time to time. Despite bathing at night, he still felt the acidic smell on his hands. But she felt good emotionally, manual work and occupation distracted her from worries and memories, she focused on her work and the hours passed without realizing it.

The rest of the women who worked in the spinning were kind to her, they saw her as very young and small, she was humble at work and did not complain, she put effort into it and they had to urge her to rest to drink water and eat something. They did not realize that she only discharged all the frustration and fear of this new imposed reality at work, she abstracted herself from the world around her and found peace in the concentration of work.

On the third day after washing the wool, while hanging it, he thought about Björk, he had not seen her for days, he had asked about him and they told him that he was working with his brother Leif in the blacksmith shop, he wondered what he was doing there, Maybe I'd stop by to see what he was doing.

The day had ended when he was combing the bundle of wool with the spiked wooden brush, preparing it to obtain the threads, he saw Björk passing by who was wearily heading to the blacksmith's shop, but he did not see her. She looked at him carefully, she was indeed very masculine, she felt herself blush and deliberately began to remember

when she met him, she contrasted herself with this man who passed by happy and relaxed with his hammer and soot on his body. He found it pleasant and he didn't like that feeling that was born suddenly without warning.



Leif was in the forge and saw Björk enter. He had a slight smile on his face, strange for him, always with a grim countenance as if an eternal concern was installed between his eyebrows. He came from the east side where the spinning mill was located and it occurred to him with fun to annoy his brother.

-Have you gone to see her?

Björk was surprised as if he had been discovered after a looting, but he ignored it.

-What are you taking about?

-You tell me hahaha. You are intrigued to know about the young date.

-Don't talk nonsense.

-Ah well, then you're not interested in knowing what I know.

He had caught it, he did want to know, it had been days since Wynn had been going to spin until night and he hadn't met her, that's why he had passed by pretending to be distracted, he felt Wynn's gaze, but he didn't want to start a dialogue. with her, I just wanted to know what she was up to. He had seen her working hard with what she was doing at that moment, calm to the point of being almost happy, he thought. Everything about her seemed strange to him.

-Well, tell me your womanly gossip, come on, otherwise you're not going to leave me alone and we still have a lot to do.

-Women have liked him, well... except our mother, of course. She is learning to spin and they are confident that she will continue to do it well, she is very hardworking, strange for her origins, but she seems to like the work and does not complain. You may have earned yourself a good wife after all, who knows.

Björk didn't ask him more, he felt tenderness or something similar inside him for Wynn. But he didn't want to dwell on that feeling, so he began to hammer the metal he had with the tongs, silencing his brother and leaving the conversation behind.

That night at dinner, Björk asked her father to start preparing for the wedding. She had planned to take an excursion to the north and she didn't know how long it could last and she wanted to leave the matter concluded. Einar agreed and would give the order the next day so

they could start preparing everything, they both decided that the party would last seven moons which meant seven days of frugal food and drink for the whole family. And the ceremony would take place under the old birch tree in the forest where they had all gotten married as was their custom.



The morning had dawned cold, Wynn was already in the spinning mill, he had lit the fire to warm himself and was twisting the strands of wool between his fingers while he wound it on the spindle, a stick that would later go to the fork of the loom. Absorbed in the task, she did not see Björk enter, who purposely did so with total stealth in order to surprise her, standing behind her and whispering in her ear:
-What are you doing?

Wynn was startled to the point of falling off the bench, horrified she looked at whoever had spoken to her and out of panic she did not recognize him until seconds later, while he laughed heartily. Which made her angry, but it made her soul return to her body.

-And what do you think? Do you know the difference between milking a cow and spinning? Guess which one I'm doing?

-From what I see you are still asking the wool to make a moo-do.

-What do you want? -He asked her as calmly as he could, because he didn't know how to respond to his silly grace.

-Let me see your hands. She showed them to him, they were red and some small calluses were visible.

-Are you a virgin? Haven't you met any man?

Wynn blushed, the brutality of the question making her voice tremble and inaudible saying yes, but the nod of her head was the only thing Björk understood. He looked her up and down and without saying a word he turned around and left. She stood there, not understanding anything and stunned by the moment. As best he could, he lifted the stool, sat down and continued with his task, remembering the moment several times a day seeking to understand what had happened.

The entire clan was busy in the following days preparing a small, family ceremony, the women searching for fruits of the forest to make sweets from strawberries, blackberries and blueberry and blackberry delicacies, while the men selected goats, pigs and horses. for ceremonial sacrifice and banquet, as well as fish and vegetables and mead for several days of celebration.



Björk was immersed at that time in the blacksmith's shop, forging a sword smaller than the one he usually used, he engraved on the sheet a verse "The sea unites our worlds while the sky torments the earth", while he thought how strange the Gods and their wishes for him, what paths they had decreed he must follow when he was born to his mother. He thought of Wynn and wondered how special she was to her God, who had brought her to his land in such a painful circumstance. It would be difficult for them to trust each other, even if it was a marriage without love but rather one of convenience as was customary. He would like to know what love was, if it really existed or if it was just carnal passion disguised as nonsense of love. women. But the contempt she felt was evident, he couldn't blame her, he had brought her against her will and imposed a marriage that she would never have wanted in freedom. She had been betrayed, kidnapped and sold like so many women and men of that time, but this one had a name and was going to be his first wife. Somehow he felt trapped too; Only when he entered the sea did he feel true freedom, when he sighted enemy land, the heaviness of his obligations generated such fury in him that he unloaded it on the cities that devastated him and, covered in blood and fatigue, he returned to the camp dreaming of a life in peace. Many nights he woke up sweaty and tormented by nightmares of screaming and crying, he dreamed

of his death over and over again and tried to calm his spirit with herbs and honey water, in the blacksmith's shop he hit the metal as if they were his dreams invaded by pain. of the men, women and children who had died on their expeditions, of their comrades-in-arms who had lost their lives in foreign lands in search of sustenance for their clans, of their own pain for a void in their soul that they did not know. how to fill. He fervently believed that he must comply with the virtues of the Aesir Gods: courage, truth, honor, fidelity, discipline, hospitality, productivity, trust and perseverance. Björk truly believed that life was good and should be lived with joy and courage, overcoming the tests that the Gods put before her. She maintained with conviction that men were divine creations, but in a relationship of harmony and concord, not submission and slavery, which is why he shared tolerance and brotherhood towards slaves with his father. His father allowed slaves to buy their freedom and allowed them to marry leaders or free women or men of the clan, but with a strong hand they enforced the laws and demanded work and being honorable, they did not hesitate to punish treason with death. to your trust. Björk accepted the ambivalence of power and passion in both gods and men as well as the responsibility of each one for their actions, her nightmares were her conscience that feared the punishment of those bloody acts in battles; Sometimes he doubted the raids they

made, he felt that there was more greed than need for subsistence, more desire for power than legitimate authority.

Björk did not need the Gods to save him, he only wanted the freedom to face his destiny with honor and courage, above all he imagined living in peace, saying to himself: -if they could finally conquer Britain, they would achieve good lands and fertile to live longer and better.

He took a small box, polished it and put it away. It contained the symbol of his future, the rings for the marriage ceremony.



Wynn and Bliss were dipping some shirts into the water. As always, they took advantage of the moment to chat friendly.

-You know, Bliss? Sometimes I wonder what the wedding night will be like. Björk and I are engaged, and soon we will be husband and wife. I haven't talked much about those things in my life.

Bliss, smiling, with her hands busy soaping a skirt, understood the young woman with her fears and questions.

-Oh, Wynn, the wedding night can be a magical moment or a nightmare, it will depend on you. When two souls merge into one it is truly

beautiful. But if there is resentment or fear, it can be a bad memory that will mark their lives. Let me tell you.

Wynn sits on a rock, attentive, Bliss whispers, as if sharing a secret.

- The wedding night is like a blank canvas. You must bathe, rinsing with cold water scented with plants and flowers, Björk will take you to her cabin, and there, under the sheepskins and woven blankets, your intimate journey will begin. But fear not, it is a journey full of discoveries and tenderness.

-I don't think I'm even remotely in love with that oaf.

-Wynn, I've seen you looking at him from a distance, I'm not so sure that you don't feel anything for him. At least I'm sure you don't find him physically unpleasant.

Wynn blushed despite wanting to remain calm, she was surprised by her friend's sincerity, they had never talked about Björk in that romantic way. He wanted to direct the conversation to the purely practical

- And how does it start?

Winking at him, Bliss began to tell him what could happen.

-Well, first, Björk will look at you with those penetrating eyes that seem to encompass the entire world, as you have once described. He will caress your hair, as if he wanted to memorize each strand. And then, slowly, it will approach you.

-And then?

-He will take off your shirt, he will release a sigh, a promise. And when you are naked before him, you will feel that time stops.

He looked toward the river, not wanting Bliss to see his wet eyes.

- What if I'm wrong? What if I don't know what to do?

Bliss sat next to her and held her hands.

-Dear, love is the guide. Björk will show you the way. There is no rush, just connection.

-Björk doesn't love me Bliss, I'm just a negotiation, she has never approached me with respect or consideration. I fear that in bed things are not going to be different.

-Oh, Wynn, a man's heart is as mysterious as they say about women's. Sometimes the greatest distance is only a veil of the most absolute closeness. He stood up and pointed to the horizon.

-Look, the sun is setting. This will be your night: a sunset and a sunrise together.

-Thank you, Bliss. It has calmed me down a bit to be able to talk about this, I hope that Björk doesn't scare me as much as when I met him.

Bliss hugged Wynn, she was not sure what would really happen to her, how Björk would approach her or how much Wynn would suffer or enjoy, but she had to give him some encouragement, it would be useless to add more fear and uncertainty.

-I will always be here for you, my sweet friend. Now, let's get back to the task. Shirts don't wash themselves, right?

Between laughter and confidences, Wynn and Bliss shared the prelude to a new beginning in the little girl's life. The wedding night was approaching, and Wynn's heart was pounding with anticipation and a touch of fear.



Björk was with her half-finished mead, it had been a long day at the blacksmith's shop and she didn't want to think that tomorrow she had to prepare for her wedding. But he was restless and the idea of getting married came and went in his mind.

Bjarne, his brother ten years older, Einar's first-born, entered the blacksmith's shop huffing and puffing.

-How are you doing brother? Tomorrow you will have lost your freedom, hahaha.

Björk looked up and looked at him almost witheringly, she got along well with him, but they were never close, Bjarne was impulsive and extroverted, he used to open his mouth too much without realizing how intrusive he was sometimes. He did not take into account the feelings of others and Björk was not a man of sentimentality, but he

was very reserved with the few feelings he had within him. Perhaps more than reserve was that he did not stop to analyze them, he tried to be practical more out of a defensive attitude than anything else. Bjarne poured himself a jug of mead and sat down ready to talk, regretfully for Björk.

-You say that because you can see your wife's chains. No one will deprive me of my freedom.

-Well, well, I mean that you'll have to give someone some explanation when you come home drunk.

-The only explanation I will give is that I am a Viking and it is worth it because I will not tell you more.

-Poor girl, hahaha. And Jette? I thought you would stay with her, but you accepted the engagement with Hanne and now with the British woman.

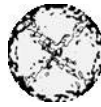
-Jette is a free spirit, she has needs like any woman and we have served each other, there is nothing more than that. With Hanne it is a good alliance to join his father and the suiones in trade in Constantinople and with Wynn we can reach Britain politically.

-Wow!! You surprise me little brother, I thought you only thought about sailing and going to sea. It seems that you have matured and your horizons have expanded.

-I just think about all of us.

-Let's stop talking and drink, it's your last night as a free man.

The rest of the brothers who had finished their work, Leif, Sven and Ingolf, joined the gathering. The night found them drunk and laughing heartily, they enjoyed the moment between jokes and brotherly bravado. They seemed like a happy family.



It was early autumn, a good time for a wedding, the crops and honey had already been harvested. Friday had arrived. The sun had not yet risen, but the family had been preparing the banquet for a few hours. The large tables were laden with plates of meat and fish roasted over an open fire, large platters with side dishes of vegetables and roast potatoes. Wynn prepared himself as Bliss had explained to him, he had bathed in the scented water of the flowers he had collected and dressed in the outfit they had given him, it was made of fine fabric brought from distant lands, he combed his hair and dressed it. She decorated herself with flowers, she felt pretty, but a melancholy came over her, it was inevitable, she had never imagined that she would get married under these conditions and so far from her homeland, with a perfect stranger.

They knocked on his door so hard that he was scared and took a while to give permission for whoever it was to enter. Despite traditions, Björk entered her room dressed in black, as was the usual dress for a wedding. She looked impressive with the bearskin on her shoulders and the belt around her waist. He had a sword with him and two men behind him left a chest at the entrance and then left, closing the door. Wynn felt short of breath. Björk looked her up and down with no expression on her face. Both had acquired more skill in each other's language, Wynn was now fluent and dialogue between them was easier.

-I leave you my wedding gift, we call it morgen-gifu, it is in compensation for your virginity, in this chest you have jewelry, clothes and other things that will be useful for our life. I will give you two slaves and a small cabin for your needs, there you can knit or embroider alone or whatever you like to do. You will live in my cabin, I have already given orders that while we are at the ceremony they move the little you have here. Do you want to ask me something? Since you don't know our customs, tell me what you want to know. He sat by the window waiting for Wynn's response. She opened the chest and took the clothes that were in it, being amazed at the quality of the fabric and the jewelry. He turned around and coldly asked:

-Is all this what you looted on your expeditions?

Björk had to contain her anger at the offensiveness of the question.

-No, everything has been bought in Tsargrad and there are some from Constantinople. Is my answer enough for you? She nodded her head.- And what are you going to give me?

Surprised, she didn't know what to answer, Bliss hadn't told her anything about having to give her boyfriend something.

-I'm sorry, I had no idea that I should give you something, even if I had known, in my condition, stripped of my wealth and far from my father, I would never have anything to offer you.

She was sincere and Björk realized that he had embarrassed her only out of revenge for her disregard for the question about the origin of her gift.

-It's ok don't worry. I made my own gift for you, here you are, it is a sword on which I have engraved some words that initiate this marriage. I will explain a tradition to you, I will give you the sword of my ancestors in the ceremony and you must give me a new sword as a symbol of protection and the beginning of a new family tradition. At the wedding I will give you the rings. And since there is no man in your family, my brother Leif will hand you over. Have you understood?

-Yes- He said it without the usual arrogance and coldness. Björk realized that she was scared and couldn't find the right words to cheer her up. He only managed to approach her and take her shoulder. He

felt her trembling and her face pale. With a smile to relax the moment he said:

-Don't be afraid, but more than anything, don't die of fright before we get married, it would be a waste of food, although it could be used for the funeral. I would prefer that we not waste the party.

Wynn regained his breath and his speech. She didn't know what moved her inside, his presence was so intense, his tall body alone impressed her and the parsimony of his words generated an atmosphere between the two of them that she couldn't define.

-Yes, of course, you're right. Thank you. It's better that you leave so I can finish getting ready.

Björk handed her the sword and she gently placed it on the bed. He secretly appreciated the gesture of respect and softness. He had spent many days building her and she seemed to value him.

He left and Wynn sat next to the sword and read the inscribed phrase, he knew that he had forged it himself and surely chose the words "The sea unites our worlds while the sky torments the earth", he could not avoid the intense beating in your heart.



The sun was up on the cold morning, it was about time she told herself. Again, there was a knock on his door and Leif, one of his brothers-in-law, entered. He was smaller in build than his brother, but he

was equally attractive and much nicer. Some said that he had a bad temper with those under his command, but the truth was that he didn't. He had tolerance for baseness or evil, and he faced them blindly without measuring the consequences of his anger. With her he had always been charming and kind, he was like that with all women, winning the hearts of almost all of them. Wynn was not the case, she saw him as childish in a certain way, but she liked him as a brother-in-law.

-How beautiful my sister-in-law is! The big day has arrived.

-Hello Leif, do you really mean that?

-Oh women, always doubting the beauty of their souls and their generous bodies. Come on, I must take you to the big rock in the forest, the whole family is already waiting.

-There is your mother too, of course. He hates me.

-hahaha, I already knew how they met. Don't be afraid, he doesn't hate you. He was so out of his mind that I feared for his health and made him swear that he would never tell the truth that I told him. What father had never touched you. Despite what she saw, she is an intelligent woman and understood her mistake, but she still loves her clumsy old husband. Fear not, I came to appreciate your loyalty in upholding the lie about my father's manhood. And we even laughed a lot while he told me details that I didn't know about the intense

meeting they had. You will have seen that he avoided meeting you, he didn't want to make you more uncomfortable than he had.

-Thank you Leif, you have taken a weight off my shoulders. Here or in Eas-tanglia, an angry mother-in-law is the worst thing that can happen to you.

They laughed heartily together, took the sword that they had to give to Björk and headed to the sacred place.

The sun spread its rays among the trees, Björk saw her arrive, she had a particular beauty, she was without the voluptuousness of a Viking woman, small and soft, delicate in her manners although tenderly wild in her spirit with a confident and transparent gaze; He couldn't help but feel nervous, that made him uncomfortable because he didn't understand why, he kept telling himself that this was just a formality, a beneficial agreement and nothing more.

Verbal offerings were made to the Gods and animal sacrifices. Björk took her sword and, looking straight into Wynn's eyes, knew how to say:

- We declare ourselves witnesses that you, Wynn of Eastanglia, join me, Björk of Scania son of Einar in legal engagement, and by taking my hand you promise me the dowry that I have already taken and you undertake to fulfill and observe the entire agreement between us, which has been notified in the hearing of the witnesses without duplicity or cunning, as a real and authorized agreement.

Saying this, he took his sword on which were two rings. Wynn took one and placed it on his middle finger, Björk did her thing and gave the sword to the young woman, Leif gave Wynn the new sword to give to her husband, thus ending the marriage.

Everyone shouted and celebrated, then headed to the big house to celebrate.

The festival would last seven days, harp music, dances with masks and merriment would be experienced together with drunkenness and games where everyone participated. Ingolf and Björk dedicated themselves to beating the rest of the men to see who could stay under the surface of the water the longest, Bjarne got involved in the fight, he and his opponent had to wear leather straps around their waists and calves, each one tried to grab the other by his straps and throw him as hard as possible against the ground. Others simply played with a ball of hemp wrapped in leather and sticks with which they hit each other, scoring points, others played at knocking each other off their horses with a club. The calmer ones, among whom were mostly women, participated in dice betting and a new game brought from Byzantium with several figures on a board that each moved in a particular way. They called it chess. Wynn managed to forget about the past and enjoy that first day learning games unknown to her, while Björk did the same, from time to time, he watched her laugh and play.

That night he should take her to his cabin and make love to her, but he felt that it was not the time for it. He decided it wouldn't be that day, he would see when her resentment for the past would disappear. If one day it disappeared.

The night had already entered hours ago. Leif approached Björk, both of them were drunk and happy.

-Tell me brother, when are you going to your cabin? You're making your wife wait.

-Mmm, I don't think so. It's going to be harder than breaking in a horse. I'm too happy to ruin my night.

-Hahaha, you're getting cold feet, you're not up for your wedding night, who would have thought.

-Don't be stupid, you'll see, I'll take her right now.

Björk clumsily got up from her seat due to the excess of beer and mead and approached Wynn on the other side of the table.

-Come on young wife, I'll take you home.

Wynn swallowed nervously, but docilely let himself be carried in Björk's arms, while everyone toasted and celebrated the departure of the bride and groom.

Arriving at the cabin that would be her new home, in the arms of her recent husband she saw what would be her new home, it was a large house. Made of oak wood on its large posts and solid walls of stone and wood, the gabled roof made of wooden slats and straw, showed

that there were one or two rooms. On the sides of the house there was about a block for the granary and a few meters away a small well cabin with similar characteristics that was generally built for weaving or pottery workshops or storage things. The wooden door consisted of a key that had been given along with the marriage chest to Wynn. Clumsily, Björk stumbled in and the young woman clung to him for fear of falling, the force with which he held her against him made Wynn blush. They went to the main room and he dropped her on the bed abruptly, it was not his intention, but because of the same clumsiness of the alcohol. He left the new sword next to the fireplace as a symbol of prosperity and protection and his sword that had been given to Wynn was left on the gift chest that had been moved from his father's house, since it was already the girl's property.

Trying to stay calm, Wynn got out of bed and walked around the house. It was warm and friendly, simple, unlike his father's castle, but he didn't mind; It had a main nave and two sides where the rooms were located, two rows of posts supported the roof beams and ran the length of the house. It was comfortable, similar to Einar's house, it had a few small windows which would allow the sunlight to penetrate in the mornings and last almost all day. On one side of the central nave there was a skylight where the dining area was located. There was a well dug in the earth and cemented with mud, on the sides there were stone and earth benches running along the interior

walls covered in skins and wall tapestries of herbs, dried flowers and shields that were unknown to me. She imagined herself lying in the warmth of the home making weaving or making small baskets, and life seemed to her like it could become beautiful. She returned to the master bedroom and began to undress without looking at her brand new husband. With her back to him, she took off her belt, the flowers in her hair, when sounds like snorting made her turn around to look for her husband. He was face down in bed snoring like a beast. For a moment she felt relieved, today she wouldn't have to know sex with this huge Viking, but a little offended at his lack of interest. She didn't dare move him or wake him up, so she lay down next to him, covering herself with a blanket, making herself as small as she could to let him sleep as long as he wanted. He observed him carefully, taking advantage of the deep sleep in which the drunkenness had left him. He had beautiful features, his jawline was so masculine and perfectly outlined. His nose was outlined without being exaggerated, it was prominent. He recognized that he was a beautiful man despite himself because he did not want to recognize that he was an attractive man, his blonde hair to absolute whiteness was clean and combed, his abundant and well-cut beard further outlined his charming face with masculine features. He freely ran his eyes along the length of his legs; despite the gaiters, he could see the muscles of a trained and agile man who was in no way sedentary. I had already felt his arms

and his chest, they were like iron. He wondered if there was something warm inside that could contain love. Why had it occurred to him to think that? Perhaps how gentle despite his natural roughness he had been these days had confused her. Did she perhaps want him to love her? It couldn't be, she just convinced herself that if he should be her husband at least she asked him to be kind and respectful. He put those thoughts out of his head and turned on the bed with his back to her. Sleep overcame them both.



The sunlight hit her eyes squarely, Björk had a headache from all the mead she had drunk, next to her was Wynn fast asleep. He saw her sweet and tender, he gently covered her uncovered shoulder with the blanket that covered her. He stayed watching her for several minutes thinking, how he would win the heart of this young woman, leaving the past behind. He couldn't erase from her memory the events that had stripped her of her previous life, he recognized that she was making an effort to adapt and overcome the life that had been imposed on her, but there was no way to force anyone to love in her

heart. someone, he had to win their love, but he had no idea how to do it.

He got up from the bed, washed his face and hands as quietly as he could and left the cabin towards the house where some drunks were still sleeping and the women were cleaning and preparing for the second day of celebrations.



Wynn woke up hours later, changed and went home to help with the chores, he wondered about Björk and was grateful that he had avoided sex with him, but he knew that sooner or later he would have to fulfill his marital obligations and sighed resignedly. He saw him when he arrived having fun with others in a bow and arrow competition. He was radiant and amused as if he had not been passed out from alcohol the night before, for a moment he looked at him cut in time, without history without a past, he only stopped to see a man; with a wide and graceful smile, laughing with the rest of the men, leading with that intense and masculine personality, yes, he was charming, but equally fearsome. He avoided it by heading towards the women who were preparing breakfast of cereals and cheeses, they were

avoiding each other all day, they didn't even look at each other. At night Wynn waited for his arrival, but he did not go to sleep that night, nor the next. She stayed in the forest sleeping under the stars and bathing in the river, Wynn did not object or ask anyone about her husband. The following days continued with the routine of the celebrations.

In the forest Björk was next to the bonfire she had made; He heard footsteps nearby and paid attention, out of the shadows he saw Leif appear.

—Hello, young husband, are you running away from your wife?

-I'm giving you your time.

-Time to fall in love with you?

-Why do you always say nonsense? I don't want to live with a woman who hates me, I just give her time to feel safe and calm. I'm not going to take it until she asks for it.

-That may be a long time Björk, I think you should go first. Dare to love her, be sincere, talk to her. She doesn't seem like a difficult woman to me, in fact she seems quite reasonable to me.

-You don't have to listen to her, she is more incisive than a dagger and stubborn like a brutalized goat.

-But she is also kind and sweet when you talk to her without attacking her or being defensive. Resolve this issue because in a few

years you will have to marry Hanne, our father is in talks with his clan, but the negotiations are not going very well. His father Torsten is greedier than us.

Leif was right, he remained silent and decided to change the subject.

-We will go with Sven to look for a new trade route in the north while our father resolves this issue with Torsten, time passes and perhaps we will achieve more by our means than allying with him. Do you want to come with us?

-It would be good to spend time with my brothers and get away from the headaches that my wife gives me. Join me, I will gladly go with you.



That night Björk appeared at the cabin, Wynn's heart was pounding.

-Are you comfortable in our house? Do you have everything you need?

-Everything is fine, thank you. Do you like to sleep often in the forest?

"Yes, get used to it." She realized how abrupt her words were and tried to soften them. "If you don't mind, if you're afraid of being alone, I'll stay here when you ask me."

Those cutting and authoritarian answers made her angry. Why did he have to be so arrogant and haughty? The lack of education and

courtesy of these Viking bandits drove her crazy. In reality, she only saw that in Björk, but on top of that, everyone attracted her.

-I don't want you to change your habits for me, don't worry, he told her as arrogantly as he had been.

- I have to inform you that I will march north, we have issues to resolve, I don't know how many days it will take.

-Thank you for keeping me up to date. Will you go with Jette?

-Why do you ask?

-It was just a question.

-No, she will leave with Barjne and Ulf for Wessex, they will join another clan to raid, she intends to stay there building a settlement.

Does it make you happy? -He asked suspiciously.

-I don't care, does the matter make you sad?

-I'm not interested.

They were both happy without showing it, she felt strangely happy that her opponent stayed away and he because she felt that he cared more than he let on.

The afternoon was quickly turning into night, the young woman had arrived home with vegetables collected during the day, ready to cook, arranging the belongings and the vegetables, she heard noises in the barn, they were from one of the goats, they were three and one was pregnant. Wiping his hands he went to the shed to see if there was any problem. When he arrived he saw Björk assisting the

goat that was giving birth. He stayed at the entrance without making any noise so as not to disturb the young man's work.

The delivery came twice, usually taking four to six hours, so Wynn guessed that he had been in the shed for a few hours. The goat was very nervous, it got up and lay down, Björk stroked it to calm it down. When the contractions began, the lying goat began to expel a kid, the young man caressing the animal's buttocks stimulated the pushing, when it finally came out a few minutes later the contractions began again and the second kid saw the light. Björk brought the kids closer to the mother so she could clean and stimulate them. While he sanitized the female's genitals with clean water so that he could cut the hair around her anus so that it would not become infected. When he finished, he stayed on the ground observing the nature of motherhood. Wynn silently watched a man with a child's gaze, amazed and delighted to see how life emerged. The warmth of the moment was not indifferent to the young woman; she felt true affection for the compassion that she had never imagined seeing in this man. He went to get something to drink to reach Björk, who looked tired and sweaty. When he returned he saw how the goats were nursing from their mother. They were so beautiful that he smiled sweetly. Realizing that Björk was observing her with the same candidness, they both avoided cooling the moment, the moment was too beautiful to

ruin it. He took the drink and thanked her for the gesture. The silence was more than enough.

At the end of the day, Wynn carefully prepared a typical Eastanglia dish. She felt encouraged to be gentle with Björk. When he arrived he took a bath and sat at the table, cutting a slice of rye bread. Wynn brought the boiling pot over and filled the plate with it.

—What is this so greasy? Woman, I spent the whole day working with firewood and the animals deserve something that can be eaten. Björk didn't know if it was food for a man or a sheep and her face clearly showed it. Hearing this, Wynn made his good disposition disappear with the smoke of the broth, he was ungrateful and did not even take into account the dedication he had put into cooking, in addition to being a dish native to his lands, his cheeks and gaze The cold air she gave him was enough of a warning to Björk that a storm was coming. He instantly regretted having opened his mouth.

-If I do you the honor of using the wood you cut, you do the same with the damn food I made for hours! -the plate barely contained the food when it hit the table, Björk didn't dare to stop- Saying one more word, he just snorted and focused his gaze on the plate that almost made it look like a helmet. Wynn turned his back on him and preferred to busy himself with the junk for a while until his anger calmed down. He sat down moments later, looking out of the corner of his

eye at Björk and seeing that she was eating eagerly, he encouraged himself to relax the tension.

-How does the food taste to you?

-The truth is that I don't know if it's hunger or that it's actually very appetizing. -He finished the sentence and hoped not to make her angry again; With a raised eyebrow Wynn looked at him with a certain charming impudence.

-You are like a child who has to be forced to eat.

The tension had unexpectedly dissolved for both of them and they smiled at each other, it was the beginning of a truce.

He left the next day with the contingent and Wynn enjoyed furnishing and organizing his own workshop in the small cabin that Björk had given him, he didn't know what it was or why, but he missed her presence, they had accidentally built a set of workshops between them. Comings and goings like cat and mouse.

He was working on organizing his own loom, the morning was calm and sunny, he enjoyed the fresh air and the smell of the nearby pine trees, when he heard screams in the distance, just like that day in Eastanglia, his senses became alert, as if his body He kept the memory of that day. She ran to the cabin and took the sword that Björk had given her, it was too heavy for her, but the burning in her chest gave her the strength to be able to hold it, at her waist she

always carried the knife that she had given her just in case. Fear sometimes gives blind courage and strength increases in the muscles.



Quickly, he ran to where the screams were and saw a group of men who were terrorizing the people, almost all of them women because Björk and her brothers had left that day before dawn with a contingent of men. He saw Einar and some men fighting and without thinking he joined in, brandishing his sword. He had never fought, but his spirit was stronger than his lack of experience, and he was grateful for the few classes his brother had given him. He did not hesitate and released all his fury. that she had inside and stabbed more than one invader, she sheltered some little ones who were crying in fear in one of the barns and returned to the center of the fight fighting alongside other brave women.

Björk and his men had rested their horses, they had decided to go by land, the route was longer than by sea, but it would make it easier for them to enter the city and negotiate, since they were not predisposed to an assault, but to sell the harvest and buy tools for the field. A horse was approaching at full gallop and they were waiting for it. Carl was one of the farmers in his clan. He jumped down from his saddle and ran to them.

-They must return now, they are attacking us, it is Klaus' clan, he took advantage of the fact that they left to enter, he must have believed that they would leave in the boats and that they would already be very far away.

They all set off, urging their horses as hard as they could. Björk, squeezing the reins tightly, thought about Wynn and her heart squeezed; she would go through the same hell again because of him. He had to arrive as soon as possible, all his people were at risk, the women and children of his men were, everyone with him had the same anguish, their families were in danger. He regretted that his great friend Ulf was not with them, he had left for Wessex, he was his unbeatable companion in battle, he prayed to the Gods that they would be able to arrive in time. They depended on themselves to defend what they could find when they arrived.

A quarter of a mile away they saw the towers of smoke, on the road three or four dead men next to their horses, they did not stop to see who they were, it was time to take care of the living, they would have time to pay attention to the dead.

Entering the village the shouts and exclamations of fighting became vivid, Björk jumped from her horse clinging to her sword, rushed tumultuously into the battle alongside her men, articulating hoarse cries like hungry wolves, the hand-to-hand fighting was renewed, it was harsh. and incessantly, Einar fought with all the strength that his

age allowed him, his shoulder is badly injured and he brandished his sword to the right and left, wounding every man in front of him, the fire in some cabins was renewed with greater intensity, the bodies were piling up. All around, Björk's arrival instilled courage and those who were defending the village reignited the courage within them.

Klaus' invading Vikings screamed disorderly with racing hearts and mercilessly clenched teeth, dragging women by the hair, familiar with assault and terror, they were like racing cars with sword and ax in hand.

Men and women were fighting for their lives, Björk heard voices while she wounded the enemies with her sword, but an angry and rapt woman's voice stood out above the male voices, she concentrated her gaze searching for the origin of the voice, with the hoping to see Wynn, there she was among the dust and smoke, her face was bloody and the paleness of a ghost, a man fallen at her feet grabbed her ankle, she looked at him calculating the thrust and stabbed her sword into his hand of her oppressor and when she released it Wynn gave him the fatal blow, leaving the man motionless, lifeless on the ground, another jumped at her back to knock her down with an axe, she looked up and met the gaze of Björk, who was approaching her taking giant steps, it was an instant in which he warned her that there was danger from behind, diverting her gaze to the man behind Wynn, she turned around counterbalancing her body holding the

sword and in her turn she opened the stomach of the Viking who He fell on his own knees. The force with which she had turned left her staggering, holding herself up with both hands with the sword on the ground. Björk arrived next to her and grabbed her waist, supporting her body.

Wynn, letting go of the sword, clung with her hands to her neck, every muscle in her being trembled, bathed in cold sweat she let herself be held and her strength left her as she felt safe in Björk's arms.

The silence felt like a veil that fell over them, they had defeated the invaders, everything was over. Night came, the sun set and with it it took the color of spilled blood and silenced screams.

Klaus's men who had been seriously injured were sent to Valhalla with an arrow in the heart and, capturing the few alive, they took them tied to a barn.

Until early morning, they organized the bodies of one side and the other, their own would be bathed and dressed for the funerals and the others would be taken to the gates of Klaus' village to take care of their own dead. The greed and foolishness of their leader would account for such an absurd assault on a neighboring clan.

The message sent through one of his men would be: do not face me again or you will pay with the lives of all your people and I will wipe them from the face of the earth as an offering to Thor.

The morning after the events, a contingent of men with Einar commanding them as their leader marched to the gates of Klaus. They knew that they would not have enough men to fight a new battle. For the moment, they were defeated, but they had to make the message clear, a future incursion. to the heart of Einar's clan would be the last thing they did.

Each family took care of their own wounded, helping each other with the food and herbal medicines they needed. These were times of rebuilding cabins and new defense strategies. The trip in search of new trade routes had to be delayed until they were organized again after the events.



Wynn was in bed resting and didn't wake up until a day and a half later. She was weak and fatigued, the strength she had left in the fight overwhelmed her, leaving her exhausted. The maids had bathed her with scented water and tended to her wounds; a scar on her temple and other small ones on her arms were healing quickly. The broth had restored warmth to his body and consciousness to his mind. Björk had been attentive to her health and so as not to bother

her he slept in her work cabin. When they told him that he had regained his strength, he went to see her.

-You told me that you didn't know how to fight

-I never told you that. You told me that you were going to teach me to fight like you and I already knew how to fight but as a Breton.

-Mmm... Anyway, I will make you a sword according to your build, the one I gave you at the ceremony is very heavy.

-I would appreciate it. How are you all? Your parents and siblings? Bliss and the rest?

-There were few casualties, luckily, Klaus's men bore the brunt. Luckily we weren't that far away and we were able to get there on time.

They had ambiguous emotions, Björk wanted to hug her, but she didn't know how and she felt the need to be hugged like when he took her in his arms, but neither dared to approach the other. They cordially said goodbye so that Wynn could continue resting while he went to the blacksmith's shop. At night Björk would have long talks with the rest of the men and Einar to evaluate how to reorganize.

The life of the village was regaining vigor and daily life returned to its normal fold. Björk marched again, dividing the contingent into a smaller number of men, one would go by sea and the other with what to trade by land, more warriors would remain in the village to protect everyone.

Wynn worked harder than usual in his tasks and in helping to rebuild the damage. Her mother-in-law Margit, in charge of the administration and organization of the women, reported the great help of the new daughter-in-law. Both were able to get to know each other even better and gained mutual respect. Life was beginning to be peaceful for Wynn but she still feared her husband deep in her heart despite feeling an attraction when she was next to him, but above all she feared the wedding night that had not yet materialized.



Björk had arrived in the city and managed to sell the merchandise at a good price, the next day they would return to Scania as scheduled. He went with some of his men to a tavern to drink, his mind kept wandering elsewhere, wondering what Wynn was doing. He got angry with himself, he needed to get it out of his head, the beautiful woman who from time to time served him the jug of deliciously flavored wine from those regions, looked at him on each occasion with candid eyes. When he took her by the waist she smiled and did not let the opportunity pass, she needed to release her impulses, it had been long

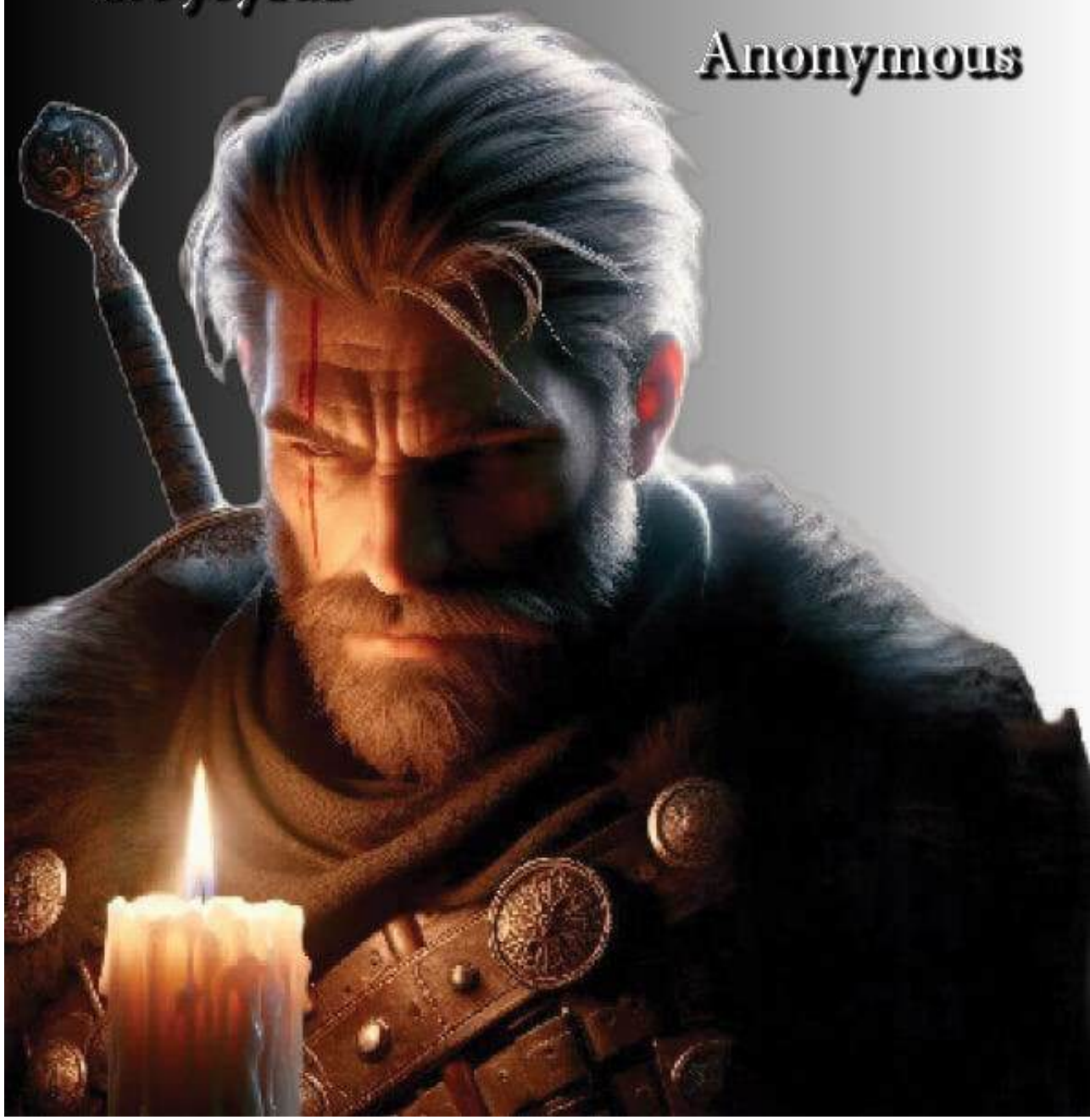
moons since she had enjoyed the body of a woman. It was a relief for his body but not for his heart, he felt empty after losing himself in the hot and soft female body. He gave her some gold coins perhaps more generously than usual, but guilt or a sadness never experienced was able to win the woman over to such generosity.

They left for Scania first thing in the morning, Björk had made a decision, she would consummate that damn marriage once and for all. Even if he hated him forever he wouldn't let her escape anymore, he had given her enough time to soften his heart, if she didn't give him the chance to keep it, he would marry that Hanne if the negotiations were fruitful and he would have more concubines than his father. If Wynn wanted to waste his life on resentment and the past it wouldn't be his problem.

CHAPTER 3

“The heart of a wise man rarely
It's joyful.”

Anonymous





The men arrived at the village after leaving the boats at the shipyard, the caravan by land would arrive the next day at the latest. Björk greeted her father and gave him the news of what was sold as well as the gold and silver obtained. He took his time to get to his cabin passing by the blacksmith shop, Leif would not go until the next day, he would stay with his wife the entire day after the trip they had made. He would take the opportunity to sort out some things, he told himself, he didn't really want to face Wynn. He deeply hoped that when he arrived she would pounce on him, happy to see him arrive, but he knew that it was a vain illusion. He walked around the blacksmith's

shop without starting or finishing anything until, defeated, he left for the cabin. The sun was already setting, there were no more excuses.

When we arrived Wynn was not there, he was probably in his small cabin working on spinning, he prepared the tub alone, the maids had retired due to the absence and permission of the woman of the house. Good for marriage, he said to himself, I am as neglected as before when I was single. Not even a woman to serve me broth. He put the water to heat up for the bath.



Exhausted from the day's work, she was organizing the wool, when one of her maids came in to tell her that her husband had arrived from the trip. Wynn told her that both maids could go to rest and she would take care of Björk. Her heart was beating intensely, she turned to the loom and stood looking at him without daring to go to the cabin, she didn't know how or what to say when she saw him. Because she herself didn't know what she felt at that moment, happiness, fear, anxiety; or all together. After an hour she went out to the garden they kept behind the loom hut and took some vegetables to make a broth to accompany the stored salted meats and serve something to eat for her husband.

Since the day of the assault in the village, his resentment towards Björk had disappeared, but the fear that he would hurt her feelings in some way remained more vivid than ever, the fragility of his heart was becoming evident, this damn barbarian was making her weak, she had even forgotten her plan to return to Eastan-glia to escape, she was living a new peace far from her land and she was falling in love with Scania and its people, not so different from her own, humanity in her unique genesis makes us equal in the face of the passions and miseries that each being experiences in its short life. But there was something else that made her feel vulnerable, and it was the candor that she couldn't help but feel on her cheeks, when she remembered Björk attentive to her health or when he took her in his arms on the day of the neighboring clan's raid; his masculine face contorted by the fight, his worried and fearful look as he ran over her body looking for her wounds, his immense body pressing her against him saying: "I'm here, don't be afraid." So different from when she had met him but equally impenetrable.

It was a mystery to her, behind his icy gaze there was something deep like the sea in him. You can see the surface of the sea although you never know how deep its abyss is. That's how he was; What scared him, like his arrogance and cruelty, like how distant he behaved, made a wall prevent him from seeing his emotions, but it was the same thing that attracted him.

She would leave the cold and distant theatricality that she always used with him, allowing everything to happen spontaneously, and for him to have the opportunity as he pleased, it was preferable to let the moment flow and he would see what was going to happen. He headed to the cabin with the basket of provisions and crossed himself before entering with a sigh from his lips.

He opened the door and there was more light than usual, several candles were lit in the room, he assumed that Björk was there, he left the basket on the table and went to the room, when he entered he saw the candles around the tub with water hot that warmed the room. Björk had her back turned, storing objects in the wooden chest closed with chains that were her property and she never dared to open it because of his demand, but the times she opened it in his presence she had realized that they were clothes and objects of hers. trips, he was not worried that she knew about its contents, he just wanted her not to have it, like someone who keeps his most beloved belongings, he was jealous of his objects.

- Hello, you have arrived. Do you need something? He said it softly without animosity or desire to confront.

-Undress and wash, you smell like sheep, the water gets cold. He was determined to make the marriage happen.

Wynn was embarrassed and like a little girl she sniffed her elbow and her clothes and although she did not smell a bad smell because she

had not been with the animals, she assumed that her nose would have already become accustomed to the smells of the spinning mill and that is why she did not I perceived nothing unusual. Björk went to see the pot of water boiling, more than anything to give her shyness space. Upon returning to the room, Wynn was in the tub covering her breasts under the water, blushing and trying to keep her face composed.

Wynn knew that this would be the night he would uncover a mystery for better or worse. Her pride prevented her from being honest with herself and recognizing that deep in her heart she wanted him. He looked at her coldly without betraying emotion as she slowly took off her chemise and linen pants.

It was the first time she had seen a naked man so close, she felt the difference in temperature instantly between his body and the warm water in the tub, a burning sensation in her body filled her. He, in his parsimony, was giving her time to get used to seeing him and spark something in her. Wynn admired the muscles and hairy chest as wide as his shoulders, the white hair that fell on his back covered with scars, and the long, strong legs of the Viking; She blushed when she saw the erect member between them. When Björk turned around, she stared at her, which she avoided, lowering her eyelids in shame.

He had to recognize that these men took care of their appearance more than the Anglo-Saxons, despite working in the blacksmith shop,

their hands and feet had short, clean nails and their hair was washed and combed every day even when they were in a camp. He had his own toiletry set as well as the one he had given to the young woman. Every Saturday Björk took a bath and put wildflower water in it. Wynn had grown accustomed to doing the same with great pleasure.

He took the jug of hot water that he had brought and approaching the tub, he dumped the contents in one go on Wynn's head, who shouted in his surprise:

-Do you think I'm a frog in boiling water? -She looked at him furiously and he smiled, there was the usual Wynn.

- I would say you look more like an eel with squirrel eyes. Jump out at once, the water gets cold.- He handed him a small bottle.- Here, I brought it to you from the north, I know it comes from Byzantium, it is an ointment made from flowers called daisies, they are used for inflammations and wounds on the skin. It will help you with your scars.

Wynn took the bottle, thanking him for the gift with the same disdain with which he gave it to him, and looked for his towel to get out of the tub, covering himself as best he could; Deep down he wanted Björk to show even a modicum of interest. They were naked for the first time in such an intimate situation and they behaved as if they were both dressed to go out into the countryside. He got into the tub and, closing his eyes, ordered: - Wash my hair.

Wrapped in the towel, she pulled out a stool and sat down ready to do what she was told. It was the first time she had buried her fingers in her hair, she didn't want to seem like what she was, a young woman who was blossoming in every intimate and erotic detail, desiring the man in front of her.

-I'm not one of your sheep, make it gentle like the woman you are.-
Wynn eased the rhythm and pressure of his soapy fingers, caressed his hair, massaging his temple and sensually drew circles with his index fingers on the back of his neck to relax the tense muscles. .
Wynn got up to go get a comb.

-Where are you going? Björk asked anxiously.

-For a comb you have knots that look like a pigeon's nest on your head.

-Put one more jug of water.- She went to fill it in the pot on the stove and warmed it with cold water so as not to burn his skin. When she returned, she dumped it abruptly as he had done before.

-What does it feel like to be a frog? He told her laughing.

Björk jumped out of the tub and, imposing all her nudity on him with a hoarse and seductive voice, said:

-Dry me- She blushed and brought him the stool where she had been sitting. He looked at her inquisitively.

-Either you sit down or I'll climb on him, trying to control his modesty. He sat down.

She was small and he was very tall, so he obeyed her while she took the towel that was on the bed. When she turned to Björk, his face was at the level of her breasts. He began to dry her hair and the atmosphere became perfumed as only passion surrounds lovers. After a while Björk took the towel that was wrapped around her and let it fall. She had soft and proportional shapes, small with a delicate and shiny torso, long legs for her height with perfect lines, her contoured hips and the blonde hair that held the long-awaited pearl, her firm and young skin contrasted with his tanned one. and tanned by the sun and the sea. I really saw her as I imagined her. With her hands she held the firm, beautiful breasts, kissing them and caressing her nipples. Wynn felt intoxicated and wrapped her hands around the strong, masculine neck. His beard hurt her with pleasure, rubbing against her breasts and belly. He stood up taking her in his arms, her feminine legs felt the touch of his erect and firm member, he took her to the bed kissing her on the lips, she let herself be controlled by the tongue that devoured her. She knew that no man had caressed her and she tried to be delicate, but the long-retained anxiety was difficult to control. Instinctively, as only nature knows how to do, she opened her legs seeking to relieve the burning that was arising under her belly. She felt his body covering her and her body, as if it had a life of its own, arched, offering itself whole. He wanted to penetrate her although the joy of seeing her open to him between sighs and gasps was

such that he didn't want it all to end, he needed to kiss her, squeeze her buttocks and play with her wet and humid sex, her pink and vibrant vulva on his lips, taking her. From his hips he buried his face, drinking it and tasting its intimate smell. He climbed up to her neck, grabbed her wrists tightly on both sides of her childish face.

-Let go of me, I don't want to escape.- He released her, taking her under the neck with one hand and with the other he raised her virgin hip to his height, penetrating her, he felt the resistance of the female body.

-Slowly please, slowly.

He knew that it was hurting him, the resistance of her hymen, witness of her virginity, generated a small pain in his phallus about to explode with every second that he penetrated her, giving him time, repressing his anxiety, until she relaxed her muscles. She tightened her muscles and allowed him to go in. Clinging to his back, she slid her hands to his buttocks, pushing him towards her with all her candor and joy.

Silence did not exist between them, the sound of their mouths biting each other and mixing their saliva, the sexes that got wet rubbing together, everything had sounds that they perceived in drunkenness, the sighs, his hoarse panting, the moan of his voice. hers, everything was skin, smells, flavors; The senses were experiencing the exquisiteness of pleasure and eroticism. The tears of climax in Wynn's eyes appeared along with Björk's trembling as she lost herself in the last

coming and going of his burning member, the fire of their sexes in communion exploded in both of them, he knew how to wait for her until the end as an experienced and attentive man. to the pleasure of the woman he had conquered. She fell asleep on his chest while he played with her hair.



The cool morning found her wrapped in the blankets, the young woman she had been woke up like a woman, she looked for him in bed, but he was not there, she sat up in bed and the silence let her know that Björk had left, she washed her face and her hands, she combed her hair and put on a dress of vibrant colors in her guards as her spirit was, leaving the cabin hoping to see him in the barn or in the orchard, fear began to be present. Hadn't their night together been pleasant for him? She gave herself without hesitation, she honestly gave him the innocence of her femininity, without confrontation and lovingly. Hadn't she been woman enough for him? For her, sex had been magical, she needed to hug him, feel his body, his kisses, embrace himself in his manly immensity.

He came back for a basket as an excuse to run an errand and decided to go to the blacksmith shop bringing him some rolls, it was probably there. He saw him in the distance forging metal. When Wynn arrived,

she greeted him, he looked up, she expected to see warmth in his eyes, but like a slap to her soul, she saw coldness as if last night had never existed.

-What's happening? -He told him, hammering the metal in his hands again.

-I brought you something to eat, I assumed you would be hungry after last night- I needed to know what he felt after what he had experienced, but he had little hope of knowing, his attitude was indifferent.

-Leave it there, I'm busy right now- His words were like a knife piercing his soul, his heart was beating in such a way that he could hear the unbridled rhythm in his chest. She felt like she was fainting, she held on to the table near her and let the rolls roll away.

He turned around without words and left.


Björk knew that his behavior had hurt her, she felt a pain in her chest and an anguish that knotted her throat. He didn't know why he had done it, but he was sure he had made a mistake. What spell had this little witch cast on him? He couldn't get her out of his mind and now out of his body. The passionate images came to mind again and again and his erect sex reminded him that the desire had not diminished but exacerbated even more. You don't want what you don't know, but his desire grew day by day since he met her and now with the truth

he knew on his skin he felt weak in front of her in a way that no woman had ever made him feel.

Wynn, with her soul in tears, headed to the river, feeling broken, her body was also crying for the lack of love and she needed to feel peace on the banks of the river. Going to a rock, she sat down, leaving the basket on the ground while her tears They burst into tears.

While in the blacksmith's shop the hammer was launched like a car launched by Björk's hand, the door was left half destroyed, angry with himself he kicked it out of its socket making it fall, he took large steps towards the cabin ready to apologize, without- Lying desolate like an orphan, When he arrived there was neither the young woman nor the basket in which he had brought her the bread; The small spinning mill was closed, when she knitted she left the door open if it was a beautiful day like today, to ventilate the environment and let in natural light. He wasn't in the garden either; The river bank was almost a mile away, where the rocks were that washed with the water course on the way to the sea, where Wynn liked to go.

He felt a cold run through his body, he remembered the image on the boat when he returned with her from Eastanglia, his face sad and determined with the paleness that the desire to die colors the countenance. River, sea, sadness, Wynn. Running with her mind cold to be

able to sustain the hope that  her fear was sterile, what woman who has been loved for the first time would want to die? Guilt whispered to her without mercy - One who has not been hugged when she woke up, nor received a loving word, nor felt the loving gaze of the man who took her.

Shortly after arriving he saw her sitting looking at the river. His soul returned to his body and he became aware of his own heart. Recovering his breath, he began to walk towards her. When he reached her side, he placed his hand on the young woman's shoulder and called her.

Wynn turned around and looked at him with eyes red from the tears he had shed, with a trembling voice he said:

-Please, kill me once and for all, women are worthless. They sell us, rape us, use us and murder us. While among us we kill ourselves to be used by you, for a little attention and begging for protection and we are the ones who bring you into the world with our womb for our own misfortune, I beg you, kill me now.

She took her face in her hands, he knelt next to her and surrounded her with his arms.

-I'm sorry.

"I hate myself for having fallen in love with you." Not only did she recognize him, without thinking she heard for the first time what she

had denied hearing that her heart had been trying to tell her for a long time.

-I fell in love with you too Wynn, I don't know what you did, maybe you just existed for me. But I swear I love you.

She let go of his embrace and walked away from him, bewildered, she didn't know if she had heard correctly, she leaned against a tree, doubting if it was true. Björk approached, cornering her against the tree, holding her waist with one arm and with the other behind her neck, he began to kiss her tenderly, she allowed herself to be caressed, feeling drunk again, his kisses traveled along her neck and shoulders, his hands searched for her breasts. under the dress, but he found her wet and hot sex, he lifted her to the height of his pelvis and she surrounded him with her legs, his rough skin, his mouth eager to devour her in each kiss, the strength of His hands holding her made her need to undress, to surrender as in the night. When their bodies were already burning feverishly, he slowly penetrated her again and again and everything was calm, she felt him inside her, lost in the sighs and gasps, yes, he was hers. Wynn demanded him with her anxious movements and her hands caressing his chest, opening her lips desperately searching for his with her tongue. When the skin regained its warmth after the fire, he did not withdraw from her, he remained attached, kissing her delicately on the lips.

-Are you okay Wynn?

-Yes.-looking into his eyes seeking to erase the doubt that the tenderness of his gaze would not become cold as snow.

-I promise to protect you and make you happy, forgive me, I have had many women, it is the first time I have had a wife.

-I understand, sorry for being so weak and acting like this.

They kissed softly, reluctantly separating their bodies because they needed the security that physical contact gave in the absence of words that they felt, but did not know how to express. They bathed in the river and returned to the cabin hand in hand, with that calm happiness that gives the certainty of knowing one is loved.



The rainy day found the brothers drinking beer, tired and listless, playing dice, Ingolf was commenting on anecdotes about his last expedition in Jakobsland in the Iberian Peninsula and how exquisite some crustaceans called barnacles that they ate in those latitudes had turned out to be. .

-You spend your time eating whatever shit, brother, one day you're going to die of indigestion instead of dying like a warrior- Bjarne slapped his brother on the back in a friendly manner.

-He's not even goin to reach the gates of Valhalla because he's a glutton, hahahahaha- said Sven.

-You say it out of envy, you are so skeletal that the sigh of a Saxon is going to knock you down.

-One less for after our father dies. -Bjarne contributed, he never filtered his thoughts, not even with a second's delay did his mouth bring life to his impulsive ideas. Everyone was silent and the air became heavy. If there was one thing they knew, it was the greed that he had not been able to hide since he was a child. They encouraged him to elaborate.

-Are you worried about the Bjarne issue?

-"Don't you ever do it?"- The darkness of the night had come ahead of its usual time and the gloom in the large banquet hall where only they were gathered illuminated by the torches that Sven had taken care of light while they drank, he noticed the tense and attentive faces listening to Bjarne.

-Björk was always a dreamer deep down, we all thought that her only dream was to sail, carry out the expeditions that her father arranged and work buried in her blacksmith shop with Leif. But in case you didn't notice, he married the Anglo-Saxon woman willing to ask for her place in Eastanglia as a husband and then marry Torsten's daughter to expand the trade route in the north. That doesn't sound to me like the dreamer we thought it was but like a slow rise in our father's esteem

-I think you are exaggerating, you are the firstborn, the throne will be bequeathed to you, father has already distributed the lands to each one, he has sent Ulf and Jette to Britain to organize the settlements that we have won.-Ingolf tried to appease His half-brother, as the son of a concubine, was not on Bjarne's list of threats nor did he pretend to be, power struggles were not his thing, expeditions and the land that his slaves worked were enough for him. Not so, Sven, Bjarne's brother by mother and father, shared with him the greed and desire for power, but he complemented Bjarne in being more cautious when speaking and a strategist, sharing his brother's desires. They combined one in silence and the other in verbiage.

-What Bjarne means is that Björk is achieving many merits, her marriages, her ferocity and successes in war and the business relationships she has been achieving with her trips to the north. You know well that even if he is not the firstborn, if his father proposes him to the leaders and they accept it, he can access the throne.

-Would that mean he and Leif would have the power? Ingolf asked.

-Exactly! The two of them are very close and we will be out of control of everything under their command.

-Look, don't think that I'm going to stain my hands with my own blood.- Ingolf was uncomfortable, he had always been in the middle of the two sides of brothers, getting along well with them; but it was also true that neither side had fully included him because he was the

only son of a concubine of Einar. Since he was a child, he navigated between two waters without truly taking sides; that lukewarmness dragged him along, making him ambiguous and distant, searching for a place among his brothers that would legitimize him in the family.

-No one is saying about harming the family, I'm just saying that we should lower Björk's price in the eyes of father without falling into provocations, father would reflect if he sees some mistakes that Björk could make - Sven said

-Einar is not one of those who allows himself to be manipulated, it would be enough for him to see the facts and some financial loss.- Bjarne thought out loud.

-And Leif? -Ingolf asked.

-If Björk falls, she drags him to Leif, anyway Father doesn't take it into account, he is weak with women and Father doesn't like it when a man is dominated by skirts

-Leif is a weak point in Björk's heart-Sven answered.

-It's not just Leif or his mother, I've been watching him these days, the Anglo-Saxon woman touched his soul, he fell in love.- Less greedy Ingolf had the possibility of being more empathetic with relationships and more affectionate towards love being able to see its radiance, but he did not want to be excluded by whoever gained power in the future, so he joined the conspiracy.

-Is that true? -Bjarne asked.- Now that Ingolf mentions it, he may be right.

Sven remained thoughtful, if that was true it was easier to focus on this weak point, it would not imply harm to the family and no one would defend the woman at any cost. Foreign and Anglo-Saxon, with no family other than Björk, even without descendants, young and docile, how could this be a reason to harm Björk? Without violating her of course, that would mean death for whoever touched her, what could harm her in the eyes of her husband? Betrayal!

-Mmm, when you are silent Sven your head burns with ideas. - Bjarne brought him out of his musings.

-Betrayal, brothers, what else? Björk has always hated betrayal, remember how many she has banished or beheaded for it. There is nothing that annoys him more than lies and betrayal, he would never forgive her.

-I don't see Wynn seducing a man, Sven. She is modest, with character yes, but she is not going to fall into the arms of another.- Ingolf assured.

-We'll see, we'll see... -Bjarne was satisfied with the discussion, it had been very useful today, he had added Ingolf to the conspiracy they had hatched with Sven.



The days passed. Like every morning, Björk used to get up as soon as day broke, stare at Wynn's face, cover his shoulder with the blanket, and stealthily prepare herbal tea with slices of bread for breakfast. He enjoyed the silence while the young woman used to sleep for a couple more hours. He took the opportunity to be with himself before going to the smithy, the gods gave him a time of peace and sweet love, he felt grateful and wished that this time would never end. He wanted to propose to Wynn that he leave for Britannia and settle in the colony that Ulf was leading. His berserker friend had not yet returned, but as soon as he did he would listen to the news and raise it with Wynn, he was almost sure he would like the idea. He could establish a blacksmith shop and have the quiet life he longed for.

While his thoughts were flying, his gaze was lost among the bushes and the cold of the morning made him feel alive. Suddenly, arms from

behind took him by the waist, it was Wynn who rested his head on his back and his body adjusted to his. He took her hands in his and asked:

-How did my squirrel wake up?

-We are very hungry, let's go inside love, let's drink another mug of tea together.

They entered the cabin and while Wynn was arranging the pots and pouring the infusion into the jugs, Björk, anxious, could not stand the uncertainty until she saw Ulf, and wanted to know what the young woman wanted for their future.

-Tell me squirrel, are you happy with me?

Wynn looked at him in amazement, she did not expect him to be worried about it, always confident and authoritative he took for granted how things should be, and in truth she adapted to the simple country life that these Vikings actually led, the It was true that he did not like expeditions, pillage and assaults were not to his liking, but everywhere there was war and fights for land or power, it was true that these barbarians were more daring and violent with a more evident greed but no more than other ruthless and hypocritical kingdoms. It was the world in which they lived in those times and she accepted it without ceasing to dream of a better world, trying to make her daily life as Christian as possible.

-What do you think? -Looking at him with her sweet and candid eyes.

-I don't know, women are usually difficult to understand if they don't want to be clear. Just tell me if you are happy or not, the question is not difficult: why do women always go around in circles?

-Well, if you are going to compare me with all the women you have been with, the one who doesn't understand anything is you. -She said it out of jealousy because he implied that he had experience with many women.

He pulled her by one arm, sitting her on his knees.

-Mmm... Are you jealous? Hahahaha.-giving him a kiss on the cheek.

-Jump, barbarian, pretending to get out of the hug - Of course I'm happy with you, if not I would have already used the sword you gave me.

-Would you like us to go live in Britannia? You could regain your noble place.

She froze at the question, her plan to escape from Scania had been forgotten since she fell in love with him, and although she liked the idea of seeing her brother and uncle again, she did not want to meet again. with his father. The pain of that departure was a wound that had not healed.

-Why do you want to go? For you to occupy that noble place?

-Not exactly, the idea is not negligible, I'll be honest, but more than anything to live in the colony and stop the assaults, really Wynn, I want a quiet life, I want children with you, I'm not even encouraging

marriage to the daughter of Torsten, I still don't know her and I don't want it, I'm afraid she's very beautiful and tempts me. He said it with every intention of making her jealous and achieving his goal he had to endure Wynn's slaps and insults full of love and desire. The love game ended in bed with young and burning passion.

In the afternoon Björk and Leif were working in the blacksmith's shop, when one of the slaves came to tell them that Ulf and his men from Britannia had arrived. They closed the blacksmith shop and headed to the large room to meet the newly arrived contingent. When they arrived they made their way through the crowd and in a hug Björk met Ulf.

-How are you doing my favorite berserker?

-With some new scars, you have gotten married, they tell me, at a good time. Is the young woman difficult?

-Not so much Ulf, but I have tamed her enough hahaha. Tell me, how have you been in the settlement?

-I must tell you that I bring bad news- he sadly invited him with a beer and sat down with both brothers to tell him the latest events. The colony had been devastated, men, women, children were decimated, a few thousand managed to escape, with families destroyed and many men injured, the Anglo-Saxons had attacked them at night, failing to comply with the treaty that Björk had achieved. They had to regroup and return more fiercely without forgiveness or mercy to re-

cover what was lost. Among those who had died was Jette, Ulf greatly regretted it, since they had become united during that time, she was pregnant when a Breton stabbed her to death, his heart boiled for revenge, he had buried her next to her shield, the dagger he loved, sword and his horse. Björk and Leif listened attentively. Ulf had already informed Einar of the news and would soon gather all his sons to send them on a large-scale assault to win the lands forever and settle again.

Later Einar actually reunited with his sons, they sent messengers to the rest of the Vikings in the north and east to add forces, only Sven would stay in Scania with a group sufficient to defend the village. The rest along with Einar would leave as soon as possible to prevent the Anglo-Saxons from recovering even more after the last battle.

Upon returning home, Björk informed Wynn of what had happened and that she would soon leave. Her tears made her fear for the first time that she would die in battle and not return to his arms. He did not want to ask her to accompany him, to protect his life and because he understood that it would be very difficult for both of them to see how he killed their people, she did not offer to go either, she was afraid to see the face of death again and see the man she loved. bathed in Anglo-Saxon blood it hurt his soul. In any case, they had to agree on it together.

-Tell me Wynn if you want to come with me, it's not necessary, you can sign a document and that will be enough.

Wynn remained silent for a few long minutes, he respected her time, he knew she was evaluating the situation. She remembered her pre-marriage plan, to get married and at the first opportunity return to Eastanglia and flee from the Vikings, but she had lived long enough among them, she knew their kindness and how they accepted her with much less prejudice than the Vikings. That the Anglo-Saxons would have had towards them if the situation were reversed. She had shared moments that had managed to create loving bonds in her and there was the reality that she had fallen in love with this Viking, with his brutal sincerity and frankness, the intensity of his masculinity that respected her as a woman and wife. His cold, sharp gaze that hid the softness and warmth he had never known. He no longer wanted to flee, he preferred to forget his roots, his heart did not want to return to the past.

-No Björk, I don't want to go with you. I prefer to wait for you here, this is my home now.

They made love with the fear that it would be the last time, without sleeping, Björk left very early before the sun rose.

They reached the coast of Eastanglia and landed at night, before dawn they would enter into an assault. The camp would not be made

until long after the battle, while the men were strategically positioned surrounding villages and in particular abbeys and castles, the entire length and breadth of the coast was invaded stealthily by the thousands of Viking ships that had arrived from different kingdoms. Vikings, women and men alike hid in the shadows waiting for the order to attack, women would stay in the rear and would only enter combat if necessary, their usefulness would be to care for the wounded and later help in the settlement if they achieved victory. Each Viking group with its respective leaders would attack different coastal points from Weesex, Eastanglia and two other kingdoms. It would be a full-scale assault. Einar and his children aimed to recover Dommoc and enforce Björk's union by claiming her own by marriage, carrying a letter written in Wynn's handwriting recognizing her will in the union and claiming her lands in favor of her husband. With blood and letter they would recover what was lost.



The day dawned red with blood and screams, it had never been so devastating and brutal, no natives were left alive, only a few survived to be imprisoned in harsh chains, women and children were brutally decimated. Björk had lost his soul in the massacre, he had no feelings of compassion or mercy, what he had experienced had also killed him spiritually, like an automaton he exercised his leadership, he did not want to think about what had happened, he should not or he would go crazy from terror. His brother Ingolf had been wounded by a spear and hundreds of arrows in his chest, Ulf seriously wounded was holding the spear that had pierced him in the back, Lief had found him among the bodies of others all piled up with arrows on their bodies, seeing them Björk knelt with them on the ground watered with the blood of all the men. Ulf, delirious with the death that embraced him, took Björk by the arm:

-It was an honor to be your friend Björk, I hope this is the last battle for you and the Gods bless you in the future. Valhalla awaits me, I am happy. Give me the black henbane to prepare once again for my journey.- Björk gave him to drink the concoction that the berserkers drank before going into battle, a kind of drink that made them enter a trance, plunging them into a state of unusual fury and bravery.

-I feel the same way Ulf, I will engrave the sign of your berserker lineage on my skin. May the Valkyries be with you.-With a sigh Ulf departed, leaving his life as a warrior in battle.

Leif and Björk dragged the warrior's body to the inert Ingolf, preserving them from the mass of flesh and bones everywhere. Björk mourned the death of her brother but she was closer to Ulf and her grief was deeper for his loss. Then they would take them to the camp to clean them and take them to Scania to give them the ritual among their families, unlike the rest of the Viking dead who would be buried in that ungrateful land that refused again and again to fall into its domain.

Einar, exhausted from the fight, realized that his heart was playing tricks on him, he had to rest and recognize that his time in battle was over, deep down he would have wanted to die in battle, old age made him sensitive to so much. death around him, he was tired of fighting and pillaging all his life, he knew that he would not be able to see his people in time of peace, as farmers and merchants as he dreamed of

when he was young, life was this, an eternal battle. Ragnarök was life on this earth, the Gods played with them, what difference was there between these men and their families with theirs, none. And yet they continued to kill each other. He had no strength to meet Hunn the ruler of this swamp land. He would send Björk and Leif, he needed to mourn Ingolf like a father. Bjarne entered his tent, he had slight injuries and a fierce expression even with his blood boiling from the battle.

-Father, we must go see Hunn, get ready.

-Forget it, Björk and Leif will go.

-Why them? You are the king and I am your firstborn.-Bjarne feared that his father had plans that he did not know about.

-Because these lands will be for Björk, don't forget that he is married to the Anglo-Saxon's daughter.

Bjarne felt furious, this seemed like a betrayal on Einar's part, by right he was his firstborn and with the right to succeed him.

-I am your heir by right, it is not fair.

-You are my heir at Scania, here the right belongs to Björk.

-So I have given everything of myself on this earth only for the benefit of my brother.- Hatred for Björk grew in his chest, he would not allow that affront.

-Enough Bjarne! Your greed surpasses mine in my youth. It is my decision and don't even think about attacking the family because I will make you pay with your life. You're impulsive, I don't know how much you deserve my place. Go away now, I don't feel like arguing anymore. And try to mourn your dead brother Ingolf.

-It's okay, father, sorry, I didn't mean to offend you.- He left in silence, swearing to take revenge inside. The fury of his wounded pride only fueled ideas that had already been planted in Scania some time ago. He would return home to organize Björk's downfall with Sven.



Leif and Björk washed their sore muscles and cleaned themselves up to present themselves with dignity to claim the victory they had achieved against Hunn. Leif was gloomy, this pillage surpassed anything he had ever seen in his life, he could not console the guilt and disgust he felt, one thing was the usual pillage or killing the enemy in battle, another was killing small children and innocent women. , without even giving them the opportunity to live as slaves. The exemplification that the great Viking Ghutrhum had imposed had been fulfilled by all the leaders, including Einar. Björk put her mind cold and determined to meet the objectives, she did not allow herself to become

sensitive, she did not even want to think about Wynn, she kept her far from her thoughts.

They entered Hunn's castle, who was waiting for them pissing in his pants, trembling as much as his cowardice allowed, which was a lot.

-Hunn, we meet again, father-in-law.- He said it as if spitting out the words, he detested this weak and small man without nobility or value.

-Björk, how is my daughter?

-It's none of your business. I am here to avenge the death of my people on your lands and claim what belongs to me. Here you have the document signed by your daughter that proves it. You deserve death for your betrayal of our agreement.

-It was not like that, my brothers Beonna and Ethelberht together with Ethelred of Wessex committed the banishment.

-It would have been banishment if they had been sent to Scania, however, they were buried under its stones,- Leif clarified.

-I will show you my resignation from that company, I assumed this would happen, knowing you Björk, I knew you would come for revenge or send me my daughter's head.

-I would never send you Wynn's head, I know very well that that would have been a bargain for you. Where is your son?

-He left after you left him with Beonna and took my daughter, he didn't forgive me and he enlisted with some warrior monks in Normandy

for a while, then he went to the Byzantine Empire as a mercenary, I haven't had any news and I don't even know if he is dead or alive.

-We will make a new treaty Hunn, with my conditions and without any claim on your part, I demand this land by union and it will remain under my domain, my brother Leif will settle for a while until I return, administering our people and organizing them. You will be a puppet on your throne and you will be relegated to your chambers, I only keep you alive because you are my father-in-law and give legitimacy to my authority.

-I have lost without having agreed to wage this war, give me the papers to sign.

Everything was signed and the Vikings left. Hunn sat on his throne, drank a glass of wine and was cynically glad to be alive, stripped of power and wealth, he said to himself, -At least I can eat and live like a king, thank goodness I handed him over.-to Wynn, something useful turned out in the end.



Einar, Bjarne and Björk said goodbye to Leif, who would stay in charge of the settlement and wait for his family once everything was calmer. The bodies of Ingolf and Ulf were taken clean and wrapped in

linen sheets soaked with herbs; the cold of the sea would preserve the condition of the men, preventing putrefaction.

Björk remained silent the entire journey and, enduring the winds that raged on the waves at the bow of the ship, like a frozen statue, not one of her muscles moved from there, until she reached Scania. Einar, Bjarne, and the rest of the men also fell silent. There were no slaves or hostages this time, no one who was Anglo-Saxon had been left alive.



Wynn prayed every day for Björk's life so that he would return safely, she truly missed him, her heart and her body needed him, she used to wake up crying because she dreamed of him being hurt or dead and she calmed her fears and anxiety by working longer hours at the loom or in the garden and farm.

The dizziness and vomiting began to appear, he did not know if it was the sadness that weakened his body until the months passed and the blood in his lower abdomen stopped coming, he finally realized when one morning when he went to clean the empty blacksmith shop. He crossed paths with Margit, his mother-in-law.

-Good morning Wynn, what are you doing?

-Hello Margit, I came to clean a little and see if everything was in order.

-I thought I would do the same, look at you, you are already one of us, I am happy to see that my son is happy with you. I'm sorry that our first meeting was so unpleasant.

-It doesn't matter Margit, I understood it later.

-I'm glad, tell me, have you been feeling well these days?

-Why do you ask it?

-You have bright eyes and rosy cheeks, you look very healthy. Are you pregnant?

Wynn mentally reviewed that he had not had any blood for a few months, he was hungrier than usual, and he had had a period of vomiting and dizziness, although they had now disappeared. She felt her breasts swollen and a heat that came on suddenly. She had thought about asking her friend Bliss, but since the symptoms had disappeared she didn't mention it to her. This is what she told her mother-in-law.

-Yes my dear, you are pregnant. You will see it by watching your belly grow. You should take care of yourself, don't lift heavy things and be careful with what you eat, let me know about anything that doesn't seem normal to you. What a joy! Nothing better than a new life. Björk will have a beautiful surprise when he returns. The gods will not abandon him now, I'm sure. - He hugged her sincerely and Wynn felt grateful for it. She returned to the cabin happy and, hugging her bel-

ly, she prayed even more fervently for Björk's return and for the son growing in her womb.



The men disembarked, dividing, some would take the ships to the shipyard and Einar and his sons would ride horses to their homes. They were received as always when they returned, beer, mead and feast everywhere. The men's spirits improved, happy and drunk they resumed their lives.

The next day the funeral honors of Ingolf and Ulf would be done. Einar was received by Margit and attended to by her, who had already notified Björk without mentioning Wynn's pregnancy, that she was in her cabin waiting for him. After a couple of beers, Björk went home without much desire, she was afraid of meeting the young woman, the deaths that weighed on her shoulders had the blood of the young woman she loved.

When he arrived he opened the door and saw her with her back to the stove, his heart felt warm when he saw her, Wynn turned around af-

ter the sound of the door, she rushed towards him hugging him, happy to see him safe and sound, Björk felt her thick and He took her away from him looking at her belly, great was his surprise, she looked at him with a smile and red cheeks, her eyes only told him that she loved him. He smiled and hugged her again, they kissed for a long time, tasting happiness without words.

Wynn prepared a bath for him and while he undressed, she wanted to know what had happened.

-Were there many casualties? Did you see my father and brother?

-Your father is alive and as despicable as always and your brother is in Byzantium as a mercenary, no one knows about him. Ingolf and Ulf died in battle. –Björk did not look her in the eyes and her words did not show her feelings, Wynn felt that she was hiding something from him.

-Too bad. Very sorry. Have slaves come with you?

-No, none-it was strange to Wynn that they had not brought slaves

-Was everything peaceful, was the documentation you brought useful?

Björk took the time to answer him, she couldn't find the words to tell him that all her compatriots had died under her ax and sword.

-We did not bring slaves, because there were no Anglo-Saxons left alive, I respected Hunn just for being your father.

Wynn felt dizzy, he sat in front of him on the bed, he imagined all his people dead.

-Did women and children survive?

-I told you that no Anglo-Saxon survived.

Wynn staggered up and with vomit in his mouth he left the cabin, he needed fresh air, he felt like he was suffocating. As Björk let her experience her pain as best she could, darkness closed in on him, guilt, pain, anger, he felt it all at the same time. He regretted that Wynn was not Danish, that she had been born in another land, and that he was guilty of killing his people. He cursed loving her, not being able to banish her from his heart as well as that son who came into their lives. How to explain to that child that life was like that, a constant struggle between living and dying at the whim of the Gods.

After finishing his bath, Wynn had recovered from the shock and was preparing a frugal dinner for him, he accepted it even without being hungry, with a few words they lay down next to each other but for the first time without the hug that both of them needed so much. that moment. Wynn cried silently in bed and Björk listened to her without comforting her, hating himself.

The following days Wynn stayed at the community loom with other women, she needed female company but above all she needed to put

distance from Björk, she loved him deeply but when she was with him, the images of death and pain assaulted her, she saw Björk killing innocents and his soul was squeezed, he needed time to reunite with the Björk he knew in his arms. They were both cold and distant, a wall had risen between them and they didn't know how to break it down. They feared that the other had stopped loving, the present hurt them. With the excuse of Wynn's pregnancy, they did not maintain relationships either and the distance grew like the desire to find a way to return to what they had been. Björk stayed late at the blacksmith shop and Wynn began to fear that another woman was taking her place, his unfounded fear growing inside him like his almost full-term belly.



Bjarne with his arms crossed on his chest and Sven with a sharp look met in the darkness of the large empty banquet hall, in the light of the torches their tense faces weaved the conspiracy against their own brother.

-How did the assault in Dommoc turn out?

-It was exhausting, I have never killed so much in such a short time. Björk was primed, he killed without mercy, cold and calculating like I had never seen him, Leif surprised me, he didn't seem so seductive

with women, he didn't seem the same, I thought he would be weak in battle, but he impressed me, he fought with rage and fury and with Extreme skill with the ax and sword, we have to be careful with these brothers, Leif was left to administer the settlement so let's not worry about him for the moment.

-Do you think that Björk has earned merit for our father to recommend him as a successor?

-I fear so, but I am not sure, this marriage with Wynn gave him Donmmoc and in the future with Hanne, daughter of Torsten, commercial access in the north, giving him many chances against Einar and the lawmen of our lands. If the village and the rest of the kings approve a possible recommendation on him, I'm lost.

-In the middle of the fight, I didn't see an opportunity to get rid of Björk, he is too good a warrior, we had already lost Ingolf, and I found myself alone in the task and fighting the Anglo-Saxons, I couldn't afford to lose him; but in a moment Ulf was steps in front of me, I saw an enemy with his spear advancing behind him, I was able to annihilate him before he was wounded, but in an instant I saw the opportunity to weaken Björk, if Ulf died I would lose a loyal friend until death, you know how excellent in battle the bereker was, so I stayed without attacking the Anglo-Saxon who pierced him cleanly, then hundreds of arrows fell on us, hitting Ulf squarely, finishing him off and the man who had wounded him also fell dead from the arrows

of his own side. I only protected myself with my shield and was a witness. No one in the heat of the fight could notice my lack of action, when everyone was already dead lying on the ground, I approached and dragged Ulf to preserve his body, he was still breathing unconscious but the wounds were mortal.

- A moment of luck that the Gods gave you. What can we do to damage Björk's honor and discredit her?

Bjarne fiddled with his jug of mead.

-And what if we sow doubts about Wynn's fidelity? If Björk believes she betrayed him, his heart will break and his mind will become clouded. When we left he didn't know about her pregnancy.

- It is exact, but I assure you brother that it will be difficult to accuse her, she has always been in her cabin and at the loom with the rest of the women, I have not seen her alone on any occasion. Although wait, he used to go to clean the blacksmith shop, he didn't even go with his slaves.

-Well, we must generate rumors of infidelity that Björk doubts her beloved. -Leaning over Sven- we must be subtle, we don't want our father to be suspicious. Wynn is the key, if we can tarnish her reputation, Björk will fall.

-But who will be the man to accuse? Björk will look for him even under the stones. It should not be someone who weighs heavily in our society, someone that no one bothers to defend.

-Let me think.

-I have an idea Bjarne, I have an Irish slave, he is young like Wynn, you know that not only women seduce me, this is a docile and soft young man, but I have already grown tired of his insipidity, being a slave and a foreigner like Wynn, both young , we could accuse them of having an affair and that the child they are expecting is not Björk's and the meeting place of betrayal could be the blacksmith's shop. The young man will surely be hanged as punishment and Björk will ask for a divorce from Wynn, leaving her to fend for herself with her bastard son. A man who cannot please his first wife will hardly be approved as his successor. None of our people will come out to defend the foreigners and since it is a matter of slave and foreigner, no one but them will suffer the consequences.

-Excellent Sven, you are my favorite brother, you will always be my right hand in my reign. I will spread rumors among the women, they are ideal for whispering while washing or knitting.

Thus the brothers drew up their plan. The words intertwined like threads of a deadly web. Conspiracy was woven into every whispered word. While the fire crackled in the fireplace, jealousy and betrayal strained intrigue and destiny in the hands of the goddesses turned the relentless wheel in the lives of innocents.



There were funeral rites in the following days, Björk helped in the construction of the incendiary pyre for her brother and the stone boat for Ulf. The seven days that they had to wait to bury them had already passed, in which only Ingolf had been woven with his funeral trousseau. He did not have his own ship to embark him on his way to Valhalla, so he would be cremated on a pyre along with his loved objects. , Ulf, on the other hand, would be buried as he used to go into battle, being a berserker his hands and fierceness were his weapons in battle, dressed with bear skin on his shoulders and bare torso.

Björk and Wynn in their cabin were preparing to go to the ritual banquet dressed in their dark suits.

-What gift will you bring to each one?- Wynn asked him.

-To Ingolf I will take one of my shields that has runes that will help him in Ragnarök when the time comes and to Ulf my best mead and a dagger that I forged with the inscription of a prayer to Thor, he was a great drinker and a very lover. of eating, it will serve you on your trip.

-Is there anything I should know about tradition?

-True, I should explain some things to you, the right wind is never lacking. Take a seat, you will see, in a few days we will experience the blót and it is no coincidence, every ninth solstice we honor our ancestors and toast to them and to the Gods, we strengthen our ties with the important dead of the community and we perform sacrifices of

animals, we drink, we sing and we usually recite sagas and poems, like one that I always like:

"It is better to have a child, even if it is born too late. After the death of his father, it will hardly be possible for an evocative stone to stand on the side of the road if the blood does not raise it to his blood." - While he recited it, he lovingly caressed Wynn's belly, as if he were speaking to the unborn child.- In the time of my mother's father there were human sacrifices, they were slaves or enemies of other neighboring tribes and in particular in the burials the wife of the dead warrior or one of his concubines were possessed by the closest men, whether they were brothers, father or friends, and then be buried next to her husband.

Wynn turned pale, his Christian faith was hurt, and he fearfully asked him.

-Is what I will see today and in the following days, will you kill more innocent men?

Björk was deeply hurt by the reproach veiled in his words, she blamed him for the deaths in Eastanglia, for the first time he felt shame in front of her for the blood shed, he saw the horror and pain in the woman he loved, she was life giving life in her womb, blood of her blood.

-Do not be afraid, my father attacked my mother's tribe, overthrowing their king, it was where he captured my mother and married her,

taking her lands, hence the extension of those you see today. When he added the kingdoms into one, he formed a new assembly of thing, free and valuable men of the community, banishing sacrifices and rapes, my mother had suffered her father's terror so she thanked and loved my father for finally freeing her. . That is why despite the years, you have seen how much he loves him.

Wynn regained the warmth in his body and was grateful for the love in Björk's eyes, everything forgave him, he loved him and even if hell consumed him, he would die with him.

-In any case, wives and concubines are asked if they want to die with him. Our women are sensible, the same as you - it was an order between the lines - they must live for the good of their children and contributing with their work to the rest of us. Once the necessary days have passed in the assembly, Ingolf's wife will ask for her inheritance, which are his lands and tools as well as any other possessions, Ulf had no wife or concubine as well as few possessions, which will be buried next to him as well as his beloved horse. As the burials take place on the eve of the blót that I have told you, there will be continuous days of banquets and oaths to the dead and the divinities. You must know that I have been building a small ship for a long time so that when my time comes, I ask you to make me burn in it and release me into the sea. Promise, I ask you.

Wynn nodded with tears running down her face, she didn't want to think that he could die, she wouldn't know how to live without him.

-That's fine Björk, but if your gods are like mine, I ask them for compassion and to make me die with you.

-Silly squirrel, come on, we must go.

The crowd had gathered on the sacred esplanade where large holes had been dug for burial, the runic tablets to mark the graves were carved with symbols and runes, containing inscriptions that told the story and achievements of the deceased warrior. All the details had been taken care of, clothing and offerings properly placed next to the bodies so that the dead did not become souls condemned to wander eternally.

Björk and Wynn were in the circle of closest relatives, behind them Sven was intentionally placed with his family and the slave chosen for the betrayal, to whom he had told days before that the young Wynn knew the boy's family. Anxiety brewing in him to talk to her about the subject, he told him that they would take advantage of the meeting so that he could talk to Wynn, but Sven would prevent that from happening, he only needed the young man to expose himself in some way so that the present would misunderstand his intentions. Bjarne had already done his part, discussing with his wife and concubines the rumor of an affair behind Björk's back.

Wynn was watching carefully as the ritual unfolded, she did not notice the whispering of the women and the malicious glances around her, nor the insistent gaze of the slave boy behind her. On the other hand, Björk, suspicious and distrustful by nature, noticed that he and Wynn were the objects of somewhat malicious glances. He said nothing to the young woman, but concern settled in his thoughts. Once the burning and burial were over, everyone went to the skali, the large meeting room for the banquet that would remain open for many days due to the blót festival. Wynn was tired, feeling heavy, so she and Björk quietly left and headed home. Björk didn't feel like talking or drinking, he felt sorry for his friend Ulf and also for Ingolf, the pleasant memories lived with them made him sad, maybe love and his first child were making him weak he thought, but still That's how he preferred to get to his cabin with Wynn and sit at the entrance to watch the night and feel the wind in solitude with himself.



Björk was sleeping when he was awakened by a moan next to him. It was a sleeping Wynn who was complaining as if something hurt her. He pulled her close to hug her. Her body was so soft and small despite her advanced stomach. In her dream, the warmth of the hug seemed to have been enough to calm her pain. He put his hand on his belly, and felt the baby kick him, love invaded him and he enjoyed

those moments for the rest of the night. When they both woke up, without saying a word, they caressed and kissed each other. They felt the wall that had separated them collapse between them. They got up and Wynn was preparing milk and bread while he cleaned himself. When he realized that there was no wood for the fire, he went out. to look for her when she was collecting the logs she felt a pain that went through her, her entire lower abdomen hurt in continuous spasms, she screamed when the pain was very acute, Björk heard her and knew that something had happened to her, he went out to meet her and saw her still holding the logs and clinging to the stones of the cabin wall.

-What are you doing woman? Ask me for the firewood, let me help you.- While he took the firewood, he held her waist.

-Björk I think the child is about to arrive. Go get help, the women must be arriving, look for your mother, she will help me.

Björk took her inside the home and left her on the bed. He was afraid to leave her alone but he needed the help of women. He ran quickly to his mother's house who told her maid to go get Wynn's slaves with everything necessary for the birth. Mother and son returned together to help the young woman.

Wynn was in bed, in labor pains. When Margit approached her, she noticed that the child was large due to the volume of the belly, it would not be an easy birth, the young woman was small in size and

the baby appeared to be as big as his father for the belly that contained him. The slaves brought a birth stool, it was a seat with a hole where women sat to give birth, Wynn did not feel comfortable so Margit arranged for her to give birth crouching assisted by a midwife she had sent for to invoke to the gods and placed compresses made from reeds on the pregnant woman's belly to speed up childbirth. While the rest of the women sang softly while painting runes on the ground around Wynn.

Björk outside the cabin felt alone and helpless, she missed Leif who had been a great company with his experience in fatherhood. I listened to the magical songs and the ritual litanies of the women inside the cabin, seeking the support of the gods in the trance of childbirth, interspersed with the cries of pain of the young mother.

Wynn was held by Margit and one of the slaves while the midwife received the child on the floor in the fourth push.

-You've done it Wynn. -Margit told him while the tension in Wynn relaxed and astonished she saw her son, one more push and the placenta came out whole, the midwife saved it for the burial rite as an offering to the great natural forces, after the delicate ta- They cut the umbilical cord and sprinkled the baby with water while they laid her on the bed, they placed the child on her chest while they cleaned her of the maternal waters.

The night was coming, Björk was walking around in the barn, he decided to go to the cabin and find out how things were, a few meters from the door he heard his son's cry, happiness invaded him, he entered and Margit received him with the child in high.

-Here you have your son, Wynn is resting, he is fine, it was a somewhat difficult birth, your wife is not strong in body, but she has a great spirit. You must rest. We will be witnesses son, if you accept this child to give him a name and guarantee his existence.

-Yes, mother, I accept it, so the Norns can begin to weave the tapestry of their destiny and the Disir grant them gifts, Hyge so that they can be responsible and master of their own intentions, Mod for their abilities and Minni to remember their ancestors.

-May the Hama descend upon him for the union of humanity and divinity and the Myn so that all his senses make him perceive the world-said Margit, taking the child with her to leave him sheltered from the mother's breast.

In the bed Wynn looked at the most beautiful jade-colored eyes he had ever seen, the little one was larger in size than any of the babies he had seen in Eastanglia, he marveled at having created a being. Inwardly, so as not to disturb the rituals of his Scandinavian family, he prayed the Lord's Prayer and asked his only Christian God to bless the child. He regretted not being able to make him a Christian, but in some way he would leave the dogma of Christ in his heart.

Days later Björk appeared before her father and the men of her family and the assembly to report on the rite of presentation of the little one.

-Father, I present to you my son so that our ancestors may solemnly endow him with their Fetch for his protection and our entire clan and his Flygia may be present at all the crucial moments of his life, may they grant him the Odr and the Adem in his fortune.

-That's how it will be son, what will you call him?-while Björk with the child in her arms stood in the circle arranged with runes around it, where offerings and gifts were placed.

-I will call him Vidar, son of Björk.- Wynn had previously asked him why he had chosen that name when he mentioned it to him and had explained that Vidar was the son of Odin and the giantess Gríðr, he was the god of silence. , revenge and justice. After Ragnarök, Vidar was predestined to return to his brother Vali. She had laughed because Björk already assumed that they would have more children, to which he assured her that he would never stop making love to her.

Einar, just as he had done with other grandchildren, approached the child, touching his small right hand with the pommel of his sword and said to him:

-Everything you win with the sword and the ax will be yours, do it with reason because without it you will fight without cause or reason.

May Frigg as mother goddess protect you from all evil and illness, may Odin, Hönir and Vé give you blood, life and consciousness.

With green twigs soaked in water of the chosen runes, he blessed the child. Everyone lit a candle and congratulated each other, to begin the festive meal in community.

They were days of burials, births and sacrificial festivities, intense days and varied emotions.

Because of the birth, Wynn was experiencing moments of slight depression. Margit had warned Björk that the young woman could be somewhat distant and absorbed. It was common after birth. It was necessary for her to be patient and give her time to recover. So the Viking did not worry about his young wife's change of mood. Meanwhile Bjarne and Sven stayed away from Björk, the betrayal was underway and slowly brewing. They had to find the right moment for a small tuft of grass to cause the heavy cart to overturn.



Marguit, like every time a child was born in the clan, consulted the seidr, he was one of the few men who practiced magic and did not use skins of lamb or other animals on his head, he only wore flowers

or green branches, of soft and delicate ways. He was visited in search of magical consolation or concerns for the future.

-Tell me Seidr, what can you tell me about the future of this child who has been called Vidar, son of Björk.

The mage silently searched for his runes, chanting in an ancient rite. After the trance he had been in, he looked doubtfully at Marguit.

-The future is uncertain, I must tell you, the eagle will wound the bear's back in clear betrayal, the bear will protect itself by healing a wound that will never be healed by protecting the child, but thirsty for revenge it will wait for the eagle to believe itself the owner of the sky. When winter passes, the bird in low flight will not see the bear's claws coming that will destroy it. The child will avenge innocent blood and see the wolf die in his land. I can't tell you more than what I saw.

-I can't understand the oracle- Marguit told him in anguish, who was the bear, who was the eagle and in what lands was the wolf, questions that her mind tried to answer in vain.

-You'll understand, when the time is right. You can do nothing.

The woman left him payment in silver coins for such an enigmatic and bleak omen. I would keep what I said so as not to overshadow Björk's present.



Wynn was breastfeeding the child when Björk stopped silently in the doorway, he saw her absorbed in that loving bond of feeding the child. He wondered why he loved her? Was it true that the women of their land were witches by nature, would Wynn be one of them?

If that was the case, how beautiful witches they were, how unfair men were when they fell in love, it was easy to blame them for the weakness they produced in their souls. Wynn was the strangest woman he had ever met, a mixture of sweetness and bravery, intelligence and innocence, ardent and modest at the same time. She was like a million women in one little woman. He had seen her in all her emotions, angry, cunning, fearless, soft, melancholic, sometimes he did not know which of her facets was her true nature. Angry, she used to look proud and arrogant, her sharpness could irritate him on more than one occasion and fill him with fury, so she preferred to remain silent and go to the field or to the blacksmith's shop so as not to confront him, after all she was just a woman, she was not As a man worthy of dealing with her and the daily affairs of married life, he only dealt with women in battle, whether they were foreigners or warriors. Without thinking about it, he thought about it and said:

-Why do you love me Wynn?

She was startled, she had not noticed Björk's presence.

-What are you taking about? "Why is that question?" Half-smiling, she gave him a tender look.

-I want to know, I have the right, don't I?- I say it more like a plea than a demand.

While she placed the child on the other breast to continue breastfeeding him, thoughtfully and as if reviewing the images in her memory, she honestly told him her feelings.

-When I met you I only perceived cruelty and coldness in you and the other men who attacked Dommoc, I was enveloped in the terror of what I was experiencing, it was difficult to accept the reality of what was happening to me.

I saw you imposing and beautiful, but my heart did not take that into account, I did not fall in love with you in those moments. It was little by little, as I watched you day after day. I discovered your gaze lost on the horizon, thoughtful, I understood that your soul was flying beyond the sea, there was no enjoyment in the violent acts that you are forced to do. When I saw you working in the blacksmith shop I saw a humane Björk, brotherly with Leif, with your parents, respect for your family, affection for your friend Ulf and how you accept and comply with the laws of your town. I admit that any other Viking would have slaughtered me with my sharp tongue and my arrogance. And you, in

turn, valued and respected me. You gave me the time to approach me delicately after months in which you could have taken advantage of the right that marriage gave you. You were thoughtful and loving. Although you are slow to cut the firewood I need and you never keep your word to arrive at dinner time.

They laughed at the same time at Wynn's final quip, neither of them was a hopeless romantic, practicality and being direct were qualities they shared. That's how they understood each other, without blunt tricks or manipulating the other. Each one accepted the other as he was. Without intending to, they had found the other in their right measure. They didn't need anything else, it was enough for them to be themselves and be together.

The background is a complex, blue-toned illustration. On the left, a figure in a long, flowing white robe with a fur collar holds a staff topped with a glowing orb. The figure's face is partially obscured by shadows. Behind them, a large, intricate circular magical diagram or runic circle is visible, filled with various symbols and lines. The scene is set against a dark, stormy sky with a bright, swirling light source. In the foreground, there are rocky, uneven terrain and what appears to be a body of water or a path leading towards a distant, misty horizon. The overall mood is mysterious and powerful.

CHAPTER 4

**“Wealth dies, relatives die;
one must also
die. I know one thing that never
dies: the fame of a dead man.”**

Anonymous

4

Einar rested hurt from the last excursion, his wounds had healed, however, his body showed signs of the fatigue of so many years lived. Margit took care of him, relegating the two concubines to mere slave work, the jealousy she always had towards them transformed into affection, the days she had spent with Einar tending to his wounds made her aware of the appreciated place her husband had for her and women's respect for her.

He helped him sit by the fire with furs on his shoulders. Einar looked at her tenderly, recognizing that this woman had always loved him deeply.

-You know woman, we have shared so many years although I know that your love has never faded. Rest assured that I have loved you in my heart too.

-And do you know how many times I have doubted it?

-Yes, yes, you hold a grudge against me, but you know how men are. However, you have always been my wife, my queen, my faithful companion.

-I admit that you have endured without punishing me all my outbursts and my jealousy, but you have not made it easy for me- He said it with a reproach full of tenderness, deep in his heart he knew that Einar was in his last days, he was no longer the A warrior with a firm hand and an energetic character, the fatigue was not only in his body, but also in his spirit.

-I was young, full of dreams and ambition, time has left marks on me just like it has on these stones. I have done the best I could. I'm sorry for not loving you as you deserved.

-You rescued me from my atrocious father, you gave us peace in our lands and I have given you two children in return, I think we are even. But what worries you? You are very absorbed these days, since they returned from Britannia.- I knew that frown in moments of worry, his gaze fixed and his mind somewhere else. He could stay like this for hours, until his mind couldn't find the answer he was looking for, and silence enveloped him.

-I worry when I go to Valhalla, who will reign in my place.

Margit was surprised, by law there was no doubt that it would be Bjarne and Einar had never proven otherwise, until now.

-I don't understand you, do you doubt Bjarne?

- And from Sven. They are extremely greedy unlike my late In-golf or your children. But that wouldn't be so much the problem, we've all been that way in our time. The point is that I have seen Bjarne in battle. Greed inspires you to fight, but if you lose your mind you no longer know why you are fighting and it only brings misfortune and bad fortune. We were in full battle after the surprise assault, I was five yards or so away from Ulf, brave like any berserker, madly attacking the Anglo-Saxons, knocking them down left and right; between him and I I saw Bjarne with his ax also destroying enemies, but it was the moment in which I noticed how between us a man was rushing behind Ulf's rear, Bjarne behind both of them being able to stop the deadly thrust that would save Ulf. Ulf, stopped and let the berserker be struck. The enemy's arrows killed the Anglo-Saxon's own man and Bjarne simply turned and continued the fight. I continued to take down men, that image stayed with me. I did not ask my son for explanations, I waited for him to take the first step to talk about the incident, but until today he has not said a single word. You know how eloquent he is with his exploits and telling stories of battles, and that makes me think that he intentionally let Ulf die. Björk's loyal friend and fighting partner. Bjarne and Sven have always been close because they are from the same mother as Björk and Leif are your children. I fear that there are hidden intentions behind that fact. Ulf was a valuable man in our community and that cursed moment that I wit-

nessed only tells me that Bjarne betrayed his people, letting a fellow soldier die in obvious disloyalty is a sign of who he is, it hurts to see that a son whose You wait so long, he is capable of betraying his people. I know that he is not appreciated by his men, he is rather feared. Instilling respect from terror will never last.

Showing strength and determination is more praiseworthy and safer to reign over the impulses of men who must follow your orders and watch your back. Power is very lonely and one must carefully choose friends and enemies alike. Sven has been his confidant and accomplice since they were children, he is weak in battle so he has acquired more cunning, he is perverse in his relationships, with his women and we know that with his men. I suppose at some point they know that if Björk were the firstborn I would be more satisfied to bequeath my leadership to her. Children are very susceptible to our appreciation of them. Words are not needed for it. I fear that Bjarne and Sven will promote a time of discord and useless battles.

-If you call an assembly with the thing and they endorse you, the family will most likely get into disputes. Before making a decision you should talk to Björk.

-No. I won't do it, I know you won't want to, but if I impose it on you for the good of everyone you will accept it.

-Will you change Einar's destiny?

-I only follow the murmur of the Norns my dear. I do not have the power of the Gods, I am only a man in the solitude of power. My queen, in the darkest nights, I wonder if the gods really forge our destiny or if we are the ones who weave it with our own hands.

In the twilight of their reign, both faced not only the choice of an heir, but also reconciliation with their past and acceptance of their present. The years gave them time to look at the past that was being forged in the present and they glimpsed the repeated future of their ancestors.

-It is a question that also torments my heart. Are we nothing more than arrows shot by the gods into the air, carried to a destination in the wind known only to the gods? Or could it be that our will can even defy divine designs?

-In battle, I invoked Thor to grant me strength, and Odin for wisdom, but in the end, is it not my arm that brandished the sword and my mind that drew up the strategy?

- It is true, and although we offer sacrifices to Freyja for a bountiful harvest, it is we who plow the land and plant the seeds. Maybe the gods are watching us, but the decisions are ours.

-So, should we continue honoring the gods if our destiny is in our own hands?

-Let us honor the gods not out of fear of fate, but as guides who inspire us to be brave and wise. We forge our destiny together, with every choice, every action and every word.

-I have heard about the Christian god, a god of love and compassion. Do you think he is more merciful than our gods, who often demand sacrifice and bravery in battle?

-It is an interesting reflection, Einar. The Christian god promises salvation and forgiveness, while our gods challenge us to find our own path to honor and glory.

-Could it be that this Christian god offers a type of peace that our gods do not know? A peace not won in battle, but in the heart and spirit.

-Perhaps, but we must not forget that compassion and love also reside in our sagas. Balder was loved by everyone for his kindness. Even in the harshness of our world, there is room for tenderness.

-So, should we consider the possibility that different gods represent different aspects of life? Courage and war on one side, love and forgiveness on the other.

-Perhaps true wisdom lies in recognizing the diversity of the divine. Every god, every belief, teaches us something valuable about ourselves and the world around us. Perhaps this Christian God does not consider us women and men so equal. Or their Christian men believe so, I know that monks are staunch enemies of sensuality and enjoyment of our bodies, there are some of them who give up having children and wives. We have had many slaves and foreigners from Britannia and the lands of Castile, the first secretly guard our familiarity

with the Gods that we formerly shared, they are freer in many aspects, but the others are demanding with their laws and live isolated from the men always guilty of intimacy with fear of their God. For a long time, women have been the weavers of the home, the guardians of ancestral wisdom. But don't we also deserve to be recognized as warriors and leaders in our own right?

-Oh woman, I have always admired your reasoning, I still remember when I found you in your village, your bravery and wisdom are unmatched, as well as your anger, may the Gods protect me from your hatred, hahaha. The sagas speak of shieldwomen who fought with honor. Do you doubt your place among our people?

-It is not my value that I question, but the vision of our world. Women carry life in our womb and face death in childbirth. We are as strong as any man in battle, and yet our stories are often left in the shadows.

-It is a truth that I cannot deny. The laws and customs have been written by men, and perhaps the time will come for women to also engrave their voices on the stones of destiny, the Goddesses also have their place alongside Odin.

-I wish that women live in a world where their value is not measured by their progeny, but by the courage of their heart and the strength of their spirit. A world where they can choose their own path, whether at home or on the battlefield.

-Then, accompany me in my leadership decision. May this king's decisions reflect the equality you long for, and may future generations sing not only of the kings and warriors, but also of the queens and squires who forged the greatness of our people.

-I'm afraid Einar, that a storm will break out.

In the following days Einar called each thing to deliberate on the decision he had made, when they met in assembly he had no opponents, it was just that the men were worried about the same thing as Margit, that the change would trigger violent events. between the brothers. Enough greedy people from other tribes had stoned the village in search of their lands. If men were divided into two sides, they would see the forces and stable order they enjoyed weakened.

If Einar ensured order among the brothers, they would accompany him in his decision, although if the peace was affected they would follow the laws as they were written. The successor would be Bjarne.

The assembly determined that events would continue and Einar would not give up his leadership until then.

Björk had achieved many merits in battle, as many as Bjarne, but the iron mettle of the favorite surpassed that of the older brother, impetuous and bellicose to a fault.

The assembly and the reason for the meeting was a matter of speculation for a few, Bjarne and Sven took note of this. The plan had to be put into action as soon as possible.

Sven suggested to the Irish boy that he go see Wynn when he was washing clothes with other women to ask him about his family, the slave's anxiety and innocence made him not realize the intentions that Sven was hiding, to add encounters and nearby to accuse based on witnesses who affirmed a relationship between the young people.

Thus the boy found the opportunity to see Wynn, while he carried out the daily tasks of washing with his maids, taking care of the child and with a few women from the village.

Wynn was kind to him when the boy introduced himself, Sven had suggested to the young man that they speak without the rest of the women hearing, to prevent them from believing that they were plotting against the town; In reality, he wanted the natural slander of humans to interpret that act as a reason for infidelity and that way rumors could spread among the people when Wynn was accused.

Bjarne was not sure of Sven's plan, he feared that the events would not turn out as intended, if this did not happen the only thing left was for Björk to die in battle, Ulf's death was an opportunity that the Gods presented to him, but the Björk's death should be calculatedly plotted.



Wynn was washing some of the child's cloths and clothes next to the river among the stones, the day was calm and pleasant in the sun, other women were doing the same task, some were singing happily, others were chatting, the young woman was attentive to the child in her basket. Nearby she and one of her slaves enjoyed the cool morning.

A young man approached them, he was his brother-in-law's slave, he didn't remember him well, but when he introduced himself he greeted him kindly.

-What brings you here?- Wynn asked him.

-My lord told me that you are from Eastanglia and that you may have given me some news of my family in Eireland, near the port of Limerick.

-Excuse me, but I have no idea about the events in Eireland. I don't even know anyone from those lands.

-How strange, my lord assured me that you knew people from my town.

-I don't know why he said it, but he assured you that I don't know anything, I'm sorry, I know it must be painful not to have news from your family.

-Yes it is, I left my parents and siblings, I don't know if they survived or who died in the assault where they arrested me. Sorry for bothering you. I thank you anyway.

-Don't worry, if I know something I'll let you know. Now that I think about it, why don't you talk to Bliss, Carl's wife? She is from your lands, she may know something.

-Thank you, I will do so, it has not been in vain to talk to you.

They said goodbye and Wynn continued with her task, only the slave who accompanied her with her baby heard the conversation, the rest of the women barely took notice of the young man.

Meanwhile, in the blacksmith's shop, Björk was stoking the forge fire when Bjarne entered, waving exaggeratedly as was his custom.

-Hello my dear brother!!! How hot it is in this pigsty.

-Bjarne works here.

-Well, speaking of that, that's why I came, I need to sell a crop and I wanted to ask you if you would accompany me to the north, you have better treatment with those scoundrels.

-And what do I gain by accompanying you?

-I will give you a percentage, I know you are good at negotiating, you will get more than me if I negotiate it. It will only take two or three days.

Bjarne's intention was to get him away from Wynn so that Sven could continue with the plan.

-Okay, tomorrow we could go out, if you like.

-Perfect brother. We'll leave before the sun rises.

Björk returned to her cabin later at sunset, Wynn with dinner prepared and waiting for him, she let her husband play with the child when he arrived, he was completely happy for the first time. Björk announced that she would leave the next day with Bjarne's proposal and would return soon. It was usual for him to leave for a few days, it didn't worry her but she would miss him. They made love when the child fell asleep and after dinner, silently so as not to wake him but passionately as always. Sometimes, when he saw her so hot, he feared that she would not be enough to sleep with him and would look for another man. When he felt her distant and distant in his thoughts, he would be attacked by fears of losing her. He would kill the man who dared to approach her. He had never loved a woman like this and this sorceress could not remove her from his mind and heart. When he felt she was far away, lost in her thoughts, he didn't dare to ask her what she was thinking about, he didn't want to hear her miss her homeland or tell him that she wasn't happy with him.

He planned to go to Eastanglia and live there in Donmoc with her and Leif, far from the fights and expeditions his father sent him on. He had not yet informed his father, he assumed that Wynn wanted it, but he could not find the time to make the decision, he had to think about what to do with his lands who could manage them, perhaps his mother would be the best person for it. .

Wynn, entangled in his strong arms after loving each other, thought about the next day he would leave, she wondered if every time he left any woman along the way would enjoy her husband, the Vikings were very free in terms of enjoyment, they considered that there was nothing disloyal if they enjoyed other women if they respected their wife and fulfilled their obligations, in exchange they could have the same freedom if their husband enabled them to do so, but they had to fulfill their marriage by giving their husband children.

She would never ask Björk's permission to belong to another, she only had one heart and it was for him, and she wanted to be the sole owner of Björk's heart, but she did not dare to ask him, she was grateful that he loved her and begged him to do so until the end. Even if other women passed through her life, she would accept their place despite the tears and pain. Both feared losing each other and without the certainty of the other's loyalty, they were the most sincere and unconditional lovers. That fear would be the crack through which malice and greed would leak.



Björk left as she had arranged with Bjarne before dawn, in the innocence of being wrapped in a filial web.

The monotonous journey north when the sun was high, Bjarne decided to sow doubt in Björk to prepare the land of deception.

-How does marriage feel to you?

-I guess better than you

-I'm not very attached to women, but I see that it suits you well. Your wife too? She always seems absorbed. It can't be easy being an Anglo-Saxon to have a Viking for a husband, I know their men are weaker with women. They fill them with gifts and unnecessary nonsense.

-For now she does not complain, she takes good care of the child and works like any other woman in her tasks.

Björk ended the talk, advancing with the horse with the excuse of checking the carts carrying the merchandise. Deep inside, Bjarne's words made her think about Wynn, why sometimes she felt distant, she remembered images and moments looking for answers, fearing reasons, it was true that he was not a gentleman that Wynn was used to, his The most valuable gifts had been given to her at the marriage ceremony, and he often gave her flowers or simple things that he forged. Perhaps she longed for the luxuries she enjoyed in her other life. He had never mentioned it to her or asked for gifts when she met him. I was going on an expedition. In fact, he remembered how blasé

and arrogant he was in his veiled reproach when he gave her the chest at their marriage with silk fabrics and silver ornaments, making him uncomfortable thinking about the origin of the goods. She was simple in her tastes although she enjoyed luxuries when they existed, but she never demanded that he provide her with them. She was not greedy or miserly, quite the opposite. And he remembered his body and the desire it gave him. Perhaps Anglo-Saxon men would be kinder than him? Would it be enough for her?



Bjarne watched him walk away, with his brother no one knew what was going through his head, he never showed emotions until he burst into anger which was not his habit, but the few times he had witnessed it he knew of a blind fury that could destroy everything in its path. around. Better to let it be seen in time if the trap he tried to leave in him had worked.

They took longer than expected, the rains kept them on the journey and they had to stay in a Varangian village until they could leave and they stopped in Hedeby, a city with connections from all over Europe famous for its artisans, two weeks had already passed since they had left.



Meanwhile Sven prepared his part in the betrayal. He always knew he couldn't take Bjarne's place.

Although he was a brainless fool, he was the firstborn, strong in battle and with an impetuous character, he, on the other hand, was the complete opposite, it seemed unfair to him, but that was how they had woven their destiny, he only had to help his brother. and stay by his side to enjoy power and prestige, although to a lesser extent sufficient for his tastes. He had to gather witnesses to support his complaint of dishonor against Wynn, infidelity was not a sufficient reason and Björk could come to his defense by arguing that he was aware of it and gave his wife that freedom, but the fact of lying about his offspring offended the whole clan The law was strict due to its sacred origin, nor could Einar save the situation with secret clauses or requests or rhetorical tricks. The thing made up of the king and all the free men of prestige made up an assembly where they decided and judged by unanimous consent, Wynn's guilt or innocence required recognition on her part, so it was necessary to present witnesses in all the moments of the legal procedure to discredit her. If he did not do so, if he was not able to present the case correctly, Sven could be guilty of offending Björk and his wife, and could be fined, but with

such a serious accusation he would be banished or, if Björk requested it, executed.

If everything went as desired, the slave would be beheaded or hanged, Wynn would surely be left to live in exile, having three winters to go wherever Björk wanted, she would not be fed, nor could she or her family ever return. son, would have no right to his property nor would he ever inherit. As a man offended by his wife giving birth to a child claiming that it was his but in reality from a foreign slave he had four possibilities allowed, he could exercise his right to revenge and do justice for himself, he also had the possibility of allowing him to Wynn had it be her who offered the sanction to be applied, although it was unlikely that she would assume guilt and due to the seriousness of lying about the paternity of the child it was even more difficult for Björk with her proud temperament and seeing herself humiliated to allow it, the third option was for Men of good will, wise men would arbitrate and the last was that the process would be strict, with accusation, defense and a procedure that would last days until its verdict. The law made no exceptions even for a king or his children, no one was above the law, since no one was superior to his destiny.

The Vikings had laws for all public affairs, for marketing, hunting and fishing, property, felling trees, collecting firewood for heating, distribution of goods confiscated on expeditions. They were strict in complying with them as well as individual property, severity of injuries

caused, murders, rapes, as well as whether they committed acts of mockery, satire or slander and defamation. Sven had to be cautious, ensuring that his intentions were to protect the honor of the family and the integrity of the community. Björk would not forgive him for slandering his son, death would be certain. And he was certain that Bjarne would not save him at the cost of exposing himself, whoever is fond of betraying does not hesitate even with his own blood.

The first thing would be to confront his father, fill him with doubts and demand a trial. Before Björk and Bjarne arrive, the accusation had to be made. Bjarne had done his part, delaying the trip long enough for him to have time to prepare the ruse. Heading to see his father, he searched for words that would demonstrate a feeling of concern that he did not feel for the honor of the family or for Björk. He entered Einar's home and Margit received him kindly, his father was resting and upon hearing his voice he got up to see what his son's visit was for.

-Well, one of many sons who comes to see how his father is, at a good time.- The reproach was not such, in reality he knew that every time someone showed up it was synonymous with problems.

-Hello father, don't be unfair, we are always attentive to you.

-If you say it that way it must be, I'm old but in good condition, you have nothing to worry about. -The truth was that his health had deteriorated a lot, the trip to Britannia had consumed a lot of his health.

The cold of the sea, the hand-to-hand fighting had taken a toll on his already tired physique.

-I'm sorry to come to you with concerns father. But it is something that concerns us all. There are rumors and they seem to be true.

"Stop being so dark and twisted, talk once and for all, it makes me angry when you go around so many times to spit out the poison." He couldn't help but make clear his contempt for his son's mean attitudes, he knew him well enough to know that nothing innocent had this visit. He never had an affinity with Sven and he had held a grudge against him since childhood. His physical build, unlike his brothers, had made him useless in battle and he appreciated his life as much as his greed allowed him.

-You call intelligence darkness and my prudence trickery, it is not poison that I come to inform you- Wounded pride put aside the intention of being humble and devoted to family interests in the imagined conversation that he had supposed to have. He wanted to hurt this father who always marginalized and belittled him. -There is evidence that Björk's son is not his, but the fruit of his wife and a foreign slave that I have on my farm. It is a clear offense to have lied about it, a bastard in our clan with rights he does not deserve.

-What? You're crazy! What are you taking about? What evidence do you have? I will hang you myself with my own hands if you continue to tell this lie.

-There are more than enough witnesses, and namely when Wynn got pregnant, Björk was away. She has been seen on several occasions talking to this slave, young like her and a foreigner. It is not difficult to imagine that they have things in common, we all know that Björk's marriage was by capture and not her free choice, we were all present when she herself explained her conditions prior to the ceremony.

-What do you want Sven? How appropriate that I am your slave, and that these rumors that you bring reach me in the absence of the one who was offended. Do not continue with this for your sake and everyone's sake.

-I'm sorry father- And savoring every word he continued to say, he felt for a moment the pleasure of having power over his father, of finally hurting him himself.-This clan is all of us, just one is nothing, if the dishonor is falls on us, no one wins anything, I'm not going to allow a damn Anglo-Saxon woman to tease us and laugh at us, we will lose leadership because of your senile weakness and the blindness of a man in love for who knows what. It's about a witch's magic.

Einar pounced on him and grabbed him by the neck, he did not believe anything, someone in the assembly had betrayed the codes of secrecy that the decisions had until they were made public. Bjarne must have been conspiring with Sven, which is why he had left with Björk to keep him away until this worm in his blood exposed the slander in a trial and the trial could not be avoided. He knew about be-

trayals and alliances, he had seen them, plotted them and suffered them throughout his years. This was not one of the best I had seen.

-You will be cursed by the Gods, you will not escape their justice sooner or later. You know that you will never go to Valhalla as a brave and honorable warrior, your place will be like a worm in the underworld.- Einar's heart made him falter, he was short of breath and the beats resonated in his ears, he let out to Sven and plopped down on the nearest seat.

-Think what you want, but I am not going to live with this offense on this earth, rest assured.

Without further words he turned and left, with a bitter taste of having hurt his father. Even if things didn't go as they had planned, this was their great victory.



Einar felt pain in his chest, a cold sweat and his legs were shaking. Margit, who barely heard the murmur of voices, perceived the silence and correctly assumed that Sven had left. She went in search of her husband. Upon entering the room she saw him hunched over, something was happening to him. Coming up to him she hugged him.

-What's wrong Einar?

-Take me to rest, help me, my legs don't respond as they should, I just confirmed my fears Margit, I don't know if it was me with my decisions or just the nature of my children that will bring misfortunes. Margit cried the tears that Einar's heart could not translate into screams and moans for the disgrace and public ruin that was coming. He sent for the laeknir, the healer who not only helped with births but also healed wounds. She arrived quickly and after attending to him, she took Margit aside.

-My lady, I am afraid to tell you that you are in the hands of the Gods, only they will give you time to continue living. His old wounds are healed, it is his heart that is weak. I will make some sacrifices and offerings, I will do everything in my power.

Margit cried bitterly, she did not even dare to consult the seidr, she did not want to hear the future.



Björk was looking at the gray sky when a flock of crows appeared fluttering above them, a feeling of alert and fear covered her thoughts, the crows were the sacred birds of Odin, their caws had the value of oracles that presaged victories or a death sentence, they travel the world and then perch on Odin's shoulders and whisper in his ear what they have seen and heard. The omen did not go unno-

ticed and he urged his horse and everyone to move more quickly towards the village, they were already in Scania so it would take another day or two.

Bjarne did not notice the crows or his brother's anxiety, he was not so devoted to the gods so he did not fear them, if he had done so he would not have committed so many misdeeds, he trusted himself so much that pride made him He blinded himself without fearing any punishment. He estimated that Sven would have everything ready by the time they arrived.



The free men who belonged to the assembly gathered, they had been summoned by the lagman, the man who knew the most about the laws and could give legal advice because he enjoyed a predominant status in the details of the procedures, he was the most faithful advisor to the assembly. Einar. He had reluctantly listened to Sven's flimsy denunciation, his whole story smacked of betrayal, but he still couldn't find a way to unravel the web of supposed witnesses and evidence. He tried to dissuade him in a thousand ways, but the boy was determined and had no intention of changing his position. The offense was serious, if the child had not been presented ceremonially within the family there was no possibility of confrontation or opposi-

tion, no one could feel offended within the clan. But they had already blessed and named him, accepting him into the family. He had known Björk since he was a child, he was a cunning man for a woman to deceive him and Wynn did not seem like a threat, since he was among them he had adapted and assumed his responsibilities, there had been no reason for a scandal in which he participated. -for. When they were attacked by the neighboring clan, she had fought as one of the village. The men were uncomfortable, they assumed that Einar did not agree with all this, causing an earthquake among his children, and they feared Björk's reaction. This was no coincidence, just a few weeks ago they had cautiously accepted, without ceasing to like, the idea that Björk was the successor, so they had accepted on the condition that exactly what was happening would not happen.

There was great respect for the law that came from the sacred nature of its divine origin, the formalism was excessive and punctilious, man was never alone, he existed by belonging to his family, if he was offended, the entire clan was offended. and to them the restoration of honor was owed. Even if Einar forgave, if one of the family demanded justice it was valid, thus order in the community would be sustained.

Thus, they had to begin the process and wait for Björk's arrival to settle the whole matter. The lagman went to see Einar, but convalescent as he was, the conversation was left in the hands of Margit.

-Tell me Lagmar, what happened? Sven came to inform Einar of the accusation he intended to make, my husband was devastated by his displeasure.

-Margit-he took a breath because he knew the impression that would result on the woman-We warned Einar that a change in the succession had to be peaceful, otherwise the fight between brothers would happen.

-But not even Björk is aware, they don't even know if she will accept or not. Why this way?

-We men are unpredictable, what can I tell you, except that there is no ill will towards Björk's wife on the part of the assembly, but the humiliation will weigh on them, it will not be good and Einar will have to go back with his decisions. It all depends on how Björk and Wynn manage to overcome it. We will see how solid the witnesses they present are. The best thing would be for you to go find your daughter-in-law and inform her, stay in charge of the child. Björk will not be able to return home until the trial is over.

-But they must talk, meet and assure each other in the trust of their feelings.

-I'm sorry Margit, the procedure must be carried out taking care of the safety of both. Avoid confrontation or strategies that may exist.

-Men and their laws!! What do you know about love, only gold and lands matter to you? He cried bitterly for his son's happiness that was about to break. All for power and greed.

The lagman understood the woman's pain and remained silent. He promised to do everything possible in his power for a fair trial and to protect Björk and her family. He left, leaving her with her grief.

The man had good intentions, but not all the assembly members agreed, in particular two of them had close business with Bjarne and the change that Einar had brought about in terms of his succession was not so conducive to them. Sven had already agreed with them that they would be appointed by him to interrogate Wynn, they would begin before Björk's arrival, he would do everything possible to advance the times, but the trial could not be concluded until his arrival.



Margit left for Björk's home and found Wynn in the cabin where she was knitting.

-The gods protect you, wife of Björk- he greeted as he entered.

-Madam, how nice you came.

-I can't say the same dear, I bring bad news.

Wynn felt the blood flee from her body, she feared for Bjorn. Her mother-in-law saw in her face the logical concern of any wife.

-Do not be afraid, it is not my son who brings me. It's a sad indictment of you. They say that the little one is the son of yours and a slave from Ireland who belongs to Sven.

The young woman did not understand what he was telling her, she was recovering from the shock first. And Margit was telling him something that made no sense.

-How is something so absurd possible? Do you believe that?

-No Wynn, but when someone in the family makes that accusation in front of the thing, it exposes us all to humiliation. It is not only your honor but everyone's that is at stake. Don't worry, when my son arrives everything will be resolved.

-I don't understand why, what is the reason for all this?

-It's difficult to explain, I suppose everything happens out of envy or greed. Sorry, women are still a trophy or a commodity that men use for their own interests. That explanation made Wynn regain the blood in her veins, anger beginning to brew in her. She wouldn't allow herself to be humiliated like that. He would fight to defend himself as well as his son. He trusted that Björk would be on his side and not believe that lie. But what if he believed it? If he doubted her? No, it wasn't possible. She remembered Sven's slave, he was a young man worried about his family and had approached her to seek news of his relatives. At no point did he notice any malice on his part; perhaps some ill-intentioned people would have misinterpreted the young

man's intentions. But it was only on one or two occasions that they met, or rather he had looked for her.

-Wynn, I must take the child and you must remain confined here until they come to look for you for an interrogation, be docile, as much as you can and answer only the truth.

-I will tell the truth, but they will hear it loud and strong, no one is going to accuse me of such disloyalty, I accepted my destiny, I worked like the others, I fell in love with the man who kidnapped me and killed my people, I accepted his rules and respected their gods. What else do they want?

-Don't worry, Einar and I are in your favor, it is clear that this is something more than what is seen.

The women went to look for the child who had been left in the care of one of the maids, Margit left with him and they dismissed the maids to their homes. Wynn was left alone with herself, wracked with anger and a spite in her heart for the rejection and animosity for which she began to blame the entire community. More than two years had passed since her arrival and when she felt comfortable with her life, at peace with her story, life put her in a new battle again.

He lay tossing and turning in bed, unable to stop his mind. She cried bitterly but like a phoenix, her spirit rose from the ashes of her tears from her wounded pride.



Sven had threatened the young slave that he would kill his entire family, informed him who they were and how many of them lived, their occupations and the control over those lands and the port that his men had so an order of He and everyone would be killed. The boy who thought he was safe because he was the Viking's lover realized that his life was no longer worth anything. The terms were that he had to take the blame for the offense for which he was blamed or his family would die, his life did not matter, Sven assured him that he would only be sold to the Varangian peoples with another contingent of slaves, but he He knew perfectly well that he was lying to him, he knew many of the Viking laws and he was certain that they would hang him in the best of cases, if not stone him. He regretted the fate of the young woman, he felt truly sorry for her. I had no escape.



The judges had been appointed, two of them volunteered as jurors on behalf of the plaintiff, the ones Sven had agreed upon.

Three men were appointed to search for the accused. When they arrived at the cabin, Wynn did not refuse to go with them to the assembly. He did it with a superb gesture like someone going to a fierce war. The night had nourished her with resentment and distrust.

The four judges were waiting for the accused, sitting at the table where destiny would be arranged by them, men of good will chosen by the entire community and by the Gods themselves according to their beliefs. They were not comfortable with the situation, they feared that that day would open a door to an endless chain of revenge. Einar and his wife were at one end of the room as mute witnesses to what they were deliberating. They were aware that Björk and Bjarne were hours away. A man from the group's outpost had arrived with the news and sent new information. -mind with the distressing message that he should not delay for any reason given what was happening there at that moment.

The skali was not only for meetings but also for assemblies of public importance or trials like this. There were armed men in case a dispute happened and a few dozen people including witnesses, family and friends. Wynn entered the room with the composure of a lady, enveloped in the air of her former royal class, her chin held high and her eyes tearless, defiant of what was to come. She walked towards the judges without stopping to look at them, she gave an account of her in-laws, at one end of the room her maids, Bliss and her husband Carl and Sven in front with a stern gesture and a knowing look. At his side, with his hands tied, was the young man he had only seen twice in his life, but to whom he was joined by rumors of disgrace. He looked down, emaciated and dirty, his clothes were nothing more

than rags full of dirt and urine. For a moment he felt great compassion because he was as much a victim of defamation as she was. He could not expect much from his father-in-law, as king, leader of his people, he was in charge of establishing the link between the divine powers and his people who had attacked him with power and, therefore, he was subject to the will of his community. It was within his family that the conflict had arisen and he was obliged to maintain and increase the honor, security and well-being of his people. The Vikings based their principles on family and the right to protect their property, their religion and their honor. Einar was subject to the law and could not dominate it. One of the older men stood up and with a strong, clear voice began saying:

-As lagman I begin this assembly out of respect for the law and the sacred, which are inseparable. There are no exceptions, no one is above the law because no one is superior to their destiny, no one exists without their family that determines their individual destiny.

Do all those present here swear to tell the truth, witnessed by our god Forseti, son of Balder and Nanna, as mediator and great judge?

-Yes, we swear.

-Wynn, wife of Björk, son of Einar, you are accused of offending the honor of your family, of lying about your son's lineage. Two of our judges will ask you questions, as many as they deem necessary to

reach a verdict. Do you wish to deny these two judges such interrogation? You are within your right to choose between the four judges.

Wynn listened attentively and weighed the futility of exchanging the judges; he did not know each of them; he had seen them at celebrations and at their weddings, but until now he did not know their status.

No one offered him security or justice, at the end of the day all this was a clear injustice and a lie created by who knows who.

If he had known some details, perhaps Wynn would have known about the relationships between the judges, his brother-in-law and the young defendant and would have had the time to unravel the web of lies, so he didn't care which judges were going to question her, for her everyone was an enemy at that moment.

-No, Lagman. Let them ask what they want.

-Well, once the Jury has been appointed, the conflict will be explained in detail, the evidence that has been provided in the complaint and the plaintiff's witnesses will be presented. The accused may then defend herself and present her witnesses. The guilt or innocence required here must be recognized by mutual consent of all. If the complaint is not filed correctly, the person accused today will be given the position of being offended, being able to exercise his right to revenge and do justice for himself. Thus, anyone who is not able to truthfully present his innocence will be considered guilty even if he were inno-

cent. Then a meeting will be decided on the day set by consent of everyone in the defendant's home where the testimony of the men of the thing will be presented. May the gods have mercy on me and my testimony, may the judgment of your case be carried out as I am testifying now.

One of the jurors approached Wynn who was sitting on a bench at one end of the table where the other three judges were, facing each other at the other end was the young man supposedly complicit in the betrayal and the lagman who was sponsored as referee in the case. that they did not agree. Wynn looked at the boy carefully. Yes, it was true that he had approached her once, but he barely remembered her face. He wasn't looking at her, his gaze was fixed on the floor.

The man who assumed the status of judge for the interrogation was about sixty years old, a venerable age in times when life was not long for many. He looked at her with that coldness that says nothing about the intentions he might have, but everything made her fear the that your lips will say. Sven and he had already conspired on what the interrogation would be like, he had to wear her down, confuse her and make her assume that she knew the young man she was joining him with and insist on it, because it was certain that she would rather die than confess something she hadn't done much of. minus the legitimacy of his son. I had to take advantage of all the time I had, Björk would be arriving any moment.

-Wynn daughter of Hunn of Eastanglia wife of Björk son of Einar, do you know why you are here? What are you accused of?

-Yes, and a lie that I don't understand the reason for.-she looked at him defiantly.

-You are accused of disloyalty to your husband by presenting him with a child that belongs to another. We know that your marriage was due to kidnapping, although you gave your consent, you yourself set conditions for the marriage. So your marriage was consensual and therefore legal. What does that say about you? That you are cold and calculating, do you think that we are to believe that love brought you closer to this Union? Björk knows very well what her obligations are, she only needed the right to your father's lands from you. It is clear that there is no feeling in you nor in your husband. Their Union has been an agreement that would not prevent you from falling in love with one of your own. But you have offended our clan by trying to entitle a son of foreign blood to us. What did you want? Do you think Björk is not aware of your misdeeds? You became pregnant when he was not here, even he doubted the child, his own brother is a witness to it. We are all witnesses that your husband was disgusted by having to consummate the marriage, it took him months to put his hands on you. Only his obligations made you become his wife, you are far from being a woman like ours, weak and lacking grace. How can you believe yourself to be more than our women?

One of the judges reporting the discomfort in the assembly and especially Einar, so he decided to intervene.

-Stop, mockery or unnecessary offenses to a woman will not be accepted.

-Who says she is a woman? Saxon witchcraft has been found under this woman's bed. It is known that British women are lovers of spells.

-We are here because of the complaint about her son, not about her beliefs. The accusation is for the legitimacy of the child, not for witchcraft, Björk has not denounced it nor has anyone in her family. Let Wynn speak.-The judge objected, clearly showing annoyance.

The young woman began to speak without flinching, if she was nervous she knew how to hide it very well for the crowd present. He took a deep breath, mustering enough courage to make himself heard clearly and loudly.

-It is true that my marriage was an imposed agreement, and I accepted my conditions freely, but if you believe that I am not enough of a woman for one of you, then you should have sold me or left me with my father. Of course I was valuable in some way. Björk respected My times hoping to see that there were feelings towards him. He never expressed to me that he doubted being the father of my child. I am Catholic, I do not do witchcraft, the Pope of Rome prohibits it in the name of the sacred scriptures of my religion.

The judge who asked the questions realized that continuing along that line would only lead to greater confrontations and the objective of the trial would be lost, first to break the will of the young woman; He returned to the fray with the fundamental topic.

-We have witnesses who have seen you with this young man. Let the witnesses come forward, let the three women who were washing clothes next to her come forward.

Wynn was internally amazed, she had never witnessed an assembly of the barbarians, they were fully organized in how to settle a trial and their laws were respected and valued by the solemnity that existed in the tense and silent atmosphere. Only the judge and those he questioned were heard.

- Tell me what you have seen

-Sir, we have only seen a young man who we do not know if he is the one present here, he was at a distance and we were busy with our tasks. We saw Wynn, but it was just a few moments, as if the young man was asking him something. We didn't see more than that.

The young women took pity on Wynn and gave him looks of warmth and friendship. They had known each other since he had arrived, sharing lessons and relaxed laughter in the mornings washing the skins and other fabrics. She returned the loving gesture with a weak smile.

-Let Bliss, Carl's wife, show up.

Bliss approached fearfully, she truly feared what could happen to her friend, she knew the harshness of the trials that were carried out there. The offense was very serious and they would not be easily stopped by giving up the lies that managed to put Wynn in such acrimony.

-As a foreigner, just like the accused, you have a lot in common, so your words will be taken with caution. What do you know what this woman is accused of?

-Wynn is my friend, and I attest that I have never seen her being disloyal to her husband or rude to our customs. He has worked with dignity in this community. I know you respect your husband. I never saw this young man next to her, I know he is Sven's slave, he only approached Wynn like me to ask about his family, if we knew anything about them.

-Incredible, our wives at home tell us things that not even the gods see, but they are in everything. But now no woman saw anything or heard anything. All innocent without hearing or tongue.

There was a murmur of laughter from some husbands complicit in the irony.

-I call our lady Margit as a witness.

The mature woman with plenty of confidence approached the center of the scene, she did not spare a single glance at Wynn, she did not want to show sympathy in front of the judges that would undermine

her word, if she wanted to help the young woman she would have to offer a truly solid argument.

-Madam, for the honor of your family, tell us if it is true that this woman slept in her husband's bed and then did so with her son. It could have been refused in both cases. The accused already testifies that she freely accepted the marriage. But in the case of her husband she could have refused since it is not a custom of ours but rather an Anglo-Saxon one for the king to test his daughter-in-law.

Margit deeply regretted the man's words, she found herself at the crossroads of deciding between the honor of her husband and the honor of her daughter-in-law, if she was telling the truth that her husband had not been with her, but that it had been a cruel mood of which Her husband used to have a manly thing flaunting his power and his manhood, her husband would look very bad in front of the entire community. He never imagined that such a distant event would come to light and it was unlikely that anyone would bring it to the fore under these circumstances. It was true that he would hurt his daughter-in-law by supporting the lie, it could be that Wynn told the truth and it would be a scandal, another one besides this one, where the only culprits were his own greedy and avaricious men. He trusted her nobility, but it was a bet he could lose.

- Yes, that's right, they are customs from other lands that we respect.

-Is it true, lady, that you saw your daughter-in-law on several occasions in your children's blacksmith shop? What was the young woman doing there?

- Yes I have seen Wynn a couple of times at the blacksmith shop, with my children absent she decided to go clean and tidy. It was only a few times. The child is small and requires a lot of attention in addition to having chores at home. I had never seen this young man, nor have I seen anything dishonorable in the behavior of my son's wife.

-Thank you ma'am, I'm sorry you are going through this moment. Margit was willing to continue vouching for her daughter-in-law, but the judge cut her short by thanking her for her presence and turning his back on her, forcing her to march to her seat, dropping into it next to Einar. The judge immediately turned to Wynn and said:

-You have been seen with this young man on several occasions, there are witnesses to this. They have already spoken and several times. Our Lady Margit saw you in the blacksmith shop in the absence of her children, claiming that you were there to clean. In reality it was your loving meeting place with this slave. There you consummated your disloyalty and conceived your son who unworthily asked for rights for him. With what intentions? Do you want revenge for your dead?

-It's not like that- Wynn's clenched jaw made his teeth grind as he finished the sentence.

-It is difficult to believe you when you say that you love and respect your husband. Who among us can love the murderer of our people, of our family? We should be crazy, an enemy is an enemy. You have shown a certain combative character, right now you have significant arrogance, there is no humility in your look or in your words. As you know, our dear Ulf killed your brother on Björk's orders. And it makes us think: Who do you love? A man who wiped out your people, brought you to our lands against your will, ripped off your father, had your brother killed? Or do you share religion, memories, longings with a man who went through similar circumstances to yours, with whom you can share your misfortunes? Surely with so many absences of your husband you decided to let yourself go in the arms of another young man and seeing yourself pregnant you decided to make a good deal, you made sure that you would inherit your husband's assets through your son. You could have been worthy and given children to your husband first. Your first and great fault is not having fulfilled your obligations as a woman and wife.

When Einar heard that Ulf had killed Wynn's brother on his son's orders, he was astonished. He recalled some episodes of those days. He did not remember what had happened, nor any comments regarding Wynn's brother, nor that he had met him. -brought there. Much less that his son anticipated that intention. It was true that in battle the decisions were made by each man, many times unforeseen, every-

thing depended on the heat of the moment, the life and death decisions of each man belonged to them. Sweat ran down his neck, he took his wife's hand, which was trembling despite her rigid countenance. They didn't know what to expect from all this.

Wynn paled, all the misfortunes he had experienced flashed before his eyes in an instant, his ears did not hear the end of the speech or the questions addressed to him. Only the words that said that his brother was dead at the hands of Björk echoed in his head. He remembered when Björk had asked him when he returned what had happened, distant and unwilling to talk, he had told him that Osric was not in Eastanglia that he had gone to fight against the heretic enemies of Rome. I had lied to him. In his chest he felt the stinging pain of an invisible knife that betrayed him blood. How many lies had he told her then? How many nights did he only serve as a husband cheating on her? She stupidly believed that he was of few words, in reality he had no true words of love for her. It was all a lie, only she had given herself over to love, he was just a barbarian who pillaged and threatened innocents to satisfy his greed. Hatred began to feverish his blood, disappointment had fertile ground for his pain. He was no longer paying attention to what was happening around him, his body was rigid and his mind was burning inside. He had trusted a Viking who only knew how, like everyone else there, to war, to plunder and to kill.

Sven was paying attention to every word, there were no witnesses who could tell the truth, he himself had concocted that lie that no one could refute, Ulf was dead and Björk had not yet arrived, by the time he did, that lying detail was not going to be Most importantly, it would go unnoticed, he was sure of it.

-Let the accused be heard. "Tell us your name, where you are from," he told the accused boy.

-My name is Bentley from Éireland.

-You are accused of being linked to this woman. What do you have to say? With all the evidence we have, tell us the truth. Have you had relations with Björk's wife? Is it your son?

The young man wrung his hands, his annoyance was evident, his nerves were on edge, the judge asked him the same questions again. But he still doubted, he wondered if he should end this farce at the cost of his life, that didn't matter anymore, there was the life of this young woman but more importantly that of his family. For the last time he weighed his alternatives, he knew that he would die anyway in his situation, if he chose the life of this innocent young woman, what they were accused of doing would cost him the blood of his entire family; If she accepted the extortion she could save them and Wynn would only bear disgrace and banishment, she would surely be sent back to Eastanglia, but she would still save her life and that of

her son. With a trembling voice, his response was unintelligible and absolutely pitiful.

-It is true that I approached her with the intention of knowing about my family. That is the first truth. But the truth is that we had a relationship. -The judge did not waste the moment, the murmur of expletives was growing, he asked him the fair and necessary questions to end the matter. One of the two young men had to confess the betrayal, that was enough.

-Is he your son or not? Do you take the blame?

-Yes.- He said it with tears in his eyes and in his soul he asked God for forgiveness, looking at Wynn he prayed that he could understand his pain. But the young woman was no longer looking at him, she barely heard what he had said. She was dizzy with nausea and her temples were burning.

-Clearly, the blame has been assumed, you are all witnesses. What else to say, how to demand from this woman who is a clear liar who is determined to support her tricks.

Einar and Margit did not believe anything they heard, Einar got up from his seat and rushed to the center of the debate. I couldn't allow what was happening.



The gray sky announced that the rains were coming, the wind brought the freshness of water in the air. Björk was lost in thought when she glimpsed a horse galloping towards them. Bjarne, a short distance away from him, also noticed it; he assumed that he would bring his "good news."

It took the man a few minutes to reach them, his gaze warned whoever looked at him that something serious was bringing him with such urgency.

-Björk, son of Einar, introduced me to you by sending him from your father.

Bjarne instinctively spat on the ground, his father was evidently supporting Björk.

-What's happening? Tell me once and for all.

-Your wife is being tried in an assembly, she is accused of... cheating on you.

-What?? It wasn't a question, it was a hoarse cry that made the messenger tremble, hesitating to tell him all the message he had to give him.

-You are accused of having demanded to give your name to a foreigner's child-the words soaked in fear of his reaction left nothing but doubts. Björk didn't understand what he was talking about, what child? Would Wynn have taken some random child and intended to keep him? What was this man talking about?-Aclara lo que has dicho o no verás el anochecer, te lo juro.- He got off his horse and, taking the man by the breastplate, he pulled him off his horse with a single pull. The messenger stood firm with his feet on the ground as best he could, otherwise he would have fallen on his side.

-She is accused of having an affair when you were in Eastanglia and that the child she conceived is from a slave from Ireland.

Björk glared at him, the poor warrior thought he was going to die at that moment. However, without saying a word, Björk mounted her horse and galloped off towards the village. Bjarne secretly enjoyed what had happened, but with a serious gesture, he announced to the caravan that they would continue the journey as they had been doing, there was no use agitating the horses and putting the carts at risk, he told them that there was nothing they could do but ask the Gods your favors.

The horse fatally sank its hooves into the earth it raised as if inviting it to fly, but Björk's mind was the one flying in a thousand thoughts. What were they talking about, that my son was someone else's? It wasn't possible. She couldn't imagine Wynn lying to her, those light honey eyes, the caresses, the sweet words. Could he lie to you like that? Could he have been so easily fooled by an inexperienced young woman? She was cunning and intelligent, but could she also be calculating and cold? No. But it was true that he was not the most kind and demonstrative. Yes, she could have felt alone, taking refuge in a young man with his Anglo-Saxon education, delicate and glamorous like all of them. Or perhaps she fell in love with another who believed in her God and understood her customs, it was true that she was forced by circumstances, that she arbitrated the marriage at her convenience and that the father was a viper who could well have inherited his evil.

He needed to reach out, look her in the eyes, listen to her and he would know the truth. But who accused her? With what reasons? The honor of the family, who of them could have been damaged? I would kill whoever did this. It was blinding his mind with increasing intensity, with fury hiding the fear that his life was collapsing. Now that he felt that his life had meaning, that he was beginning to live a time of peace. That death felt so far away. He remembered Wynn being pregnant, when the child cried at birth, when he held him in his arms

and gave him his name. Tears ran down her face just seconds after the wind carried them away; she didn't even realize how inevitably her soul dissolved into silent crying. He didn't care about the laws, or the leadership, or his parents, nothing was more important than reaching her. He thought about his brother, how much he needed him in those moments, he always managed to make him see other points of view of things, he calmed his anguish by advising him by seeing solutions that he, in his impetus, eluded him. But he had stayed in Eastanglia, the sea separated them for the first time.

He could already see the village, the seconds were slow for him, as he passed through the entrance doors he jumped from the saddle, leaving the horse alone without a rider to stop meters in front. She didn't see anyone around her, but everyone saw them coming even though they were invisible to Björk.



Einar, with a stern and arrogant gesture, looked at each one of those present, a skilled orator and leader who knew how to lead his warriors into battle, invoking the sacred in it, he spoke as only he could. I needed to buy time and stop the whirlwind of this farce.

-What is all this due to? It reminds me of when we used to sacrifice women for Freyja, I think we are returning to those times when we

were capable of throwing our women into the fire for a good harvest. How much value can the word of a slave who pays for his freedom with the work of his hands have? Who assures me that this slave's words are truly free when he speaks? My son Björk is the most injured and is not present, I will not allow this trial to continue until he is not here. I never heard any doubts from his mouth, nor did he report any complaints about his wife. Let us respect our traditions and comply with the laws, I lead their lives and we are free men with sacred customs. If I don't respect this, I'm just a barbarian who clings to rituals to allay my fears and yours.

Sven cursed his father, his intervention was unexpected, and contrary to his wishes this took longer than necessary. From one moment to the next things had turned unfavorably; if the trial stopped, everything had to be considered lost. If the loving spouses met they would surely fix things. Even more so with his father's clear intention to favor Wynn. He should have looked for more witnesses to support the plan, his bully brother Bjarne only knew how to give him orders in the absence of intelligence. He hoped she would keep him away until he came up with something.

Wynn continued in his thoughts without listening to Einar, if for a moment he had regained his temper he could have seen a little light over so many shadows that invaded him. She would have realized that she was not as alone as she thought, that what she had experi-

enced had not been in vain. And with time he would discover the lie about his brother's supposed death. But the seed of doubt had germinated in her, she only felt the desire to take revenge, to scream, to see Björk's face to spit out all her pain. She couldn't and didn't want to trust her feelings towards him, ever again. How could she expect loyalty when her own father gave her up without a tear? She could not trust a barbarian who had treated her as a transaction and in her face in front of the entire assembly confirmed that her husband was only her husband out of obligation and personal benefit. Her hands were stained with her blood, that of her people and even worse that of her brother. This was not enough, she had given him a son who was now defiled as a bastard. And that boy, they would surely pay him with his freedom at her expense. To get her off their backs, now that they had Dommoc in their possession, they no longer needed her, she had signed the papers that Björk needed to get the right to the land, it was the only thing they wanted from her. Surely he would marry that woman Torsten, a Varangian suitable for the clan. He hated him with all his soul.

There is no fury more overwhelming than a wounded and betrayed woman, even the bravest man guards against the thrust of a scorned woman.

Björk entered the assembly with all the fury of a tornado, her immense body seemed twice her corpulence with the furs draped over

her shoulders and her shaggy hair falling over them showing the swift journey she had had. In two strides he was in the center of the scene, his father, surprised like everyone else present, stood aside without being able to say another word.

—What is all this about? Who accuses and why?—His face was as serious as his gaze, he observed the faces of the impassive judges, while Sven hid behind the crowd.

Wynn got up from his seat and approached Björk. His face showed anger turned hate, he trembled from so much feeling, needing to speak.

—Whatever you believe, you tell me. The lies, your lies, everyone's lies are up to date in this room.—and he spat at Björk's feet.

He looked at her without understanding what she accused him of lying to her, she was all a bundle of anger, his pride felt hurt when he saw his wife spitting on him in front of everyone, with a contempt in her eyes that he had never seen before.

—Explain what? You empty head, pure brute. Don't your hands full of innocent blood now have the answers you demand?

-Don't raise your voice at me, woman, and answer me.

The interrogating judge, recovering from the stupor in which Björk's arrival had left him, explained how he could overcome his own fear of

what was happening. He began to doubt how favorable Sven's plan had been, things were getting out of control.

-Björk, son of Einar, this woman is accused of cheating on you with this man you see here and that the child she gave birth to is actually his.

Björk looked directly from head to toe at the young man who was pale and knew he was presumed dead at that very moment. He was no more fazed than he already was. He held her gaze and somehow Björk felt that it was not the figure of a man, she seemed more like a sad young woman in a man's body. Even so, his anger was so deep that he only took into account the appearance of the situation. It was possible that Wynn had become entangled with someone so different from him, the young man was beautiful in his softness, slender and apparently polite in his manners. He felt envy somewhere in his resentment. Heading to Wynn

-It's true? Do you know this one? Have you been disloyal to me?

-Why do you want me to answer you? -The contempt was evident in the look accompanied by every word spoken hostilely. -I have already been humiliated and sentenced. You better tell me about your hypocrisy and the lies you have told me. Do you demand respect and loyalty from me? You have always been a vile fraud. I have seen you be

ruthless and vengeful, I have endured your contempt and you have manipulated me as you please.

-You are selfish and excessive, you cannot be so reckless to speak to me with so much pride when you are accused of something so dishonorable. -The impatience and shame of seeing her so exasperated was causing all the anger to begin to be directed only at she. Everyone around had disappeared from his attention, he only had ears and eyes to see how unhinged Wynn was.

-Does your pride worry you about seeing me involved with someone else? Every time you've left, have you been faithful or have you raped every woman who then put your sword to death? -Wynn released the words full of pain, seeking to hurt him as she was. They were both two wolves wounded in a fight imposed by nameless shadows. They didn't even take into account the people around them, they only saw themselves immersed in their feelings.

Esas palabras fue demasiado para Björk, su mente se obnubiló, no sentía más que desamor e ira. La actitud de ella no se correspondía con una frágil e inocente mujer, fue claro para su mente que era culpable de lo que se le acusaba, no sabía de los detalles a esa altura de insultos y humillación, no necesitaba saberlos. ¿Qué mujer inocente se comportaría de esa manera? No vacilaba en responder con soberbia y altanería.

-Is the son to whom I gave my name mine?

Wynn only saw and heard the unfair interpellation, the vile look, the hypocritical words, he could not see the burning within her, the helplessness, the fear and the affliction that devoured him inside. Behind the arrogance of his questions there was confusion and distress. It wasn't hatred or contempt, it was all the love he felt for her, wounded and bleeding.

-It's the only thing that matters to you, besides fulfilling in bed and having the rights to my lands. Do you also expect me to love you? It would be a blessing if my son did not have a father who murdered his family.-With his chin held high and his pride on the surface, his posture in all its haughtiness, his voice was of a torn sharpness.

"Did you betray me yes or no?" The fury in his words only made Wynn angry.

-Think what you want, you always do what you want. You are cold, incapable of loving anyone. You are a savage, you always have been and you always will be.

Björk was hurt, betrayal and shame were like arrows in her chest, she felt the metal of the hilt of her sword in her hand burning. It was a minute, fleeting and fast.

-Damn manipulative and lying witch-he shouted with all the hatred he felt for her at that moment and pounced on the young woman, he only wanted to show her his anger, he unsheathed the sword he had held on to for minutes, but his hand had a memory of its own. ; Ac-

customed to killing and wounding in so many fights and battles, she only did what she always did, pierce the enemy with her sword.

She didn't see him coming because she was only looking into his eyes. It took two strides and she felt his immense body covering her like a leafy tree. She felt a stinging pain in her stomach and a heat that embraced her. What was it? He wondered. His arm took her by the waist and pushed her onto his chest, her gaze was locked on his, she realized that only one arm was holding her, the other was in a position... holding... his sword. The fury he felt gave way to astonishment.

Björk felt her body and as if her own body had a memory, it molded to her and remembered in each of her nerves the familiar perfume, her waist attached to her body, her breasts, all of her.

Like a murmur he heard the screams of those who were there, but what he heard most clearly was her breath. As if his mind regained control over his own body, he became aware of his hand on the sword and the arm that held it to Wynn and how the body he clung to became lighter. The sword stuck in Wynn's abdomen had pierced her and she could see the end of the bloody blade above the young woman's head as it began to fall on her chest. Panic took hold of him like the awareness of what he had done.

-Wynn, Wynn-he whispered. He withdrew the sword and threw it aside, it was the sword he had forged for the marriage ceremony. The

beginning and the end. He hugged her and, kneeling with Wynn's body in his arms, tried in vain to cover the wound from which the blood was gushing.

Wynn realized that death was approaching and his astonishment gave way to all the love he truly felt for Björk. He saw him in shock with his eyes full of stupor and tears. How sad he thought, why had it come to this? If I loved him, why? He felt sorry for Björk because the pain was greater in him, his contorted face told him how impetuous he had been without thinking. She lamented that it was nothing more than her arrogance that ignited his fury. If she had been calmer, if she had answered him truthfully instead of trying to humiliate him as humiliated and devastated she felt. If arrogance and fury had not entrenched themselves in the two of them. If they had taken the time to speak honestly and unravel the tangle of lies and conspiracies, they could have saved their lives together. As many if there were, they were just more wounds that added up, but this time in his soul.

-Björk I swear I love you, I swear he's your son. I never cheated on you. I don't know who did this.

-Sorry Wynn. I don't know how I did it. -Björk couldn't help but cry bitterly.

-It's okay, I wasn't the best wife. Forgive me. But please protect Vidar, he is your blood. Don't abandon him to his fate. Promise-fear it.-The paleness of her face and hands announced that life was saying

goodbye to her. It was the minute before fatality, the one that we want to stop by denying the madness that led us to that moment. Life was fading from his eyes. Wynn only felt the injustice of seeing himself at that moment next to the pain he saw on her face as he hugged her to keep her close to him. She also wanted to go back in time, a long time ago, when they walked together in the river after experiencing their loving bodies, when he hugged her, wrapping his huge arms around her growing belly. Retain your loving gaze from yesterday and today even in the desperation of your tears. The resentment she felt in her heart turned to sadness when she thought of the baby she was leaving without her love and care, the pain of not seeing him again and having him next to her breast full of breast milk. Knowing that I would not see him grow up nor live to tell his story. He felt how life and strength were fading with the illusion of everything he dreamed of and could not have, a quiet and simple life with love. He closed his eyes and let go with a last breath.

The hoarse and furious scream filled with pain left everyone in the room terrified. Björk felt a stabbing pain in her heart in the middle of her chest, the air escaped from her lungs and everything around her began to spin, she felt like her head was exploding and her ears were ringing. He had never felt such pain in his life. He refused to accept that his life was going into his hands, those that impulsively took

what he loved most. It was all a bad dream surely. I wanted to wake up, forget this nightmare.

But Wynn's still warm body and the blood that spilled across his clothes, staining his, told him that the nightmare had just begun. He still had her next to him, she was still his, soon they would take her from his arms, they would carry her on a litter to clean and change her clothes, they would perfume her and wrap her in a shroud. Hands, many faceless, took him away from his beloved, several men pushed him up, some women approached Wynn and carried her on litters out of his sight. Time was no longer time itself, it was a succession of images, bodies around, words that I heard without understanding. La asamblea aún espantada y sorprendida se disolvió en el desorden de un ir y venir. Una escolta llevó a Björk a su casa y se apostaron guardias a la espera de las siguientes órdenes de Einar y los jueces. Debían cuidar que no cometiera más locuras y se dañara o buscara más venganza. Su madre al reponerse marchó a quedarse junto a él, se encontraba ido de sí como perdido en un sueño o una borrachera. Le dio a beber un brebaje para sedarlo que le hizo dormir descansando así su mente.



CHAPTER 5

“With half a loaf and a glass you become a faithful comrade.”

Anonymous



The silence broken by Björk's heartbreaking scream like a wounded bear left everyone paralyzed, some women fainted, including Bliss and Margit, the outcome was unexpected for everyone. Einar, who was meters away from the incident, could not come to his senses. Björk held Wynn's body against her, while her blood ran down both of their clothes. The judges were pale, everything had gotten out of hand.

Sven was waiting for Bjarne outside the skali, he saw how Einar's men carried Björk and the women carried Wynn, surely they would take her to prepare for the funeral rite. His nerves were playing tricks on him and he knew it because his body wouldn't stop shaking. If the conspiracy was discovered, death would be his destiny. I could already see Bjarne's caravan shortly arriving. They came at a calm pace

without yet knowing what had happened. He decided to take a horse and go ahead to tell him what had happened and put together a strategy that would cover them from everyone.

Bjarne saw a rider approaching quickly and soon realized it was Sven. Something inside him told him that something had gone wrong, otherwise his brother would be waiting for him with a few mugs of beer in the tavern to celebrate the triumph. Seeing him arrive pale and upset, he no longer had any doubts. He got off the horse, moving away from the caravan he was presiding over, and waited for his brother a few meters from the others.

-What happened Sven? By your face I see that things have gone wrong.

-Even worse. Björk murdered Wynn in an outburst.

He told him in detail everything that had happened, Sven was always cold and calculating, he was out of his mind, he had no strategy nor could he think clearly, Bjarne had to take command of the decisions or everything would be exposed to their misfortune.

—Go back and tell the judge that you blackmailed that I want to see him secretly right now, make sure he doesn't tell anyone and that I'll wait for him right now on the cliff.

-What are you up to?

-Discard the witness that could incriminate us. Your slave will not open his mouth, he knows that his death was certain.

-But getting rid of an important man can have consequences.

-Not if we do it quickly. The guilt of having been so harsh in the interrogation led him to dishonorably kill himself in a senicide, an old man who decides to throw himself off the cliffs.

-Okay, I'll go look for him, but I won't accompany him, it's better that they don't see me so close to the incident.

Sven marched to the village while Bjarne prepared excuses in his mind to leave the caravan and go to the appointed place.

Bliss wept bitterly and the rest of the women shed silent tears as they undressed Wynn and washed his body with scented water. It was all very strange; They could not believe what had happened nor the accusations about the young woman. They tried to remember some fact that incriminated Wynn but they remembered nothing. One of them had prepared a funeral dress for herself to wear on the day the gods wanted, yet she decided to give it to the young woman who had never foreseen her end. They had to preserve the body for a few days in the best condition they could until the family decided how they would perform the rite. They dressed her in a linen petticoat and left the blue-dyed funeral dress made with woad, flowers from the coastal areas that were abundant in the area, beautifully embroidered with red threads made with flowers called blondes brought from Britain.

If she was not buried correctly it was possible that she would not find peace in the afterlife. Wynn could visit his living relatives as a ghost

to torment them and as a sign that more family members could die. Sometimes the dead had to die again; You could pierce the corpse with a stake, or cut off the head so that it would not find its way back to the world of the living. They all begged inwardly that this would not happen.

Night was falling and the most important men of the community were left in the skali, Einar and the judges, except one, the one who had interrogated Wynn mercilessly, who excused himself on the grounds that he had to recover from the moment due to his weak health, promising to return later. to drink his medicine.

-This has been a disgrace. Björk has committed murder.

-That leaves him out of the succession, the woman had not yet been tried-we were in the middle of the trial.

-I see him differently than you, he alone did justice, as a wronged husband he had the right to apply whatever punishment he decided.

-She had not been declared guilty, he murdered her while disputing her reproaches towards the other.

-There were sufficient elements to declare her guilty of treason and disloyalty.

Einar listened in silence. His fears had materialized, this had been nothing more than a betrayal but from one or two of his children. Bjarne and Sven were in their sights. They were the only ones who benefited from displacing Björk by using her most vulnerable side.

No one dared to share their thoughts although some assumed the same thing. Only he could enable us to express ourselves, although without being sure of what Einar thought, no one would dare to offend him.

Einar weighed the pros and cons, he could not have his children killed for defending Björk, that would weaken his reign, in time he would bring justice to them. Now the important thing was to defend Björk and especially himself. He didn't know how his wife's death would affect his spirit and mind, but he had to bet that he would overcome it. Now more than ever he had the certainty of ceding the throne to his son even if he became crazy as a goat.

-It is clear that there was an offense, the slave will be killed by hanging as if he were a thief, I do not care if he was extorted, his testimony was bought or his betrayal was true. In any way, his actions damaged our honor, whether it was true or false. Björk exercised her right, it is true that she would have preferred him to banish her and her son, but the man's temperament is not something that others can control. Björk will be my successor as we decided, he has sufficient merit, even this fact shows that honor and compliance with our laws prevail in him, he will do justice even when pain passes through him. I don't think we should continue debating this matter.

-Excuse me Einar, but don't you think there is something more to this whole matter?

-No. This matter, no matter how much of a surprise it may have given us, is nothing more than an everyday case of marital issues. This marriage carried the interest of securing rights to Eastanglia, so it served us well. Hunn will be notified and we will possibly send him his daughter's body for burial according to his Christian beliefs. I will leave that to the decision of whoever her husband was.

-It is important to decide where or how the rites will be performed. She was born a Christian, but by marrying Björk she accepted our gods, we do not want more tragedies or deaths to fall on us in your family or ours.

-I will talk to Björk in due time and we will consult the Godit. It will be done to the best of our ability.

-I suggest that the slave be offered as a sacrifice at the young woman's burial ceremony as reparation so that he can serve as her slave in the afterlife.

-If it were up to me, I would deserve the punishment of the "blood eagle", I would remove his ribs and lungs to settle accounts for so much humiliation that he brought to my family. But it would only feed the thirst for old traditions that we have decided to leave behind. People would again ask to sacrifice children or women for any reason. But I agree with cutting his throat as a sacrifice, it is the best punishment we can offer.

-What about the child?

Einar sighed, he was sure it was his blood and he couldn't leave him to his fate. He had heard Björk's promise at Wynn's request. His heart was squeezed in sharp pain.

-Our community does not abandon the elderly or orphans, it is our obligation to support them. The child will be one more orphan than we sustain after the losses of our warriors. I will consult with my wife about which family can accommodate him. But whether or not he belongs to our family is out of the question. Björk has the right to recognize it in the future if she wants to.

- You have spoken with wisdom and justice Einar, we are all in agreement if we vote for it that way.

All the men nodded and broke up the assembly with a tragic shadow over them.

Two days later Margit was preparing a frugal lunch for Björk in the house she had built with her own hands, she remembered him being cheerful and consulting her about feminine tastes at that time, her son did not eat much so she had not prepared a great food. He had gone to the bank of the river to be alone, she had told him, she saw him as more in control of himself and although she was somewhat restless, she did not oppose him. He understood that he had to clear his mind and cope with his feelings to put his soul in order. Einar had told him that he would stop by in the afternoon to talk to him.

Sitting on a stone watching the water flow, he listened to the lurs that sounded calling the cattle back to the farms and remembered the panpipe, a type of wind musical instrument made of a small boxwood plank and the tubes created by drilling holes in the wood at different depths; that he had done to Wynn to remind him of his homeland. I used to take it with me when I went looking for flowers to dye fabrics. More than once he found her making her sound relaxed in the countryside enjoying the sun. Hours went by remembering scenes or details he experienced with her. Like when he brought him three kittens to scare away the rodents from the garden behind the house, how he pampered and caressed them, even he learned to show affection towards those little cats, especially a kitten who used to approach him rubbing her snout and body on his legs. . He got used to her staying next to him while he sat down to rest after chopping firewood, he caressed her, discovering a tenderness in him that he didn't know he could have.

His body ached as he remembered the passion he had experienced with the young woman, the fights that were nothing more than seductive skirmishes where they eagerly sought each other out, testing their sagacity in their phrases and their complicity in their mutual seduction.

He had not bathed or cleaned himself since his death as a sign of mourning, nor did he have the mood to do so, he did not even care

about feeding, deep in his soul he only wanted to die once and for all. Darkness had taken over his hours. There were only memories that came back one after another. He also didn't want to talk to or see anyone. Leif would surely come as soon as the ship that was leaving for Dommoc gave him the news. He didn't even feel like talking to his brother. He thought about his son, whom he did not want to see either, it hurt him to think about the future, how he would tell him that it was he himself who stole his mother's life without trusting her and defending her from lies and accusations. Why the Gods had taken their lives was a constant question on his mind. The resentment towards them was great and the seed of revenge was already planted in the fertile soil of his temperament, he just had to know who it would fall on.

Einar arrived alone, greeted Margit and asked her to leave him alone with Björk who had arrived a while ago and had something to eat. He was sitting on the stone bench against the wall with his elbows on the table and his hands clasped holding his chin. With an absent look he greeted him and Einar, taking a seat on the bench facing his son, felt compassion for him, he had to speak to him and he was obliged to do so to coordinate the steps to follow.

-Björk, we are alone, what we talk about here will remain between you and me. What's going through your mind?

-What do you think? I killed Wynn blind and angry without thinking. I have taken the mother away from my son. I'm sure it's all been a web of lies. I was blinded by Wynn's stubbornness and arrogance. If only we had been alone here in our house, if I had been there from the beginning of all this, none of what happened would have happened. Who accused her? Tell me everything you know.

-I will only speak to you frankly if you promise not to go out like a madman in search of revenge, it will only bring more misfortunes. I have well-founded suspicions, but I have no proof and if I had it I don't think it would make things better but even worse. Sven presented the complaint to the council and the judges were determined. I don't think your trip with Bjarne was a coincidence. The intention was to get you away so you could harass Wynn freely. I tried to dissuade him, to delay the trial until you arrived, but everyone rushed things on purpose. There was only one who took the blame, Wynn defended herself fiercely, she was also angry. It was understandable. There were no valid witnesses to support the accusations, but since the slave took the blame it was difficult, although not impossible, to prove that he was lying for some reason. I just needed time.

-And I wasted it in a moment of fury.

-Revenge is a dish that is eaten cold. You know that the Gods are the ones who decide our destiny, the souls of those who die are wel-

came into their kingdoms. It is certain that Freyra will receive it. The gods are powerful and wise beings who rule these kingdoms and determine the destiny of each of us.

-Don't give me that now. I don't care about the Gods, plus Wynn was still deep down a Christian, only her God will receive her in any case. She believed that her God and her son Jesus were merciful and compassionate, but evidently they do not have enough power against ours, cruel and without mercy for us.

-You are hurt, the Gods understand your anger, do not abandon yourself to darkness. From what I know, Wynn also believed in his ancient gods who are family of ours, I think he deserves to have a funeral according to our beliefs. Or perhaps you prefer to send her to her father so that the Christians can arrange her departure to the afterlife.

-No way, she was mine and her death belongs to me. That cretin of a father has nothing Christian about him and I doubt he sincerely mourns his daughter. He will most likely put on a circus after this, playing the victim at our hands. He will try to take advantage at all costs.

-I'm close to finishing the boat I built for my funeral, I'll give it to Wynn.

-I'm sorry to tell you that it cannot be a burial or cremation with all honors. The assembly determined that his death was a punishment that you imposed for your right against the offense. Otherwise you

would be judged and your child would suffer a worse fate. This way you can at least protect him from a distance and wait until you are clear about what really happened. The young man who declared himself to be the father will be hanged to death and without indicating where his body will be on earth his soul will wander without a guide.

Björk looked at him with pain, it was unfair that to save him she had to be humiliated even when she was dead and her son banished from her family.

-I will not give my son away. It's mine.

-You can't Björk, the best thing is for another family to take care of him. Carl and Bliss have been consulted about it and were very well prepared, the woman is the one who knew and loved Wynn the most, she is sure that everything has been a lie. You will ensure the sustenance of all of them, periodically you will provide them with more benefits and you will give them a portion of land. When the child reaches sufficient age, you will be able to recognize him in front of the community and restore all his rights as a legitimate child.

-Meanwhile he will live like a son of a lying and foreign mother. And I will only be a witness to his life.

-You could also send him to Danelow with Leif, he could raise him. I'm sure he won't object.

-No. He will stay here and I will watch over him, in silence as punishment for my mistakes.

-As you wish. Wynn is in the mortuary cave near where the Godit lives. The women prepared it on the altar, when we have it and it is better before the body decomposes, the necessary rites will be performed. Margit and the women will come get your wife's belongings to put them next to beautiful cushions and details that they usually organize so that she has the familiarity and comfort in her new life, as well as honoring her. It is important that the passage to the afterlife be careful, no one believes that their soul will go to the underground kingdom ruled by the goddess Hel, where those who have not died in combat or honorably go. But you know that everyone fears that Wynn could be left here haunting us looking for justice.

-Let them fear me. I am the one who wants revenge and justice the most. Wynn was only arrogant and stubborn in the face of anyone who wanted to harm her, if they had left her alone, if they had not used her to hurt me, she would only be a warm and sweet woman. If I hadn't been so stupid she would still be alive.

-Stop torturing yourself. Now you must cool down and accept what is coming. This occurred due to the succession to the throne. Some seem to crave the place more than I thought. I'm sure they weren't expecting anyone to die, just to break my decision. But you and Wynn paid the price. The most inquisitive judge apparently committed suicide on the cliffs. He was the most intransigent at the trial, someone silenced him, but he had been so distraught that day that everyone

assumes that guilt led him to that end. I don't believe it. Betrayal is the sister of greed and it is always behind your back, the shadow closest to yours bears its name.

-Even if it takes me years to discover those who brought us to this end, I will be relentless the day my ax rises above their heads and makes them roll. Winter will be warm compared to what you'll see from me from now on. I don't care if they are my brothers, I'm sorry father, but I won't even forgive my blood.

-Build your battle slowly, observe and wait for your enemy. Look for his weaknesses, let him live in peace for a while, let fear fall asleep and believe that oblivion has become your flesh. That will prevent him from seeing the ax coming over his skull or the arrow into his heart. But don't forget to keep living, to take every sweet moment that life gives you. I am not asking you to seek happiness, only to nourish yourself with the force of life to achieve your goal. Revenge cannot be your guide, you will become blind as you have sadly learned, seek justice, that will give you the balance so as not to needlessly hurt innocent people along the way. Cruelty alone as a shield will only make you a beast of pure instinct, the punishment must be measured according to the offense, precise and accurate without delay. Because if not, bloodlust will be the end for you and for many.

-How long will it take me father?

-Whatever your soul needs to be at peace with itself and thus punish the truly guilty and pay for their mistakes, but do not add yours to them. Those that correspond to you must be paid by yourself as the Gods request. Your destiny is already written, just follow the path they have set before you. Don't try to change it, let it flow like the river to the sea.



The rainy and gray day accompanied the feelings of many that morning. Björk had cleaned herself after days of sadness and deep pain. He had prepared his clothes, the same ones he wore when he married Wynn, he was emaciated with his eyes sunken in his face, he was only about five years older than the young woman, barely twenty-three years old, but the anguish had added to his body and -ma of ten more years. When she met Wynn she was only sixteen and three years with her seemed like an eternity that she had lost in a minute. They had had that peace that only love brings, they had known love for the first time.

She convinced her father to make the cavern of mortuary preparations the crypt where Wynn's body would be kept, with the excuse of Christian rites, if he couldn't give her the funeral she deserved, at

least he would give her a single place just for her. . He had a coffin made of stone, limestone, gravel and sand two meters high in the place of the pyre where the bodies were prepared so that it would contain the body inside. He himself engraved the runes on the pillars. "I do not deserve to name the one who has given you your perfume and has repaid you with blood and fury of blind love, may Vidar guide you on your journey, he knows your truth."

The cave had a very beautiful access, an entrance that descended a few meters through steps made of stone and wood, the walls were covered with ivy and small flowers. Daylight penetrated warmly, illuminating the center of the grotto.

The women had already brought the young woman's belongings, clothes, jewelry, fruits and food for their ghostly journey. The swords and dagger that were exchanged at the nuptials had been brought by Björk, who knew what demons could come her way and must have something to defend herself with, since she was unable to do so in life.

The cave would be closed, but Björk had secretly made an opening to the outside in a hidden part, she wanted to go alone whenever she wanted. Christians used to visit their dead in those places and he wished he could have that strange custom for his people. He who had

always stated that the living should be with the living and the dead with the dead, today he wanted to live in both worlds.

When he arrived at the forest, several were already present, his parents, friends and his brothers. He only glanced at Bjarne and Sven, who were looking at the ground in false respect. If his gaze had been an ax they would have already been dismembered. But he contained his temper by clenching his fists until his nails were digging into the palm of his hands moistened by small drops of blood. He had plenty of time for revenge, now he had to fire Wynn.

The slave was present kneeling and bound, his face and body were nothing more than bundles of bone and flesh, his mind was gone due to a hallucinogenic concoction that they had given him to drink. He was beheaded and buried at the foot of the young woman's body. Björk did not flinch, she felt neither pity nor pity for him, nor did she feel resentment or hatred, she felt nothing. Requests were made to the Gods as custom provided, even without honor the ritual had to be celebrated for the protection of the family and the village. Wynn's head had been wrapped with a shroud of fine embroidered cloth, her feet did not face the exit of the grotto, so that she would not find the way out, and her toes had been sewn shut. Einar had ordered that They didn't break his legs, they only used protection talismans.

When they placed the stone sealing the box of stones that contained Wynn, Björk felt again like that fatal day, that reality was fading from her, the people were only shadows and murmurs, everything revolved around her, she saw herself outside her body, Minutes or seconds passed, he couldn't specify it, he just felt a fresh wind on his face and an immaterial hug in that breeze that brought him back to his senses and as if a veil had been lifted from his face, everything appeared even more real again, the colors and sounds, as if I had woken up from a dream.

When everything was over, there were no celebrations or toasts as usual, everyone broke up, Bjarne and Sven approached Björk to give them their condolences, he barely listened to their words, he just looked at them coldly without saying a word, he just did With a nod of thanks, he examined them carefully in order to understand all the details, analyzing the deepest, most invisible aspects of his past and present intentions.

Bjarne's cynicism and Sven's perversity were what he took into account the most and inwardly he had already decided who would be the victims of his thirst for revenge. It would be the shadow that would follow them day and night waiting for the opportunity to humiliate and behead them. For now he would take away what they valued most, power.

Einar and Margit accompanied Björk in silence to her cabin. They embraced him with all the love they felt for their son and prayed to the Gods to protect him even from himself.

Alone in the cabin, he lay down and in his dreams he returned to the happy times with Wynn.



Days after Wynn's funeral, Björk visited Carl and Bliss to leave the animals and the cabin in their care. She had decided to go to Eastanglia, spend some time there to regain strength and resolve matters there. Einar would take care of giving them a few hectares and support for the whole family. The couple received him with true affection and thanked him for his good will, assured him that they would take care of Vidar like another son and would keep him informed. She spent time with her son, the baby was already four months old, she could see her mother's ash blonde hair and almond eyes like hers, he was smiling and beautiful. She went with him to the river and spent the afternoon with the child in her arms, she enjoyed the tenderness of his cuteness and made him sleep by hugging him on her chest. I would treasure that day.

Later, when the cold night fell, Björk headed to Sven's house. Since childhood, Sven had always been the most calculating, with no noticeable physical abilities. His personality was built based on his ingenuity and the manipulation of his words. He was not wrong to target the mastermind of intrigue and lies around him. He wanted to face him and hear with his own ears the lies that he would surely tell him. When he reached the door, he had to contain his anger and dump a bucket of coldness on himself so as not to light the cabin on fire. The only thing that showed his hatred if someone had been next to him was the punch on the door to warn him. his arrival.

Sven opened the door and looked pale when he saw his brother. He feared the worst, he had not slept well since Wynn's death, fearing his brother's revenge. He had discussed it on several occasions with Bjarne, but unlike him, he was eagerly awaiting the meeting; it was the opportunity to justify parricide in self-defense.

Björk didn't greet him, she just invited him to go out for a walk to chat more calmly. Sven, with the excuse of looking for a coat, put a knife around his waist, in case he had to save his skin, a difficult prognosis if he had to do so. Only through betrayal did he have the possibility of surviving, even so he would not escape punishment in any case, a murder from behind his brother had no justification.

-Explain to me Sven, where did you get that Wynn had an affair with your slave? - accentuating Sven's ownership over the slave. -Why did you take the offense on yourself, without discussing it with me?

-Look Björk, family is the main thing, you were not there, and seeing how tragic everything ended I think I tried to do the best. Hold a fair trial for Wynn and stop the gossip.

As always, skilled with speeches to always land on his feet like a cat, Sven managed to stab him. The only one to blame for Wynn's death was him. He recovered internally as best he could, he needed answers.

-Where did Wynn get that I had murdered his brother?

-I have no idea where the judge got it from, unfortunately he can't tell us from the world of the dead.

Once again, the truth escaped him among his brother's lies and omissions. It was useless to continue the interrogation. I only had certainties without evidence. He had nothing to expose the betrayal.

Without saying another word, she looked at him for a few minutes with such intensity that Sven was about to wet his pants. Turning her back on him, Björk headed back, leaving him alone in the middle of the forest, taking care to feel the handle of his dagger, although she did not believe that Sven would be so stupid as to kill him from behind.



The next day he went to sea with a few men who wanted to settle with their families in the lands of Britain. Leif had already been warned of his arrival. He had loaded all the blacksmith tools onto the ship, as Leif had built one in Domnoc. The trip was calm without a storm and with a favorable wind. Björk felt a little peace in her soul sailing in her beloved sea, she did not think about tomorrow, she just let herself be looking at the sea and the horizon, the union of both seemed to have a name of its own, a being present in eternal time. A defined place to travel, where the world seems to end.

He thought, wondering what God would be with him on this journey, Njord seemed to carry him in its waters, the weather was conducive to calm, but Aeger would always be waiting for him, perhaps on a night without moon or stars to guide him, urging him on with giant waves and hitting his ship like the thoughts that every now and then crumbled him in his spirit.

He was deeply grateful for the moment anyway, just as Wynn had taught him to be grateful for every beautiful detail they experienced, making him see that life was not just suffering and work, struggles and death; There was also beauty, enjoyment, rest and time to share with loved ones.

The shores of Dommoc appeared, upon arriving and mooring the drakar, Leif was waiting for him on land. They didn't say anything, they just hugged each other and Björk rested on her brother's shoulder and, hiding her face, cried bitterly. He needed his brother more than he thought. Only by being in front of him could she loosen her muscles and her feelings tied to the coldness of his character just to avoid ending her life.

They arrived at Leif's house, the family was waiting for them with delicacies, they let them eat alone and calmly so that they could talk and catch up on everything that happened. Björk told Leif every detail; they spent many hours debating the intrigues that her brothers had undoubtedly made, and how they would act in the future. Leif informed him of the intrigues between the kingdoms of Britain, the risks to which they were exposed and how Hunn had stayed out of everything, living locked in a world of fantasies, haunted by his ghosts and getting closer every day to a senseless madness. He had informed him of his daughter's death shortly after the news of the death of Osric, Wynn's brother, had arrived, which devastated him and plunged him into his rugged mind. Barely realizing Wynn's death only made him mourn his son's death even more. Osric died in Byzantium fighting against the Muslims, they had no details, but his body had arrived in very bad condition due to the long journey despite all the treatment with herbs and other ointments to preserve it, as soon as

he disembarked he was buried with honors, Leif participated as part of the in-laws. He suggested that he go see Hunn sooner rather than later, not so much for himself but for the good of the community, to show respect and secure his rightful place as Wynn's husband. Björk accepted and had already thought about it, she would see how to adapt to life there, she needed to get away from Scania for a while.



Hunn was walking around in his room, he couldn't find the book, he knew he had left it on the table, but it wasn't there, it had probably been stolen. It was valuable, written and illustrated by the monks of Wessex Abbey. I didn't remember what it said, but I was sure it was important. Was it the Bible? No, it was about another topic. Were they minstrel songs? I wasn't sure. But it was important that I find it. Surely the Vikings took him or his brother, that vile man who always took away what was his. Even the book was stolen. He had to find him, he would have him search every house of those damned barbarian Danes. One of his servants knocked on the door and announced that Björk was there. His mind tried to locate that name, it sounded familiar. What would this invader want now?

-I'm not willing to talk to anyone about it with my daughter's husband.

The servant knew that his master's mind was lost in strange thoughts that came and went, people and places mixed up and he got lost in time.

-It's him, his daughter's husband.

-Ah, okay, I have to talk to him, a book has been stolen from me, he has to look for it among his people.

The servant went in search of Björk without first telling her that Hunn was not having a good day, he was anxious and somewhat lost in his mind. Björk sighed inwardly, what a crazy old man and his mother's son was missing.

-Hunn, my respects for the death of your children.- He said it without emotion. He had never liked the man and the blame for Wynn's death did not deserve to be given to this man. It was his fault and he would give her no reason to take advantage of it. He was not a father who deserved even the slightest consolation for the loss of his daughter, whom he only saw as a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. And Björk had snatched it from him without being the best buyer for old Hunn.

-Ah, yes of course. Terrible what happened. I have no heir. I should get married again and have children, but children take a long time to

grow up. I don't know how to solve it. But I wanted to talk to you, I lost a book. It is important that you find it.

-What is the book Hunn about?- Björk realized that the man was no longer master of himself. Evidently, some of these Christian demons had entered him to disorient him and drive him crazy. He wondered what the hell he had come for, he didn't give a damn about this crazy-as-a-goat bundle of bones and meat. The man kept going from one side of the room to the other, rummaging through objects, opening and closing drawers of a piece of furniture crammed with remains of candles and food.

I had nothing to do there. He had enough with his own madness, on top of putting up with this miserable man.

-I don't really remember, but it's important. One of your people must surely have it and they must have stolen it at the request of my brother, that bastard.

-Okay, I'll look for it, when I find it I'll bring it to you personally, now I have to go Hunn, I have a lot to do.

-Sure, sure, go and don't forget the book.

Björk left, thinking about how annoyed she was at Leif's idea of coming to see Hunn. He didn't plan on ever going back to see the crazy old man in the tower as much as possible. The worst thing was to think how different he was from Hunn, the wretch had sold her, but

self-hatred came to him and he fled the castle, but more he escaped from himself.

The following days Leif updated him on life in Domnoc, the harvests were being fruitful, they had obtained better agricultural tools and that allowed them to improve the times and the amount of food for consumption and the surplus to be sold at a good price. They had managed to live with the locals despite the past and the blood shed. Some had converted to Christianity, it was better to deal with a single God than with so many capricious and vengeful Viking gods. Leif had not opposed and even he himself felt seduced by Christianity, the only thing that stopped him from accepting it were those of the curia, extremely greedy for power and always restricting everything natural in men, calling every sin. They were suffocating to him. Björk was amused and made fun of her a lot, which gave them reasons to laugh. -What really bothers you, brother, is that they don't let you fuck as many women as you want, hahaha.

-It's true, what good are my eyes and crotch if it's not to enjoy a beautiful woman. These castrated bishops want to miss out on the good things in life.

The days turned into months, Björk worked from dawn until nightfall, Leif had set up a blacksmith shop like the one they had in Scania,

now with more tools that Björk had brought from the blacksmith shop that he had left closed. They no longer only made swords or axes, they made household items and even some simple and cheap jewelry for the women who used to come to buy all the time, more than anything to flirt with Björk, who paid no attention to them, but liked to sell to them despite their intentions. so evident feminine. The one who took advantage was his brother, since more than one woman was consoled by the second prize.

The distance from Scania allowed him to forget the tragedy and being in Domnoc made him feel that he was close to Wynn in the most loved times. The broken soul was slowly healing although the wound had been mortal, everything was distant from his feelings, which were few. He hardly felt tenderness, only a dog could move him, which followed him insistently and lay at the doors of the blacksmith's shop. Finally, so much waiting managed to make Björk feel him as a friend, taking him to his cabin where the dog slept at the foot of his bed. Thus he became the faithful friend with whom he went to the blacksmith shop every morning and returned at night to share his food with him.

The silence, the tranquility of the village, how far away the betrayals and power struggles in Scania had been, gave him the respite he needed; he spent three years in that imposed exile.

He tolerated the Bretrons and their fights, Wessex was gaining power in men and weapons and the political fights between the natives were exacerbated from time to time, he tried to stay on the sidelines, they saw them as brutal Viking peasants who occupied the territory due to weakness. of Hunn, but the marriage of Björk and Wynn gave legality to their rights. The natives of Dommoc were few due to the purge suffered years ago, there were still wounds from that time, but coexistence was peaceful on the surface. Björk managed politics thanks to Leif's more empathetic vision, the two made a good team dividing administrative tasks and dispensing justice among their people, achieving a certain harmony between their culture and the Breton one.

The resentment and thirst for revenge only returned when he thought of Sca-nia. It wasn't time yet, but the time would soon come when he had to return. He did not want to think about Vidar, without being a man afraid of death or battle, the only thing that made him afraid was facing his son. The more time passed, the boy grew and he did not know how to imagine what temperament he would have or at what point in his life he would reproach him for his crime.



Leif went to look for Björk that morning, men from Scania had disembarked and brought tragic news. As he approached his brother's cabin he thought about how difficult these years had been for him, months in silence and working the land, taking care of the livestock, his personal hygiene was deplorable and his temperament had become taciturn. He dealt only with commerce and daily affairs in the village, but he did not interfere in anyone's daily life, he barely visited him at home and rarely went to the tavern. Surely he was uncomfortable seeing family life around him, he still blamed himself for losing his opportunity to be happy. The betrayal of his brothers had also hurt Leif, but unlike Björk, the distance and remoteness of the political turbulence of his land was enough for him. On the other hand, her brother was unforgiving and the desire for revenge he knew was undisturbed in Björk's mind.

He saw him in the distance chopping wood although winter had not yet arrived. The dog next to him watched him calmly. Signaling to him, Björk, followed by the quadruped, headed towards him, shortening the distance that separated them.

-What did Leif bring you this morning?

-News. Take it easy. Father has died.

Björk didn't know what to say, she didn't know what she felt or if she felt something she couldn't know what it was. He hugged him unexpectedly, Leif wasn't expecting it, but somehow it gave him peace of mind to know that his brother was still human.

-You must prepare, you know that the time has come. Be cautious, think before acting.

-Yeah. Revenge is a dish that is eaten cold.

-Don't get so obsessed with revenge. Think about your son, you haven't seen him in three years.

-It is the most difficult thing to face.

-He is still a child, he needs you, he will make no claim to you.

-He will at some point.

-But not today, nor tomorrow. Don't get too far ahead.

Björk organized his return, gave directives for the administration of his possessions, everything would be in charge of Leif, until he returned and if he did not return, Vidar would inherit his mother's lands in due time.

The Vikings were particular about their belongings, everything was written down to validate rights and concessions. He left for Scania to dispute his right over his brother, who was already in discussions with the assembly of free men to seize power. The most prominent men were not convinced about Bjarne, who had the support of those who wanted more looting and to join the invasions of the Umayyad emirate of Córdoba that had been taking place with great losses for all the Vikings. They desired the peace that, although weak, they managed to maintain with Britain. Not all clans had the same aspirations, but Scania in particular wanted peace. Bjarne sought more power and to ally himself with the most warlike clans on the peninsula. That's why they had gone looking for Björk. They didn't know that he didn't want power nor had he ever wanted it, but taking the most precious thing from his brother, the thing for which he didn't mind destroying Björk's happiness, was his goal. The first step to close the circle of revenge that he had prepared.

He embarked two days later, he would arrive for his father's funeral ceremony, which would be with all the honors he deserved. He would have time to reaffirm alliances and seize power. During the trip he had time to remember his father, his teachings and the good times with him.

At sea melancholy came over him like a strong and tearing wind. He cried silently, looking at the horizon, protecting himself from being

seen by any of the men in the contingent. He cried for all the absences in his soul.

The trip seemed eternal, it had been a long time since he had sailed for so many hours without setting foot on land, he loved the sea, the anxiety of returning intertwined with his memories had him tense and the rictus of his features showed it. The crew shared the silence and the expectant air.



When they sighted land, preparations were mobilized, managing to clear up the general heaviness. Björk set foot on Scania as if she were going into battle, she did not waste a minute and with only two men as support, they took the horses that were waiting for them and headed towards the village to her parents' house.

Margit had been waiting for him by the fire for hours, devastated and with her eyes lost. As in her dreams, she had been with the women preparing everything necessary to say goodbye to her husband. She was tired of so many nights of poor sleep taking care of Einar, the end was waiting for them, both of them were aware that the twilight of their lives had arrived. He hoped to follow him and although he had the possibility of dying with him as an offering Einar had forbidden it. The Christian ideas that arrived from the Mediterranean coasts

through Byzantium over the years had seduced many in silence and without demonstrations.

Einar and Margit were two of them. Without renouncing their Gods, they intimately questioned the cruelty of seeing innocents die for free; they considered life beautiful and valuable to waste. They dreamed of times of peace and abundance, the wars and conquests had left nothing but nightmares that tormented them some nights, widows and orphans on one side and the other. Old age brought Einar, hand in hand with his faithful wife, detachment from power and wealth, for which he had fought so hard in his youth. None of that had given him back the years lost in distant lands, nor had passionate women given him more years in his life. The relentless time gave him answers to questions that he only began to ask himself when he reached the maturity of his gray hair. Everything had been ready for a new beginning for his people with Björk. Young blood would bring a different future. He was sure to leave his reign in good hands.

Björk entered and Margit welcomed him with a quiet smile. It had been a long time since she had seen her children and she was sorry that Leif had not arrived too. But that's how they had decided. They were pragmatic and put their responsibilities before formalities, often leaving their feelings aside.

They caught up with the events of recent years, Margit uncovering the threads of intrigue and Björk with those of Britannia, interspersing

memories of Einar and the last months of his life. The next day would be exhausting for both of them.

Einar would be buried in his funerary ship, the mast, figureheads and other prominent parts had been removed to prevent them from protruding. A hole large enough to bury the ship was dug, and the body was placed on the deck surrounded by funerary items. The stones with which it would be covered were already arranged around it and enough earth to form a mound approximately forty meters in diameter and five meters high. It would maintain his status in the afterlife by preventing him from becoming a wandering soul in this way. The weapons and riding equipment as well as one of his horses would accompany him on the journey to the afterlife. In the previous days, animals were sacrificed with which a banquet would be offered. On the seventh day after Einar's death, the *sjaund* would take place, which would involve libations of a funerary beer, and only after this rite would Einar's heirs claim their share of inheritance. Björk would claim her right to be leader and her brother Leif's right to land. Everything was thought out and ready for a confrontation. Bjarne and Sven greeted Björk coldly and he indifferently did the same. Everyone knew that the most important thing would happen later.

The burial stone they had prepared contained runes and the emblem of Einar that marked his place in the community and that of his family and indicated for posterity the status of his descendants. Among

those present, Björk saw Carl and his family, in his wife's arms was Vidar, her chest tightened, but she kept her gaze firmly on the torch that Bjarne was holding to light the oil-smearred boat.

Margit held back tears behind a proud expression because of her status as the widow of someone who was a great leader. This remained the case until the end of the ceremony.

The immense fire burned accompanied by ancient songs, a time had come to an end, the future was present and each one of them thought about what life awaited them. A new leader would dispose of his future sadness or joy. There is no human being who does not want something, some ask for peace, others to pour out their fury, others to love, others just to live.



The assembly would gather at the skali before the funeral banquet. The men slowly walked towards him. Almost everyone had made their decision and only a few would decide there depending on the events that occurred.

Bjarne did not feel safe, he had not managed to convince everyone he had spoken to, Sven, always with his scheming temperament, preferred to keep his distance from the matter despite supporting Bjarne. Always attentive to rumors, he knew that his brother did not have

everything to win. So he planned to remain less exultant and talkative than ever, if Björk was the new leader he did not want to be the target of revenge, he still remembered the day Björk came to him asking for explanations and the fear of losing his life at that moment .

The assembly was full with all the free men, many more than the twelve men who usually made decisions with the king, there were also the most important warriors, some of them were in favor of Bjarne. Everyone was tense but determined. Peace or continued war was what would be debated in those hours. Alfred of Wessex was consolidating his power and intended to recover the territories from the Danes. Donmoc was a small part of one of the five boroughs of Da-nelaw, but Björk was the absolute owner of it and the bastion of her community in Eastanglia. He was not interested in Bjarne's faction, they wanted to approach and conquer the Iberian Peninsula, but the Danes in general wanted to defend and occupy more territories in Britain. Thus they expressed their wishes, despite the fiery arguments of those who wanted to advance with new conquests, they could not convince the rest.

Unanimously, despite this handful of men, Björk took the lead. Her brother did not raise the moral question about the past of Björk's tragic marriage, not because he did not want to, but because there were dark points that despite time remained in the air and in the silence of everyone in the community, the network of intrigues that

Bjar-ne and Sven had created were shadows that had not yet dissipated.

The gods had little to do with it on this occasion, it was the men who decided their leader. They gave freedom to those warriors who wanted to join Bjarne and other clans for raids on the Iberian Peninsula, but they would not have the maximum support for this. Bjarne's pride was wounded and he swore revenge through promises of future victories and threats that they would beg him to be the leader after he was victorious.

No one was fazed by it, they just let it be.

Björk assumed her position in a ceremony similar to the one her father had had according to the Dreng Code transmitted orally throughout the generations, it was part of the culture and values of the Viking people. It was the compass in decision making and so important to their society that even the gods were subject to it, like normal human beings deeply linked to life after death.

Brave men who exerted a good influence were called-ban dreng. He possessed courage, nobility, magnanimity, a sense of fair play, respect for others, strength to do the right thing and a sense of personal honor, which he had demonstrated in the administration of Dane-law. His physical bravery was something already known as well as his self-control and coolness in battle. According to the Code, Vikings had to pay close attention to loyalty to friends, family and community.

And that despite the pain that Björk carried with her, she had also demonstrated it when she punished her supposedly unfaithful wife, defending her family's pride. Björk was not known for his hospitality or generosity, but for the power of words without cunning, he was clear and direct and his reputation was presided over by his servants and men-at-arms who accompanied him, equanimity before the danger, self-esteem and respect for the community.

The sacred place set up for the ritual was blessed and consecrated, the bonfire burned intensely and its light enveloped everyone with sacredness.

Björk was led by a representative of the laws to a large stone, pierced as a seat in its center, emulating a throne. The people expressed themselves, the women shaking arms and the men raising their hands in approval for lineage and merit. Bjorn was very clear that his life no longer belonged to him, but he didn't care, hopes and dreams had died long ago. If in his time as a leader he did not demonstrate integrity and promote his personal interests or transgress the limits of his position, death would be his end, killed or sacrificed for his failure. Society was the end and the jarl-king was its means, so Björk was no longer the owner of her life, she was a hostage of her entire people. He had to guarantee peace and order among his people, so he said it briefly and out loud: -I am your Jarl, I will ensure peace and order

between us and the rest of the clans with the blessing of Odin and all the gods.

They gave him the horned helmet that belonged to his father; they had not left it at his funeral as his sword had been left worn and dull from so many battles. The helmet was the symbol of his status and wealth and on his head he only felt the weight of chains and the flight of his lost freedom.

In the crowd, Bliss held Vadir in her arms, so he could see the ceremony, and her father. The child, entranced by the scene, saw the imposing figure of his father among the flames of the fire. The little boy's admiration was reflected in his astonished look. He still had no questions to ask, no grudges to undermine his spirit.



Bjorn returned to the cabin where he had lived with Wynn, the memories crowded into his mind, nothing worse than the tangible presence of the moments recorded in every corner of the absence of a love. He spent a few days there, and felt the desire to stay there forever as if he could go back in time. But reality was something he couldn't afford to avoid.

He had to take the reins of his life once again, and although he would have preferred to return to Dommoc, his place was there, deprived of the sea and freedom, he had to assume his responsibilities.

His mother had inherited the home she had shared with Einar, as was her right, but her health had deteriorated over the years and the sadness of her widowhood. So he moved in with her, avoiding having to organize servants and typical tasks. Everything had always been organized and would continue that way until Björk remarried.

It had been years since the marriage agreement with Torsten's daughter had been stalled, Einar had neither insisted nor rejected the proposal as well as the cunning Torsten who had left the proposal at that stage while trying to make a better marriage. child, but their expectations and demands were so high that no agreement was reached with other possible clans. While his daughter Hanne was gaining years and was no longer so valued for her beauty or quality, in reality that was the least important thing, the only thing that was valuable was her father's power, which had diminished due to unsuccessful raids against the Moors, losing men and money uselessly. The only thing that might interest a candidate was commercial access to Hedeby City, which provided Björk's clan with viable trade routes, while other clans sought riches more readily available in distant lands.

Björk was more cautious, the stability of trade meant greater possibilities for her people, so she resumed negotiations to reach an agreement favorable to both clans.

Torsten was as old as Einar was, time was running out and he had to resolve the issue of a beneficial alliance, and his people were upset with the matter so he was more than supported if not forced by them to define the issue. .

The wedding would take place on their land and Hanne would then leave with her husband to take care of her new role. Days before the date of the ceremony, Björk met Hanne. She was very beautiful, in the prime of a woman of almost thirty years she seemed younger. As a man he could not deny how attractive she was, but he could not help but compare her to Wynn, who was no better than Hanne in beauty, but Hanne was definitely not Wynn nor would she ever be in her heart.

So different from each other, it only chilled their feelings even more.

He and she met by the fire. Björk noticed that she wasn't anxious or scared, she was calm and confident, as if nothing could surprise her.

-Tell me Hanne, are you comfortable with this alliance?

-It is very appropriate Björk that you define it so well. "Yes, I am comfortable with this alliance," he said, emphasizing the word alliance. Realizing the fact, Björk was as brutally sincere as she had always been.

-You well know that I am not willing to romanticize or anything like that. I only ask that we live in peace, live your life freely and let me live mine. Be discreet and prudent, I demand that of you, and give me offspring as you are obligated to by marriage.

-Don't worry, I'll do it that way. -Somewhat surprised, Björk wanted to know why this woman didn't ask for love.

-Don't you care that I never love you?

-The truth is that no. I only ask you for respect and support. Are you happy with it?

-It is unusual for a woman not to ask for love.

-It's just... I'll be honest with you. I have already loved and deeply. I'm not interested in loving a man again. He died two winters ago and I cannot and do not want to forget him. A woman knows the first moment she meets a man whether she can love him or not. And you are a valuable man, but we are surely too similar, we only truly love once in a lifetime. And it shows that your heart will never have an owner. I know about your previous marriage, there have been many rumors about it, but today when I met you, I knew which of them was true.

-Which of the rumors do you think is true?

-The one who says that you killed her despite your love and believing in lies about her that conspirators wove. Your look says it all Björk. You have no heart, ice and guilt cover it.

-I'll just tell you that I trust that we will be good friends- with a sigh I finish the sentence.

-This will be Björk. For the good of our people.

Ten days later an entire caravan returned to Scania with the handcuffs.



CHAPTER 6

**“About his intelligence,
no man must boast,
try to be
I always spare my words.”**

Anonymous

↳

The cold morning made Vidar's hands numb and it was difficult for him to draw his bow. He was already a skilled farmer and hunter, the war had not yet crossed his life, but sooner or later he would have to participate in an excursion, his almost seventeen years made him a man to assume greater responsibilities. He still had to prepare himself in the mastery of weapons of war, the spear was not good for him, the ax was better, thanks to so much firewood made during the winter in which he and Carl and his foster brother, to make the task, they competed to see who could achieve the most logs. The bow was the one he was most excited about. Having control of the situation made him more comfortable, having the enemy in his sights, deciding the moment in which the arrow would fly through the wind, observing and calculating the distance that protected him in some way, it was like

when he hunted an animal. The hand-to-hand combat filled him with anxiety, it was as if he were dancing a macabre dance with death, making him vulnerable. The sword he practiced with couldn't feel real in his hands and he couldn't believe it resembled the reality of battle. As a child he dreamed of reaching this present to get away from the tasks of agriculture and fishing. Like all children, their childhoods were spent in the warmth and shelter of their family, learning to take care of themselves and their family, plowing and raising livestock, planting and harvesting, fishing and the first steps in navigation that fascinated everyone. siasmaba

But for Vidar the greatest concern in those days was the possible recognition of his father as the firstborn and worthy son of the family. His first years were in the warmth of Bliss's lap, whom he felt was his mother. She had never made a difference between her two children and he, always loving and maternal, had given place to the memory of his mother. Through his stories he built the image of Wynn, he had never stopped mentioning her and he did not escape the logical questions that arose from him trying to satisfy his ignorance. As he grew up, the questions became deeper and more elaborate, the other children often brought him rumors that they heard from their elders, Bliss and Carl tried to clear up the shadows that they caused him. The story of his parents was a puzzle that he built with each piece that was brought to him.

His father was a mystery, not only for him but for the entire community, a stone wall that Björk had increased over the years. His grandmother Margit was the only one in his blood family with whom he had had contact; she had died a few years ago and had once told him the tragic episode about the death of his mother. While they were playing, a boy, jealous of having lost the game they were in, had yelled at her that her mother had been a whore and that for that reason her father, a worthy man, had killed her as punishment. Another on a similar occasion had told him that the Jar was not his father, that he was actually the son of a dirty Irish slave. Crying on his grandmother's knees, he told her what had happened and she, wiping away his tears, had told him, trying to calm his pain, that his father had had no option not to bring the family into disgrace and that he had been forced to comply with the clan laws, but that his mother had never deceived him about her birth and paternity, his father did not doubt it, he had not been able to find the evidence to save his mother. He put a cloak of mercy on his parents, there was no need to hurt the child with details he couldn't yet understand.

But from a distance Vidar realized his grandmother's good will and the facts did not close his mind. There was more that I didn't know. But only his father's word could confirm or not what he knew up to that moment. Would you publicly recognize him as your son?

Getting close to his father was difficult. He used to march for months and when he was in Scania he took care of the political and economic administration of the clan. I had only visited it a few times over all those years. And it seemed more like an interrogation than a fatherly meeting. What he had learned, how he had progressed with the rune lessons, if he already knew how to fish and how many fish he managed to get, if he handled the ax well and so on every time. Most of the time at those meetings he spoke alone with Carl and Bliss to agree on provisions and education for the children. Björk not only cared for Vidar's well-being but also for his foster siblings. Both he and his brother and sister learned the use of runes, the narratives of the sagas and the Nordic laws, which implied respect and admiration in the future, only a few had access to that instruction. Just like the boys, the girl was also exceptionally learning the use of weapons for war. Carl and Bliss were grateful for Björk's support, she had helped them market their products and provided them with good land, which favored their status in the community. Björk in her heart thanked them for loving and caring for her son, they were good people and her parents Einar and Margit had known how to choose them for Vidar.

The sun was full and Vidar's elm bow felt heavy, even tilting it towards his chest to compensate for the weight, instead of towards the corner of his mouth or under his chin as the Bretons did. The arrow

he shot didn't even reach two hundred meters, something must be wrong with the arrows he had made.

Something more than the bow weighed on his soul.

He was so absorbed in solving his immediate problem with the bow that he did not hear the horse's hooves, nor the grass crackling under heavy footsteps.

Björk watched him carefully as he approached him, her same white blonde hair and the same physical build as her age. He couldn't deny that he was the son who most resembled him. The shell was without a doubt his, but the inside of that young man was just like his mother, the cheerful character, the clear look and the almond eyes. Every time she had seen him it was like seeing Wynn in his face and her heart skipped a beat. Tenderness wanted to invade him, but with anger he pushed it away and he spent days sulking and giving orders here and there, hiding the pain and remorse behind the veil of anger.

-It's a good day to practice. Are you having problems with that?

-Hello Jarl.

-Won't you call me father, appropriately?

The young man's silence disconcerted him a little, due to his deep and serious look, so different from other times, it seemed that legitimation was an issue that also worried his son. That's why he went out that morning to look for him to talk about it. He felt cold and distant. He didn't imagine that this was how he would start the conversation. He

figured his son's only concern would be guns, women and beer at his age. A fresh head like any young man.

-Yes, father.

With a gesture he asked for the bow.

-"Don't leave your weapons hidden behind your back in a field, you never know when you will suddenly need your spear", in your case it does not apply if you are only going to use the bow. The Viking bow differs from Breton bows due to its particular shape.

-I am half Breton.- He said it with a certain defiant tone that did not go unnoticed by Björk.

-And you should be proud of that, but bathe like a Viking - he continued as if nothing had happened - the oval cross section and the flared tips, when you pull the rope, make the blades flex and accumulate energy. When you release, the bow relaxes and transmits that energy to the arrow. From what I observed you have good posture and the arch is well built. The problem is the arrows you are using, they have wooden tips, which makes them less resistant to the air they have to pass through. How many arrows in a row can you shoot?

-Not many, three or four.

They were silent for a long time, shooting arrows, hitting and missing at greater or lesser distances from the target they had available. The sun was already low, the afternoon was saying goodbye.

-You must practice, reaching ten or more arrows in a row. -while searching for something in the bag hanging from his belt- In battle you must be quick as well as skillful. Here, have these iron tips, I made them myself, there are different sizes and some special ones like spikes. You must attach them to the arrow shaft by the tang with shoulders that fit the end of the wooden shaft.

-Yes I know, Carl taught me how to build them

That comment stung Björk's being. His son had no idea how much he would have wanted to raise and educate him in blacksmithing and weapons himself. And that emptiness was so deep that he had not even allowed himself to enjoy it with his other children. It was impossible for him to give to the rest what he had denied to his firstborn. He got into position to demonstrate to his son when he suddenly heard, without expecting it, the fatal question. It came like the arrow he had in his hands, sharp and clean like the wound it caused.

-Why did you kill her?

Björk took a deep breath and sighed - Have you already loved for the first time?

-No.

-Love is everything. Happiness that you want to make eternal, fear of losing it, passion that burns. But it is also hatred of oneself or the woman for making yourself vulnerable - I shoot the arrow hitting the target - You feel that without her you are nothing and your life has no

meaning. You forget that she is a woman like any other, with her own strengths and weaknesses, who feels fear, pain and resentment as much as she loves. You become blind because you feel that it is perfect for you and you can't stand the idea that it is only human, because you cover it with fantasies and lose the sense of reality. When you think that you don't mean anything to her or that you have been a toy in her hands, you hate her and want to destroy her - she leaned on the arch and looked him directly in the eyes - And there you make the worst mistake of your life if you are a young man. impetuous as I was.

Your mother and I, the envy and greed of the people enveloped us and we did not know how to see the traps of destiny - he took another arrow and shot the target, hitting it again - When I realized, it was already late and the sword with the That I wounded your mother also mortally wounded my soul. I can't stop you from hating me, but by all the Gods and the God your mother professed, I swear I loved her with all my heart. In his last breath in my arms he gave me his soul and I gave him mine. I am a man who lost his soul by not taking the time to learn to love. I'm sorry son.- An invisible knot closed his throat for a moment.

-And what do I do with that?

-Live your own life and not make our mistakes, learn from them.

-But what was my mother's mistake?

-Letting herself be carried away by her impulses, fighting with pride and stubbornness against the one she loved and believed had abandoned her to her fate. She couldn't trust that the man at her side was not the same as her father, that she could know she was protected and loved. That's why give yourself time when love or hate blinds you. Give her time too, whoever you love.

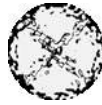
-I don't know if I will ever forgive you.

-Try it, not for me, I don't matter. Do it for you. Your mother wanted and I just want you to live and find love at every step, I hope, of your long life. Here, the bow is now tense and ready for you to continue with your practice.

He turned his back on her and walked to his horse. He had waited and feared this talk with his son for years. Although his intention had been to talk about the legitimization ceremony, there was no need because there was something more important to resolve. There was no relief, but there was the feeling of having completed a pending task.

The young man stayed a while longer shooting arrows, as if trying to express every fragment of his thoughts. He wanted to understand the past, but everything in his mind was a contradiction, like pieces that he couldn't fit together. He saw his father from a new perspective and it hurt him not to know if it was admiration, resentment, love or hate. Maybe it was all of that at the same time. He no longer knew whether

or not he wanted his father's recognition. But he remembered what Björk had told him: -give yourself time.



He arrived home when Hanne was already in her bedroom, the children were sleeping. One of the women got up to serve her and told her that he would take care of himself, dismissing her. He needed the solitude of his thoughts, he was tired, the day had been more intense than he expected. His body hurt, he was no longer so young, his bones creaked more than usual and he didn't want anyone around him. The past was not a path he liked to travel. He lived in the present and built for the future. But it was inevitable that day. Vidar's legitimation ceremony had taken too long because no one had asked him to do so; it was a right that he could exercise or exercise whenever he wanted. Hanne didn't participate in the topic because she didn't really care, she respected her husband and let him do it, and she didn't consider that part of her life with Wynn and their son any of her business. She didn't care about the place of privilege that Vidar

had or not, she led her life discreetly, she had a lover whom she truly loved and he loved her even though they both had husbands. It was comfortable for Björk, he did not have a woman who demanded attention or made scenes of jealousy like Leif's wife, who despite the years had never accepted her husband's affairs, already a mature man with more illegitimate children than those I could count on my hand. They used to laugh with their brother when Björk accused him of conquering more women than land and sowing more with his penis than with the plow. Half of Eastanglia already had its features.

If his son wished to take his place in the family he would be welcomed and he felt that he could be a loyal man capable of exercising his place as Jarl upon his death. He should teach him to beware of the conspiracies that had caused him so much suffering, the farcical flattery, to avoid greed, to negotiate with satraps and criminals. Maintain order in the community and enforce the laws. Difficult task as a father and guide. But above all he himself should trust his son without fearing that he would stray from the path. He thought about his father. Could he have had the same doubts as him now? The same fears of exceeding expectations that you placed on your son? It was like a bet on the Gods and it was difficult for him to trust them considering the adversities in his life and how helpless he felt when he most needed divine help. Maybe he should ask the God of Wynn to protect Vidar, it

could be that he was less cruel and bloodthirsty than Odin and capable of listening to him when not, forgiving him.

But he had not delayed the ceremony out of reluctance or laziness, it was conscientiously calculated; In time the reason would be known, for now I was tasting the cereal bread with the meat broth slowly.



Carl and Bliss watched Vidar next to the hearth fire, he was absorbed in looking at the flames. The woman gestured for Carl to come to him to find out what was happening to him.

-How was the day? Björk stopped by looking for you and I told her where you were. I assume they found each other.

-Yeah. We talked while he practiced with the bow. But now I have more doubts than before.

-Doubts? About what? The ceremony will be held after the harvest, which is soon to end.

-What if I don't want to be part of the Jarl's family? You are my family.

-And we will always be, we will be there for you when you need us. But it's your rightful place.

-Maybe I don't feel like a Viking, I'm also half Breton, that divides me and I don't know which side to take.

-If you see it like this it is heartbreaking. Why don't you try to see it from another place? You are like many others, for example our children, a promise of peace between peoples. You could work for the well-being of both.

-I don't know, I never saw it like that.

"Think about it, you may be the door to a better future." He put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "You are as dramatic as all Catholics!"

Bliss joked sweetly as if challenging him for this criticism that also came against her as a devotee of Christ.

-It's true Bliss, hahaha-looking back at Vidar- Accept your Viking blood and be practical, life is simple, don't complicate it. You eat, you take, you make children, you kill, you conquer, you sow, you harvest and you go back to eating, taking, making children and that's how you spend your life hahaha.

The three of them laughed at Carl's idea and the atmosphere relaxed.

-Give yourself time.

-My father said the same thing.

-So, either he and I are right, or we are two stupid people. How about we go to rest? It has been a long and intense day.



Björk called an assembly that morning of all the free men and judges available, there were no more than twenty, enough to make her decision known and seek the approval of all of them to perform the Vidar legitimation ceremony.

Some of them were already aware and had no objections since it was only a matter of making room for a member of their family, another issue would be if Björk wanted to bequeath her place as Jarl. The young man did not have enough merits and his youth was a point against him. Furthermore, his father was still in his prime and if so he should have the approval of all of them. Nothing had been said about that issue. So there was nothing to fear surprisingly.

She cleaned herself slowly, enjoying the water and combing her hair, the gray hair was camouflaged in her naturally white blonde hair. Two of his fingers reminded him of the years that weighed on his shoul-

ders; for some time now he had not been able to bend them towards the palm of his hand or stretch them completely, which made it difficult for him to hold the sword firmly. or the axe. He tried to hide it as best he could and until now no one had noticed it, but it was becoming more and more frequent. He put on his camisole over his pants and a fur coat over his shoulders, he felt tired, the night had given him dreams of intermingled images of past experiences, without a clear meaning it had only left him uneasy. They told him that everyone was already gathered waiting for him and with a sure and firm step he went out to meet a meeting that he did not plan to extend too much, there was not much to say. Upon entering and greeting those present, everyone paid their respects to the jarl. He sat at the table where they had already placed a couple of jugs of ale, a drink similar to beer but softer, fermented from barley and other cereals. real. Serving himself a jug of it, he announced to them:

-I have brought them together to inform you and I hope for your approval, in regards to my son Vidar and the legitimacy to be part of my family. Some of you remember your mother's tragic end and the doubts that fell on her. No one can deny my son's resemblance to me, both in his physique and his temperament. The unfounded punishment on the mother cannot be healed, no one can bring the dead back to life and at that moment the punishment imposed expires and no one can claim anything from me. Not even their son. The boy has

been well raised by his foster family and has shown signs of being worthy of this family. I would like to know if anyone has anything to say.

There was a silence, while they drank, lengthening the moment, some by surprise because they did not know the story Björk was talking about, others because they had been present in that episode and their conscience weighed on them for witnessing that tragedy. One of the most respected men who served as judge on many occasions, took a step forward and spoke out.

-Jarl, you know that you enjoy the esteem of your people and I believe that I speak for everyone, if not, whoever wants to speak is free to speak. I know Vidar, and I attest before the Gods that he is a worthy son of yours, I congratulate you for having him and welcoming him into your family, I am sure that he will be a good son and brother.

The faces showed approval, only a few did not show any emotion, but they did not disagree, nor did they have the desire to get involved in such delicate matters for the Jarl. They imagined that it was just a pending moral issue of a father who had punished his wife and wanted to make it up to his son in some way. Whoever knew Vidar the least, he was a good young man, cheerful, caring and kind, with a lot of potential to be a good warrior if his father trained him in weapons and character. It was a promise to be seen.

- I'm glad to hear your words. If there is nothing to say, in ten moons the ceremony will take place, prepare for a three-day party. May the Gods be with you.

With a shout of celebration, everyone ended the assembly.

Björk was satisfied, the first step had been to meet Vidar, this was the second and it was done. He had to order them to begin preparations. Something that he delegated with increasing pleasure to Hanne, he was good at managing the home and these festivities, in particular, had never excited him, the days of music, drunks everywhere, wasting food, choking on beer and mead. It was a waste of time. At the end of them, there were always fights over women, new pregnancies and marital problems everywhere. A bore for him, who preferred a thousand times to be away sailing in the tranquility that the sea offered him, even when the waves were rough. He was not and had never been fond of sociability, he loved the warmth of his home, but that had been a long time ago, now he loved to travel, to escape from everything that surrounded him from time to time. But as a Jarl, he had to provide his people with rest and fun from time to time, to relax from work and obligations. His brothers would be there for the ceremony, it was something important for the family, he was happy that they were all there. It had been a long time since he had

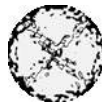
seen his older brother. The news that reached him was not encouraging. The last excursions of Bjane and his men were disastrous, with losses of supplies and men, leaving widows and young children to be cared for. Bjarne became more resentful, having become emboldened by joining with the northern clans to take over the coasts of the Mediterranean when Björk took over as jarl, in particular he became obsessed with the Arabs on the coasts of the Iberian Peninsula, to the south along the western coast. towards al-Andalus. The emir Abd al-Rahman II gathered a large army and laid a trap for the attackers, using some men as decoys to make them leave the camp and his plan worked, the bulk of the Viking troops were annihilated. The excursion deterred the Northmen from attempting another attack on Andalusian lands for the next fifteen years, and Banner was unable to convince any clan to follow him as sole leader. His return was dishonorable not so much because of the defeat but because of his despotic and cruel character without an iota of humility in the face of his bad luck. Sven, for his part, had settled in a town near Staraya as a trader with the Viking Rus of the north. He had earned a good name by changing the traditional policy of coercion and plunder for a policy of diplomatic agreements with the Byzantine Empire. conspirator and his strategic and calculating mind had found fertile ground for his aspirations. Always ready as the political drag that he was, he had accepted the invitation that came to him from

Björk to return to his homeland, he had moved away all those years to stay safe from resentment and possible revenge from his brother, but he felt that the past was behind him. and it was more convenient to have a good relationship with him, deep down he still feared him like when he was young. Björk only wanted him present so that there was no doubt about Vidar's recognition, given that it was Sven who accused Wynn of betrayal and it was something she could never forget, much less forgive him.

In Eastanglia the lands were flourishing under Leif's administration, but the clans that continued to plague Weesex and York were complicating the peace gained. Dommoc in particular was a peaceful settlement although it was unknown for how long, events urged the men to take up arms again just in case. They should not let their guard down, peace was an unstable asset in these times, tension and suspicions were at a high level in general, but in Dommoc there was still no violence, but it could occur sporadically and surprisingly. Björk was thinking of settling there for a while after settling things at Scania, Leif was more of an administrator than a warrior, it was better to stay on the lookout there at least until the situation was clearer.

For now it would focus on the next events that would occur within Scania. He held expectations about the future of Vidar. He had three more small children with Hanne, one of whom he doubted was his,

but he didn't care, children were children, the least thing he would do to us would be to put Hanne through the misfortunes that he himself experienced in the flesh. Wynn. Anyway, that had been the deal, everyone with their lives and the house would be at peace.



There were few men in the tavern, the board where four of them were drinking beer was the most lively, they laughed and clinked mugs with typical jokes.

-Finally at home, I had already gotten tired of so much brunette.

-I miss them, they are passionate.

-The ones that touched you, hahahaha

-It's just that I'm more attractive than you, who bathes in goat urine.

-Fuck off.

Bjarne drank without participating.

-What's wrong with you Bjarne? It seems that you are worried about something. Do you already want to go on an expedition again?

Man, enjoy a little peace.

-If I had known that I would have to be in a stupid ceremony to recognize a bastard I would have delayed our return. For what purpose

and with what meaning Björk wants to legitimize this useless person, I don't understand.

-Why do you say useless? He is very similar to his father.

"It was clear that he was the son of a slave and his infamous mother," Bjarne replied.

-Don't repeat that Bjarne or we will have problems with the jarl.

-If he intends to leave his leadership to him, the problem will be with Björk himself, that young man does not have a single merit, he has not yet gone to war nor even went to Britain, where he should have gone as a child if they did not want to kill him just like his brother. mother. It was all my father's fault and his weaknesses. Björk and Leif were always his favorites. He should have given me the place to be chosen as leader but I left it to the unhappy Björk.

-It was a decision of worthy men- said one of the men who, upon seeing the merciless look of which he was the object of Bjarne, instantly regretted his words. A sharp blow of Bjarne's fist on the board silenced everyone in unison. But one of them tried to calm things down.

-Don't worry, the boy doesn't seem to have any intention of that, plus Björk is still vigorous, there's a leader for a while.

-That is also a problem to be solved-He drank a long sip of beer, everyone fell silent and silence covered them. Bjarne left it hanging in the

air that he would challenge Björk for power. The men did not feel comfortable being silent participants in a possible conspiracy. Bjarne, a prisoner of his own passions, did not take into account the spirit of the men who accompanied him. He was convinced of their loyalties and blind in his envy. He did not see that the men who had followed him in so many assaults were more faithful to the robbery and to themselves. mos.Siguieron bebiendo muchas horas más, con algara-bía evitando continuar con las preocupaciones de Bjarne, ni por casualidad lo seguirían en una empresa semejante pero nadie se atrevió a decírselo a la cara, huiría cada uno por su lado llegado el caso.



Vidar was chopping firewood, when Anja, his foster sister who was barely twelve years old, with a fresh and cheerful smile put in front of his eyes a bouquet of wildflowers that she had been collecting in the nearby clearing. She was tall for her age and had ash gray hair with big blue eyes, a promise of beauty and sweetness, if life did not crack her character. She had always been in love with Vidar, with that tender and platonic love that children usually have, she admired him even more than her father or her blood brother Ove, just two years older than Vidar. Perhaps because of the mystery that surrounded the young man about his origin and the bond that united him to the Jarl.

The distance between their ages made the young man protective and paternal towards her, he had never realized the infatuation he had over her, he truly loved her like his little sister, he made her laugh at his childhood occurrences and the spontaneity with which he said what he thought without measuring the appropriateness of his words, a characteristic that seemed familiar to Vidar without knowing why.

-I gathered these flowers for you Vidar.

-Men don't need flowers Anja, women are the ones who receive them from men, hahaha.

-I don't see it that way. Why can't women also be gentle?

-You'll understand when you grow up a little more.

-Oh, always the same.

He sat near Vidar while he continued with his work. She was intrigued by what the young man thought in relation to his father and recognition. He wanted to know if he would move to the jarl's home and if he would continue to see him as always, he was worried that he would disappear from his life.

-Are you going to go live with your father?

-It's possible. But don't worry, you will remain my little sister forever, that won't change.

-But you're going to leave.

-The most likely thing is that you will have to travel and assume responsibilities.

-Promise me that you will always come back.

-I promise, but you can get off your ass too, you little bum, and visit me.

They laughed together and spent the afternoon gathering the logs that Vidar had cut and arranging them in the back of the cabin close at hand to use in the hearth fire. The young man in particular knew how to save the moment as a memory for the uncertain future that awaited him. Deep down he knew that soon his life would change forever.

He did not like the idea of joining his father's family, Hanne was distant to him and his children, his half-siblings, were small and he did not feel any particular affection towards them, they were other children just like any other. His relationship with his father was cold and enigmatic, as if a bond of mystery and silence united them, words that did not arise, questions that were not satisfied with the answers he heard. The feeling towards his father had mutated throughout his life, as a child the admiration every time he saw him from a distance, then the intrigue to really know him, now only a dry resentment without passion arose in him. He couldn't hate him, something told him that his father was a man suffering and hurt in his silence, his dull look told him of an absent joy for living, a constant alert of who knows what unknown dangers. He did not have loving feelings for his

mother, since he did not know her, it was rather an affection towards an image created in the likeness of Bliss and her stories about Eastanglia. He felt divided, his Viking part was clear and real, but his British part was something nebulous and unreal. I needed to unite those two halves, to know who I really was. His path was uncertain, but he had decided to take the course himself, they had even decided for him, it was time to take charge of his own life and make his destiny. The Gods were foreign to him, they were like stories from other times, if Odin existed, the Christian God could also exist, less cruel, less similar to men and their passions. Something that added to their fragmented world was also the intangible world of the sacred sagas and distant Christianity.



Björk had asked Hanne for austerity, barely enough mead and beer and no animals would be a banquet that day. Strange thing, Hanne thought, as if she wanted that day to go unnoticed. She was used to being left out of her husband's world, and that had been the pact with him over the years, which had been very difficult when she was unable to give birth alive to her first pregnancies. With the promise not to divorce, Hanne gave her consent, even though Björk did not need it, for him to have concubines who did give him children in those early years. She suffered the silent contempt of men and women even

more for being from another clan, she maintained everything with the indifference of someone who only lives in the present without asking for more power than she had as the administrator of the home. The peace and security that Björk gave her was enough for her; she did not bother her with marital encounters or ask her what she was doing with her life. Being careful and respecting the position of her husband and herself, with her husband's approval, she found love in the arms of Björk's loyal comrade in arms. She succeeded some time later, she did not know if because of the herbs they gave her, because of her prayers to the Goddess Frigga or simply because the Goddess Rin-da had stopped harassing her; getting pregnant three more times, making the children hold the breath of life, holding them to the world. Only she knew which child was Björk's and which was her faithful lover's, not even they knew and they didn't want to know for sure.

The skali was ready, conditioned by the women and prepared for an assembly in which the members of the family and the most important men of the community would participate. Björk had requested that only Hanne be present of her wives, the concubines would be left to take care of the little ones. Björk wanted to be brief and the children would only make unnecessary noise.

Yes, the construction of one more room had been arranged for Vidar's arrival, it seemed like a good idea to him, he knew him well, he was

always aware of what he was doing so he could keep Björk informed about his son's life in his rooms. long absences. As well as keeping an eye on Bliss and Carl for any news that arose or if they needed anything.

Hanne thought of him as a happy young man, but cautious when speaking, always observant and taking the time to act, whether in children's games or in daily dealings in the community. He never bragged about being Björk's son, one might even think that he preferred to ignore the matter and be one of them all. In fact, he got slightly uncomfortable when someone mentioned it to him. He had observed him being affectionate with his foster siblings, however, he had never approached his half-siblings, they admired him for being the oldest of them all and perceived the aura of mystery around that brother so physically similar to his father. . He was kind, but distant with the whole family, the same coldness as Björk and that strange unintentional arrogance of someone who knows he is confident in his physical strength. He would have to resettle with his family, but he didn't see it being a problem, surely Björk would train him in battle and in trading, she would take him on expeditions or to trade in the northern lands, the Rus irritated Björk greatly and she would put her son at the forefront of the negotiations would be a relief.

He had already coordinated with Bliss to bring Vidar's belongings after the ceremony, they had finished conditioning the wood they used in the expansion of the home and furnished it with what was necessary for his hygiene and rest. He hoped that he would be comfortable, Bliss had always mentioned how simple he was in his tastes and how simple he was in his manners, he trusted that everything would turn out well.

Leif had arrived from Eastanglia very early that morning, after a rest he decided to go meet Björk and find out about his brother's plans. They decided to go fishing in the river to chat quietly.

-How is everything in Domnoc?

-Intrigues are the order of the day, Weseex is discreetly providing itself with men and weapons, something is plotting.

-As always, they are intriguing by nature.

-They would say strategists and we are just barbarians.

-Hahaha, it's true, they usually turn things around as it suits them. I don't know how they do it, they know how to justify everything they do, always turning the facts in their favor.

-I think it's what the Romans left in their women. Hahahaha.-Taking advantage of a target in the conversation, he wanted to know about his nephew.

-What do you plan to do with Vidar?

-Better ask me what he plans to do.

-Tell me...

-I have no idea! It exasperates me that she is not like her mother in that regard. She had no thought left unsaid, impetuous and thoughtless, when she started there was no way to stop her.

-Instead, it came out to you. Observant, calculating and cold. You never know what's going on in his head.

-True. But it's not what matters most to me.

-And what worries you the most?

He stayed for a few minutes as if thinking several things at the same time, but he only summarized his thoughts in a single sentence.

-The imminent future. Maybe just die without forgiving myself.

They spent the afternoon together, they made a small fire and ate the poor, starving fish they managed to get, the fish was surely deaf from the screams and laughter that the rest of the school quickly fled to avoid being caught.

Leif had always been Björk's confidant, even though he was the only one who enjoyed her absolute trust, sometimes his brother was a depth that he could not penetrate, where there were shadows he did not know and revenges thought out over and over again in detail. The mystery in Björk was only the silence of a man who spoke to himself in the solitude of his mind. He had plans for his son, but as he had

confessed to Leif, Vi-dar was as much of a mystery as he was himself. He wanted to train him as a warrior and merchant so that he could take his place if the people considered him worthy. It was not enough to be his son, so he had to try to give him all the tools so that he could take advantage of the opportunity when the time came. The rest of his children were small and he hardly knew each one's personality, at least he remembered their names, he had a great memory for names, faces and facts, something very useful when he traveled to distant lands or had to market. with Constantinople, which was rarely the case, or with the heavy Russians of the north, they had a worse character than him and it was difficult for him to negotiate with them, they were hard and inflexible, in general they managed, after arduous back and forth, to negotiate justly to both sides. There was also Eastanglia, more livestock and agricultural like Scania, the difficult thing there was the Viking expansion policy and the resistance of York and Weseex. Leif, with a sometimes somewhat fickle and passionate character, achieved a certain peace by managing coldly and negotiating with passion. He had never been a simple plunderer, but had become a settler, explorer and owner of the new lands they arrived at, leaving Scania behind. Vidar could learn a lot from his uncle, but he saw him as such a Viking that he did not imagine he could adapt to that life.

Björk only felt the fatigue of having lived so much, her hands became rigid with sharp pains that lasted an eternal second. His back increasingly reminded him of the cold nights on the high seas, the days riding or the blows suffered in battle. I had little time, the soul knows when it has to leave and gently prepares us with premonitions and dreams, it warns us that we must leave our feelings, our belongings, passions and fears in order. Björk was certain that her own ragnarok would break out shortly. His desires, passions, fears, revenge and resentments were seeking their place at the end of his time.

This is how the brothers returned, walking calmly after so many years along the same path they used to return from the river when they were two children with hair so white that it became transparent in the sun.



Sven had been avoiding Bjarne, but sooner or later he would have to face him, for years each of them had gone their own way, things were going very well for Sven, he worked his lands with a handful of men who had bought his lands. freedoms in exchange for work and good administration, while he dedicated himself to negotiating skillfully in other lands and pulling the strings of conspiracies and alliances throughout his travels, to which his spirit was so fond. Unlike his older brother, he felt comfortable in the shadows of power and whether due to a natural issue or his own personality, second places worked wonders for him.

Bjarne showed up at her home with the intention of seeking her complicity as he had always had. But just like him, Sven had also suffered the passing of the years but without his spirit being eaten away by frustration and resentment. More cautious and experienced in politics, Sven would treat his brother with subtle disdain, he would try to per-

suade him to confront Björk as if they were still young and inexperienced, but if he found no sanity in Bjarne, he would let the Norns finish the matter. fabric of your life and destiny without interfering.

-Brother! "It's nice to see you." Bjarne hugged him as if he really knew what affectionate feeling towards another human being was.

-Come on Bjarne, let me go once and for all, you're fatter and smellier than I've ever seen you. Come in and let's share a beer, tell me what's been in your life all this time.

-All rubbish, you know? Looting to obtain loot, women and slaves was not my only objective; He wanted much more than he already knew how to achieve against the Anglo-Saxons. The first advances had already caught the damned Christians of the north by surprise and we had the emirs of Córdoba in our grasp. When Asturias was almost entirely ours, a few of us headed to Algeciras, we looted everything there was. crossed us on the road, riding through Guadalquivir on the way to Córdoba to join the great battle near I don't remember the name of which city, the issue is that a dirty emir named something like Abderramán set a trap for us, decimated us The damn thing caught us by surprise, I lost almost all my men and the rest of the assault groups had lost the heads of many of their leaders. We were only left with about three or four hundred men, half of them badly wounded. And I without being able to take revenge on everything and everyone. Some of us retraced our steps and devastated what was

left, but others continued along the coasts of some islands and went up to Pamplona, damn it, I didn't see it and I didn't join them. It was a bad decision. There they managed to capture a king and obtained a large ransom in exchange for his release.

Sven listened attentively to his brother, he already knew the look of men when they went mad from greed or simply went crazy. His brother had that lost face of someone who no longer sees horizons and is lost in the mist of his desires and hatred.

-Why did you come Bjarne? Was it just to be present at this ceremony designed by Björk?

-And you? Why have you come?

-For the sake of form, my life has not been nearly as glorious as yours.

-Glorious?! Does it seem glorious to you? Return empty-handed, with nothing to rub in all these faces? More years have passed than I would have liked, all in vain. I have left children everywhere, who I don't give a damn about, about them and their mothers. They just want me to support them and give them a place of privilege. Let them earn it for themselves, damn it!!

-Listen Bjarne, leave the past, settle down and continue with your life here. Don't look for problems.

-I see that you have become a lazy talker. Björk's Saber Sucker. I thought you would have blood and seek with me to take back what we should have had.

-You will say, what you should have had. My place would always have been the same with you or with Björk.

-Well, don't say I didn't offer you a place at my side.

-What are you up to?

-Nothing that matters to you, I will dispute Björk's leadership hand to hand, if I don't do it now I will never be able to. This bastard is doing this thing of recognizing his son to position him in front of the community, to shower him with merits that this unfortunate man does not have. This time I won't fail. I'll crack Björk's skull with one blow.

-You are crazy Bjarne, you will only get yourself expelled forever or hanged like a thief.

Bjarne jumped up, still having a strong body and the height of a white bear. Sven instinctively grabbed the knife hanging from his belt with his right hand. The big man kicked the table, knocking over the jugs that were on it and with a helpless roar he crossed the threshold and left the fireplace. Sven sighed in relief that she was leaving, he couldn't wait to leave Scania and return to his usual life. I had in mind going with the Norwegian Nordics to trade in the green lands of Greenland, anything would have been just as good as long as I didn't go back to Scania.

Bjarne went to the tavern, drank until he fell to his knees, the few who saw him gave him looks of contempt, some knew him from long ago, but everyone knew that he was the Jarl's brother. Apparently a shame for the leader, they had never seen Björk drunk or behaving vulgarly, she never shouted, her icy gaze was enough to make it clear, this brother was the complete opposite. They left him lying there, sleeping in his own vomit without notifying anyone, why get involved in a family issue that had nothing to do with any of them.

Night fell on the town waiting for a gray and cold morning, snowfall times were approaching sooner than expected, but the provisions were already ready to withstand the winter. The raiding expeditions were smaller than in other times, Björk gave freedom to the men who wanted to go looting after the harvest, but in Scania, the spirit of settlement and colonization had settled in the families. Bjarne would never be taken into account for the times, his dreams of feats had no place. But maturity and old age had come to him without the wisdom that he never knew how to seek.



The eight berserkers that Björk had sent to post were in front of the skali, some sitting, others chatting, all relaxing and drinking, while the men of the thing arrived, they were the most respected free men and owners of the best lands in Scania, not It was not necessary for the twelve judges or the godir to attend, but Björk had asked them if they would be willing to participate in the ceremony. The pleasant atmosphere among them suggested that it was an austere and family festivity, it could be understood that the jarl wanted to share the legality of the moment with the community. The rest of the townspeople were unaware of the occasion, but they were aware, they all knew that at some point Vidar would be called by his father to the family home, he had long been of age to venture and go to conquer lands or collaborate. with his father, which meant a departure from childhood in his foster home with Bliss and Carl.

All the men were asked to leave their weapons before entering the skali, they would be watched by the berserkers, no one paid atten-

tion, each one left his sword, spear or knife safe. The godir barely listened, old age had robbed him of his hearing and the sight of one of his eyes, tinted with a whitish mist that only allowed him to glimpse lights and shadows. The night before the runes showed him events that were difficult to understand, birds in blood and the blinding light of the sun had invaded his dreams, the godir was uncomfortable and alert, presentiments like whiplashes on his skin were present to him that day. And taking advantage of the impunity of the wrinkles, he acted oblivious when he crossed the threshold of the skali without handing over the knife under his tunic. No one thought to suppose it, in fact no one paid attention to it.

Hanne had arranged enough oil lamps to illuminate the entire place; she did not understand why her husband had especially requested them, if it was a cloudless and sunny morning. Even so, he arranged everything, along the walls there were benches that were actually trunks with compartmentalized lids that were used for such use, these had two elevations, one in the center of one of the longitudinal walls and the other in front. The first had a seat of honor for Björk as Jarl, which could accommodate several occupants delimited by pillars with runes inscribed; there, next to her husband, Hanne would sit as a mute witness of what happened. Located in front of them would be Vidar whom they wanted to honor that day. The third elevation in the transverse direction, like a small dais, was reserved for Leif, Sven and

Bjarne. There were no fixed tables, they would be set later for a toast. The individual seats were three-legged stools and the occupation of places on the benches was not left to chance. Attentive to the origin and the status to avoid later disputes, the twelve judges and the godir had been in the first row, behind each free man or as they called him bondi, they would follow one another according to custom. The women had taken great care in cleaning the precious upholstery brought along during Björk's travels. Weapons hung on the walls, the pride of the owner of the house. There were Rhenish swords with golden hilts, others with inlaid , valuable chain mail, spears, pikes, bows and halberds. As well as shields and hammers of various shapes made by Björk himself. Since the times of Einar and Margit the skali had undergone several transformations, the hearth fire had been moved to another room and more bedrooms had been added through narrow passages with the arrival of children and servants. Björk was an accomplished blacksmith and craftsman who had known how to absorb Byzantine and Mediterranean art and her home denoted this, as well as the filigree and inlaid jewelry that Hanne displayed on these occasions with simplicity and good taste.

Vidar had arrived with Bliss and Carl and his foster siblings. Inside his soul trembled with fear but also with courage. He had made a decision in the solitude of his being, day by day until that moment he had traced the path to his true desire.

He did not feel comfortable with this presentation, much less with what he had determined in his heart, over and over again he had gone over in his mind what he would say to the present assembly, but he did not know how his father would take it. Maybe he should have talked about it with him before, put him on notice, allowed him to swallow the moment in his own time, and not in this unexpected way. How would his father react in front of so many people? His father's character was unpredictable for him, he could take it calmly and wisely while respecting him, but he could also become angry if he opposed his will. I didn't really know. Unconsciously, he had chosen to confront him publicly for fear of doing it alone; if he made him uncomfortable, it was possible that he would not recognize him as his son until he did what he wanted. It wasn't that he cared so much about being Björk's legitimate son, what mattered most to him was that it allowed him to make his life what he really wanted, deep down he was only looking for her approval. In some way it was something he had always wanted to have, recognition through approval of his existence beyond his mother. He needed to feel the respect he had not had for his mother, to validate his blood and his history. He wanted more than anything to make the figure of his dead mother present among so much invisibility throughout those years. Reveal the tragedy beneath the silences and indifferences of everyone around them. Shine light on the ghost of his deceased mother. He was already walking towards the skali, he

took a breath, straightened his bearing, raised his gaze, gently greeted those who crossed his path and went in to meet his father.

Bjarne and Sven were at a distance from each other, but they exchanged glances when they saw Vidar arrive. Bjarne measured the young man as he would an opponent, clearly the young man was not a rival unlike his father. He thought it would be easier to challenge his nephew to a duel later, instead of facing Björk, younger than him and in better condition despite her age. For a moment he gave up his resentment, but it was only for an instant, the resentment and desire for power, frustrated for so many years, had made a dent in the logic of his thinking, he was blinded by dark feelings. Something would occur to him, he would improvise in the moment to hinder legitimation, he would bring the past humiliation of his family because of Wynn into the present, and he would get the father or son to give in to their emotions. In this way the scandal would disgrace the ceremony. Nothing mattered more to the Norse than honor.

Sven observed him, knowing the subtleties of the human soul, greed, hatred and passions were issues that he dealt with daily with himself and with others like him, he knew his brother very well. He was up to something and he wanted to stay out of his madness.

Leif saw Vidar and grabbed him by the neck, the young man had already seen him coming and melted into a sincere hug with the only uncle he had contact with, every time Leif returned to Scania for

some business, he had visited him since he was a child. . He told her about Dommoc and how crazy the Anglo-Saxons were to them with their ways and the suffocating Christianity that prevented them from enjoying women without guilt. They were very fun moments for Vidar who lived his stories as if they were magical stories from a distant land. Leif greeted Bliss and Carl and together they entered to separate, placing themselves in their corresponding places.

Björk groomed herself with care and dedication, the day had arrived so thoughtful and calculated for years, in any case she knew that reality would prevail over her desires, it was always like that. They told him that the assembly was ready, and he headed there with sure steps. Upon entering, his strategic spirit located each one of those present, with a glance he knew the place that each one truthfully occupied. They greeted him with the same voice and he sat down in his place, Hanne doing the same next to him. There was silence waiting for Björk's voice, grave and monotonous she began her presentation:

-We are gathered so that I can give the place that belongs to him since his birth to Vidar, son of my blood and lineage and of his mother Wynn of Eastanglia daughter of Hunn. Its name was given in honor of our God Vidar. I ask our Godit to enlighten us with the story of the sagas.

The Godit stood up, leaning on the long staff that he held in his hand and that was taller than him, clearing his throat and beginning his story with a trembling voice:

“Get up Vidar

And admit the father of the wolf

as a guest at the party.

In order that Locke cannot

make reproaches

here in Aegar's palace.

The vast country of Vidar

It is covered with bushes

and tall grasses.

There the son of Odin reigns

riding on his horse

He will avenge his father.”

Everyone kept a respectful silence before the recitation of the Godit who continued saying:

-Vidar is the God of the forest, ancient and impenetrable, incorruptible and imperishable, where the sound of an ax or the voice of any

man has never been heard. He is the God of silence, he lives far from us and does not exert influence on men, he works in secret and hiding for the good of the human spirit, everything that the world produces will die, but the honest work and the secret power of Vidar He is eternal like the God that is. He will avenge his father Odin during Ragnarok, when the Fenris wolf pounces on Odin, Vidar will break the beast's jaw, tearing him apart and tearing him to pieces. And so the world will exist again.

The old man returned to his seat, helped by one of the men near him. Vidar was attentive to every gesture his father could make, but he only saw a large stone with long white hair and a sharp, fixed gaze. He gulped and asked the Gods for help for himself.

Björk spoke up.

-I am only reaffirming what I did when Vidar was born, welcoming him to the family and no one can deny what the Gods have shown us, he is worthy of my son just by looking at him. I have seen you grow and I keep the promise I made to your mother. That's why Vidar takes your place among us.

The young man stood listening to his father, waiting for the moment that would allow him to speak, but when his father mentioned his mother, the emotion surged in his chest, he recovered as best he could and while everyone was waiting for a few words from him to shout the good news, his voice was heard.

-I respect you as my Jarl and I thank you for your paternal protection over my life. I will always be loyal to you and I will fight for you and for our people. I ask you to allow me to leave for Dommoc, to my mother's land, and take charge of our lands there.

There was a general silence, Björk noticed the surprise on Bliss and Carl's faces, it was evident that they knew nothing about Vi-dar's decision. Once again he confirmed his paternity, just like him, Vidar had silently and secretly made his decision, without talking to his father or his foster family. Apparently he had inherited his father's cunning, he felt proud of his son. Like Björk, surprise was a weapon they kept to use at the right moment.

Before Björk spoke, Bjarne quickly stepped forward to speak to the assembly.

-I have something to say.

While Björk nodded for him to speak, with his left hand he made a slight sign to two of his berserkers who, alerted by him, knew perfectly well what they should do. The berserkers who had been outside the skali, drinking beer and laughing, had posted themselves at every opening and entrance to the room, with their knives hidden under their shirts. One of them, at the same time that they closed each window and door, had ordered one of the women from Björk's house to light the lamps, the rest of the women who had discreetly positioned themselves near each oil lamp did the same. . Hanne realized that her

husband's order to prepare the lamps and not present so many provisions for the banquet had not been innocent. She looked at him intrigued and her husband only returned that look that told her that she should remain silent without asking, and so she did, expectant of what was going to happen.

Bjarne instantly realized like everyone else how strange what was happening and felt that he was at risk, he did not have a single weapon with him, if his life was at risk he was determined to kill Björk with his own hands, but he did not see that possibility with the judges and the most relevant men being there and his fear subsided.

Leif and Sven, like everyone there, were attentive and amazed at the turn of circumstances in the light of the lit lamps.

-This legitimization is a farce, Björk's wife was executed for treason, presenting a bastard son as part of our family. There are judges here who can testify to this.

-It seems that the Gods have taken the time to do justice, Bjarne, and they are ruthless. I recognized my son at birth and gave him his name; my wife's tragic death was due to intrigues and conspiracies. You have done well in stating the case. I consider a new trial to have begun, taking advantage of the fact that the necessary judges are present, as well as witnesses to the case you mention, presenting new evidence and clearing up the darkness.

Back then, you asked me to accompany you on an excursion, you unnecessarily delayed our stay at every step, and the return to Scania was strewn with obstacles to delay my return, while our brother Sven accused my wife of dishonoring the family. To do this he made use of some of his slaves, threatening to murder his entire family in Ireland if he did not give in to exposing himself as guilty of the crime. There are women present here who can testify that they never saw Wynn in any romantic attitude with that slave, who had intentionally sought her out to ask her about her family and so that they would only be seen, he approached her next to the river while she was washing with other women. Sven while speeding up the trial even though Einar our father urged him to wait for my return. Having agreed with one of the judges, and his wife is a witness to whom I have promised my protection, that he was visited on several occasions by Sven, who was thrown to death from a cliff, after he was called by you Bjarne for a secret meeting, that the man told his wife about it because he feared for his life. And she never said anything about her pain at the death of her husband for fear of your retaliation. She is older and her children look out for her and she wants justice.

To your advantage, our brother Ingolf was killed in Britain, so I was your only obstacle to coming to power and you saw no better opportunity than to destroy my family, since you well know that in a duel with me your chances of surviving were slim. Leif and Sven were no

problem for you, but I was your biggest headache, since you knew that our father and our people voted for me to take over as jarl. You expected him to die drunk on the high seas or die in Britain crazy. And now it bothers you that Vidar is a young rival who could dispute the leadership. Have you come back to question my place? You who have been a waste of men and provisions in your crazy expeditions on the Mediterranean coasts?

-You're crazy, I don't know what you're talking about.

-Judges, deliberate yourselves, here are my witnesses - five women came forward, among them the wife of the murdered judge - and there is no better witness of my truth than just seeing Vidar, no one can deny that he is my son and no one He will doubt my word, I recognize my blood in him.

The silence became heavy, Bjarne did not know what to expect, while Sven sitting next to Leif tried to get up to escape to no avail, Leif took him by the arm and sat him down with a jerk, while a berserker stood behind him, knife in hand.

Björk observed Sven's desperation and decided to target his other brother.

-As for Sven, he generated intrigue and obviously in collusion with some others to accuse my wife in my absence, he accelerated the trial and by lying to her about the death of my wife's brother he turned her against me. He accused my most faithful man Ulf, since he was

dead and could not bear testimony, alleging that I myself had ordered him to kill his relative. Lie! Osric died in the land of those whom Christians call heretics. We had nothing to do with his death. My wife went crazy with pain, feeling betrayed by me. It was all thought up by Sven and Bjarne.

The judges who had stood up did not know how to react, they found themselves in a spontaneous trial without warning and had to decide. The fact that the murder of a judge was at stake, since they remembered very well his death and the strangeness of that suicide, meant that they could not stop expressing themselves, if they did not condemn the act, their own lives could be in suspense in a future, the feeling of preservation urged them to resolve at that moment.

Vidar atento a cada palabra de su padre, iba tejiendo imágenes del pasado y encontrando las respuestas que tanto había deseado escuchar.

-Jarl, these events have taken us by surprise, but in light of your words, if your brothers have nothing more to say, please do justice as you consider.

Sven realized that they were lost, he remembered the words they had had with Bjarne, desperate, his face red and his body twitching, he shouted at Bjarne with all his fury:

-Kill him once and for all Bjarne! Kill him!

Out of control, he felt that his throat and chest were wet with a hot liquid, he thought that something had been dumped on his body, he looked down to see his chest and the dark blood stained his clothing and a stream came out of his throat, the Life was escaping him and he could not help but be surprised, going crazy without being able to speak, he fell to the floor at the feet of Leif and the berserker who had slit his throat.

Bjarne, upon hearing Sven, had launched himself at Björk, Hanne had been taken by the arm and taken shelter by her lover who was close to her, and Björk, without flinching, stood up from her seat and took the sword that she had hidden between her. His skin crossed Bjarne's body, taking him with his free arm he pushed him even more, with his face pressed against his brother's, he saw the wild eyes of someone who realizes that he has lost the opportunity to stay alive, with disdain and almost whispering so that only Bjarne could hear he said:

-I don't think you will reach Valhalla brother.

He pushed him back and Bjarne, holding his abdomen, fell to his knees. He didn't understand what had happened, how everything had gone to hell. He only had to give one last look of hatred at Björk and leaning over, his body bled to death.

The doors and windows were opened, the lamps were turned off, no one moved from their place, surprised faces invaded the scene, only Björk was in control, she always had been. His revenge simmered for

years in the heat of his soul, only Leif sensed that sooner or later his brother would collect the debt, but he had never mentioned his plans to him.

Björk waited while Vidar grew up and the resemblance to him became increasingly noticeable to use him as a witness and irrefutable proof, she let time and years give her brothers security and they confidently considered what they had experienced as past, believing that there would be no revenge on Björk's part. He let them do it all that time, he sent men and supplies to Bjarne every time he asked for them, without asking him for explanations or to account for the losses, he provided Sven with contacts so that he could be successful in trading, he allowed him to profitably work his lands and I encouraged him every time I saw him. But deep down, he was just waiting for the right moment. And that day had arrived. He didn't feel peace, but he did feel relief at having finished another pending task in his life. From now on he had no idea how to continue, his only secret motivation was to get revenge and he had achieved it with temperance, coldness and calculated strategy.

Everyone present realized that their Jarl was a calculating and spiteful man, his pulse did not tremble if he had to execute anyone, he was a worthy leader, who deserved the respect of everyone. They had better walk on the right path if they didn't want to end up singled out like those two.

They took the bodies to clean and bury, they would have no honors, given that they had treacherously tried to kill Björk, beyond the intrigues and conspiracies of the past. They sent word to the women of those who had fallen into disgrace, none of them would cry a single tear, since they were freed they only assumed the responsibility of continuing with their children and their lands. Sven and Bjarne had not cultivated filial love if that was the case.

No one dared to ask about the banquet that should have been held for the ceremony given the turn that the occasion had taken. So each one of them dispersed with the disappointment of what they had witnessed.

Hanne retreated with her slaves, Blis and Carl hugged Vidar and marched home. Leif, Björk and Vidar remained, they arranged a table, some stools, sitting down to talk about the present and the future, with wine, beer and whatever drink was available in the house.

-What a day by the Gods. Since when did you have this in mind, Björk? -Leif asked, already dizzy from so much alcohol.

-I don't even remember it anymore Leif. I have the feeling that it has been a lifetime.

-I thank you Father, that you have done justice. I must say that your forms are somewhat exaggerated.

The three laughed heartily at Vidar's words. Björk sipped a long drink and looked at her son intently.

-So you're thinking of going to Dommoc, I was surprised when I heard your request. If that's what you want. That's how it will be, it wasn't what I had decided for you, but I'm already old and tired, do what you like, but do it well, so that I can be proud of you.

They agreed that Leif would teach him everything related to the governance of the settlement, he informed him of his grandfather's increasingly deteriorating health, to which Björk spat on the ground, blaspheming against Hunn. They commented on the political disputes of the towns in Britain and how Weseex was complicating the situation more and more every day. The fact that Vidar took his place as a British-Danish would make relations loosen a bit, sooner or later they would have to make pacts with one side and the other, the more legitimacy there was, the better it would be for everyone.

Vidar expressed to them that he felt the need to discover his maternal origins, he did not deny the Gods, but it was true that Christianity generated intrigue in him. Both his father and his uncle warned him that not all Christians, particularly the clergyman, who had a lot of influence in politics, were people of virtue, honorability was not their strong suit, they tended to be scheming and complicated, there was no alliance between them that would last a long time and had to be handled with caution. They had had times of peace, however, they were not sure if it would last long, they had already attacked them on some occasions and the Vikings had suffered many losses. If Vidar

took his place there, it was very likely that in the future he would not be able to claim leadership at Scania, Vidar knew it, but he was not worried, he had no intention, otherwise he had brothers who could well take that place in the future.

-Apparently, you have a lot of your mother and me. If we could have gone far away to live in peace, we had no intention of having more power than to govern our own lives. But only they know the reasons for the destiny that the Gods imposed on us. Sometimes I think my life was a waste of time.

-Don't say that, brother! Life has smiled on you as much or more than on any man. Don't complain or the Gods will punish you.

-I don't know Leif. I'm not so sure. I feel empty.

-It seems that your departure Vidar has made your father become a sad old man. Hahahahaha.

They continued drinking all afternoon and night, until they went to their beds trying to find peace in a restful sleep.



He did not have many things to carry with him, Vidar's bag had more invisible than material things inside it, they were his memories, the eternal emptiness of an absence that he could not define, some tools, his weapons and some carvings in wood that he had made as a child with his brothers. His father and a couple of men would accompany him to the dock from where he would leave for Eastanglia with his uncle. The march had been delayed for a few days because they had to finish fixing the planks and iron rivets on the longship's lashed hull. As an honor he would travel on the most valuable drakar to show the power of whoever arrived on the shores of the Danish town that belonged to him. Björk arrived and gave Vidar and his family a few intimate moments to say goodbye to them. Anja couldn't stop crying uncontrollably over her brother's departure, her purest and most childlike love breaking her heart. The five riders left on horseback in silence, Björk lost in thought and Vidar keeping in his memory every turn of the road.

The dock was full of life, fishermen and vendors were bustling with their work, Leif gave instructions to the rowers, about sixty men who would return to Skania after leaving them there, he also had to secure the provisions and merchandise that he was taking to Dommoc. to market. The boat trip would last two or three days depending on the weather at sea. He saw them arriving and went to meet them.

-Finally bags of fleas have arrived!! I've already done all the work for you.

"Don't exaggerate Leif, as if you don't like giving orders without moving your ass," Björk told him more cheerfully.

They left the horses in the protection of the escort and headed to the dra-kar, Leif continued organizing the game and left Björk and Vidar alone.

-Are you upset that I left Scania? Will the Gods be?

-Fuck the Gods!

-Don't say that! They will punish you- said the young man.

- Anyway, my life is in his hands, whatever he does. Don't worry. Of course I would have liked you to stay, but I believe, unlike the older ones, that one's destiny must be made by oneself and not left so blindly in the hands of the family, the community or the gods themselves. I am sure that the Gods give us the freedom to change the destiny in the hands of the Nor-nas if we are determined to change it.

-I have never heard someone say what they think so freely, father, I don't know whether to admire you or think that you are a bit crazy.

-hahahahaha. Tell me something Vidar, what would you rather be if you could choose from just two options, the head of a mouse or the tail of a lion?

-The truth is that I have never seen a lion, but I know that it is fearsome, like a big cat the size of a bear.

-That's right, I saw some on an excursion on the way to Byzantium.

-Well, let me think... I know mice and rats better, to tell the truth. So I prefer to be a mouse head, they know how to find food, they defend themselves if you confront them and they also know how to flee in time.

-There is no right answer, it is just a decision. I chose to be a lion's tail, and I spent my time smelling the shit out of his ass and shooing away the flies. If I could choose again I would also be a mousehead, to stick my nose wherever I wanted and eat whatever shit I wanted.

For some reason Vidar felt a relaxed and sincere affection for his father like never before, for a moment he thought that this could be the last time he would see him. Leif had everything ready to leave, he hugged his brother and said, "Don't fall asleep brother, neither the lying wolf gets his slice nor the man who sleeps his victory."

- Yes, yes, and you stop getting into women's skirts, you're old and you'll only get your crazy wife to slit your throat for just reason. Ha ha ha.

Björk pushed Vidar against her body and, hugging him tightly, hit him on the head as if he were still a child.

-Njörd has never abandoned me, nor will he abandon you. Here, here are the papers that make you owner of everything in Eastan-glia, no one will demand anything from you.

Nephew and uncle left, leaving this gigantic man on the dock, with long white hair and cold eyes.

The first day of sailing Vidar spent busy with the typical tasks of life at sea, physical work prevented him from taking care of his mind and his feelings. The second day, during a break while he was eating fermented herring, his uncle approached him to talk.

-What are you thinking Vidar?

-Nothing special. But since you ask, what is my grandfather like?

-I don't like it, I must confess, he's mentally ill, I guess he never had it right, but the death of your uncle, on whom he had placed his hopes, was the trigger. He is always saying that he has lost something or another, that it has been stolen, and he alludes to conspiracies supposedly concocted by his brothers.

-And when did you find out about my mother's death?

-He was already crazy, he didn't understand or didn't want to when your father came to him to report Wynn's death. He never complained to her or mentioned her again, I think deep down he believes that she is still alive and living in Scania. Don't believe anything he tells you. To all this, have you thought about where you want to settle?

-I will do it in the castle or what remains of it. Hunn, my grandfather, lives there, right?

-Yes, but we destroyed many of the buildings. The stone forts like your family's were left standing, it has a good circular fort with glacis and a defensive moat, Björk never wanted to get rid of it, I don't know why. Even the church was in good condition, they say it has a style imposed by a Christian, I think they called him Augustine, it's beautiful I think. There are Christians living among us, and there are already many unions between natives and Danes.

The young Vidar, like any man of his age, forgot family issues for something that mattered even more to him at that time.

-What are British women like?

-Ah, you have come to get wood, I am a great connoisseur of those women, hahahaha. Look, they are not nearly as beautiful as ours, they are small almost like elves but like fruits, small and tasty. They are happy, but angry, cold and warm at the same time, the truth is they are fun, but just like any woman, each one is an inhospitable

and unknown land, there is no woman equal to another. Is that why I like them all? ? It's just that I always find something beautiful and unique in every woman. My wife doesn't understand it.

-I think Leif, that all women would agree on that: you are a common and ordinary woman.

-Oh, I think I'm listening to your father, no one understands me.

-Of course, I understand you, you like them all! I just hope I get lucky with a pair, I don't need as much as you do.

- Dommoc will be a new world for you.

-Do you think they will accept me well? I'm not talking about women, but about the people.

-I think so, the fact of having a Breton mother and a Viking father is a great advantage, you will be able to exert influence on both sides, reach better agreements if there is a dispute, as there is always one on the horizon. But at first act as if you were a guest, be cautious when you arrive, be silent and listen, keep your ears open and your eyes alert, this way you will protect yourself as a wise man would. Furthermore, children born like you will feel understood by you, and in the future you will have an army of faithful men who will naturally have you as their leader. Maintain that temper that is so characteristic of yours, it gives security. A very chatty man pretending to be nice all the time is not trustworthy in anyone's eyes. Just as someone who is always stern and has few words is sometimes unnecessarily scary.



The day ended in a peaceful night at sea, as did the next day. Leif continued to fill him in on the politics and relationships Vidar would have to deal with upon arrival, the trade routes they had up to that point, the relationships with the remaining Danelaw burghs and the jarls in charge of each, as well as the alliances that existed until now. When Vidar was alone, he looked at the sea and thought about the past that he left behind, one that in part did not belong to him and still weighed on him, its mere existence had avenged the death of his mother and the childhood resentment. that he kept for his father was settled with the bloody justice he had meted out.



It was night when they sighted the coasts of Dommoc, the good weather and the speed of the ship shortened the sailing time, the drakar with a scant keel allowed them to approach the coasts without danger and although the ship was not the best to live in, they decided to sleep there. until the sun rose. When the light became a clear and fresh dawn, the men began the descent of the trunks and provisions, Leif and Vidar along with a couple of men headed towards Hunn,

along the way they crossed paths with blares who in amazement scrutinized Vidar and Leif introduced his nephew and gave the news that in three days a party and banquet would be held in his honor. Everyone was very aware of Björk and the pleasant impression that her administration had left in Dommoc, and they hoped that their son would be a faithful legacy of him.

Vidar observed everything that was happening around him, bustling people in the market, small Danish-style houses interspersed with Romanesque or Celtic buildings, he couldn't define them, he almost felt like he was in Scania, that gave him pleasure. Arriving at the small family castle, he climbed the main stairs and entered it. They were greeted by men stationed at the main entrances and a woman who was there greeted them happily, guided them to the rooms that Hunn occupied on the northeast side, they notified their grandfather of their arrival and minutes later they entered the room. wide with tapestries of strange drawings for Vidar. At the table was an elderly man with a gaze absorbed in images that only his mind knew.

-We salute you King Hunn

Vidar found it strange to be called king, Leif winked at him to follow the theater.

Hunn woke up from his mind, gone into who knows what unreal world he was in at that moment and, surprisingly hugging Vidar, he said:

-Osric, you're back, but what happened to your hair?

-Hello Hunn, I'm Vidar, your grandson, son of Wynn and Björk from Scania.

-True, true. How is your mother?

-Dead.

Leif scolded his nephew with his eyes for the brutality of his response.

"How do you say?" Hunn asked, stunned by the answer.

-I say that I'm dying of happiness for sending me to your side.

-How strange you speak, it is logical, you are half a barbarian. But that can be fixed, no problem, I will have the bishop give you classes and make you civilized. There is no problem.

Vidar almost started an argument with the old man, he really found it unpleasant, but Leif was already killing him with his furious look, the young man became aware that arguing with a madman would be a waste of time, he was not used to madness. In general and lowering the foam of the moment, he realized that it was better to continue the theater that his uncle had started.

-It's true Grandpa, my parents have sent me to become civilized with you. So my stay will be long and if you don't mind I would like to stay here with you.

-Of course, you are my blood. Where better than here? I will have the best room prepared for you. I think Osric's will be to your liking. Rearrange it to your liking. Do you know, can you help me look for something? What have I lost? I don't remember what it was, there

have been many things that my brothers have stolen secretly at night. I must find what was stolen from me. Could you handle that?

-Sure, don't worry, after resting and eating something I'll get on with it.

-Good boy, good boy. Now if you don't mind I should rest, my head hurts a lot.

Leif and Vidar retired, on their way to the chambers that belonged to their maternal uncle, Leif slapped Vidar in the face.

"What was that?" said the young man with a look like I didn't do it.

-I told you he was crazy. Who would think of arguing with him? I can't wait to waste my energy on something so stupid. What if he got violent? What would you do? Kill him? Nice start with a fratricide on your hands.

-Does the old man get violent?

-So far only half stupid, but don't alter it for no reason. Leave him in his world, he bothers no one. Come on, get settled in this your new home once and for all, I have to go see my wife and children. I'll wait for you tomorrow at my house for lunch so we can start organizing your new life. Don't miss it or you'll have to deal with your aunt and I assure you that a blow from me is a caress compared to the ones you can receive from her.



When Björk returned from saying goodbye to Vidar, she took her horse and along with the rest of the men who had accompanied them returned to the village at a calm pace, but this time no longer thinking about her son but thinking about her own future. Years of waiting while he ruled with a firm hand, wielding his sword bathed in the fights and deaths of so many men and women, had left him with few feelings left to live with. He no longer loved intensely, nor did he feel tenderness for the simple things in life, he did not dream of the peace of other times nor did he seek more power than he enjoyed. He had become extremely pragmatic.

Vidar had modified his plans when he decided to leave, he had to reorganize his ideas, he was clear that he did not plan to die like his father, in his old and sick home. He would not let the Gods get in his way with their divine whims, his ancestors had decided too much

about the destiny of his life. No more, he was tired of everything and everyone.

Hanne received him with food on the table, he was tired and hungry, this time he wanted his wife to accompany him for a friendly conversation. Something unusual about him was that he preferred solitude while he ate dinner or ate something frugal mid-morning, as was the case.

"How was Vidar's departure?" Hanne asked to start the conversation.

-Good.

-Björk, what do you want to talk about? -I knew that the invitation to accompany him at that moment was not innocent.

-Of our future. I plan to leave with some Norwegian jarls for Normandy, the Saracens are gaining land and we are a bit lazy lately. We don't want to stop expanding, we need more Viking colonies.

-And what's new about that?

-I have no intention of returning.

Hanne did not expect that answer, surprised and asked him why that decision.

-Because our ancestors decided our lives Hanne, our alliance, our marriage, the place we should occupy even without wanting it, we did everything they wanted. I have given you the freedom to live your life and love whoever you wanted, and you have done so with respect for me. I have also done what I wanted. And now I want to die however I

want. If Valhalla is out there I will go to meet it with honor and see how true Asgar and the Gods are.

-Are you doubting our world?

-My father was not a great admirer of the Gods and that is how he transmitted it to me. I have the same doubts that he had. Perhaps the Christian God, being one, is less cruel than ours, perhaps I get along better with him than with our phlegmatic divinities.

-Don't talk like that, if someone hears you say this they may judge you.

-I am speaking in confidence with you. Call Kai I want to talk to him.

-Can I know what you have to say?

-Nothing in your disfavor, quite the opposite. Take care of the children, make them worthy of their lineage. I have nothing to reproach you, you have been a good wife.

They finished eating in silence, the friendly atmosphere between them was real and sincere and Hanne knew how fair her husband was when he made a decision and how stubborn he could be, nothing she could say would change his mind, no matter what. whatever he had resolved.

Kai was a man younger than him and even younger than Hanne, who was still as beautiful as ever despite the years that had not made a dent in her figure. He was an excellent warrior and faithful to Björk's leadership, he had dared to be the jarl's wife's lover, only when Björk

himself authorized it, with a little modesty at first, but he truly loved her.

He appeared at the audience with Björk intrigued by the call.

-Jarl, I am honored by your call.

-And I appreciate that you are part of my wife's life.-Direct as she used to be, Björk got to the point.-I will leave for Normandy shortly and I must put things in order in my home. I ask you to divorce your wife and leave all your possessions to her, for she has well earned it.

Kai couldn't handle the surprise that hit him like a hammer blow to the head. Björk couldn't help but smile wryly at the impassiveness of the man in front of him.

-You see, I have every intention of going to battle as many times as necessary until I am at the gates of Valhalla, I do not believe that the Gods will disdain me and I trust that some beautiful Valkyries will pick me up along the way. I am sure that I can be very useful to you in Ragnarök. So you will be managing the town in my name. Vidar is the owner and lord of Dommoc as heir to my first wife and me. If I do not return from my expeditions, you will have already proven, I hope, that you will be a good jarl, and by marrying Han-ne you will be able to take my place. You will watch over your children and mine and among them you must choose who will succeed you in the future to present in the assembly and be anointed by men and the Gods.

-It seems like you've thought of everything. But if you come back, I will have neither wife nor land.

Björk's gaze was withering and penetrating, Kai's response came like a lightning bolt, he did not need words to understand, Björk was not planning to return, he would die like a warrior, with honor and in battle.

-You will have even more, Hanne as a widow will inherit everything mine as well as my children, but you will have the power to make your own wealth if you are skillful and cautious. Do you agree?

-Yes Jarl.

-Well, in a few days I will gather the assembly of men, you while you fix things with your wife without scandals.

In the following days the meetings and assemblies, discussions and questions took place non-stop, Björk's departure raised questions and diverse opinions, but the aura of astonishment and admiration was everywhere. The assembly of freemen and warriors accepted Kai as administrator while awaiting Björk's return, only the most prominent men knew that the possibilities of the jarl's return were doubtful, Björk had been clear with them and with the provisions he had imposed.

He would march on his drakar with only thirty men who were always willing to be mercenaries who fought for the highest bidder and two of his most loyal berserkers, the rest of the Norwegians who had arrived

to join his team were already on the dock. ship on its way to the coast of Normandy. In recent days, Björk had spent more time with her children than she had ever dedicated to them, she wanted them to have a memory of their father. He enjoyed the moments observing that the oldest of the little ones was a chatterbox, the girl was a shrewd observer and critic, and the youngest was a wild man who broke everything. He was glad to leave, the children were worse than the enemies he had faced.

Björk was preparing the horses to go meet the expedition members when Hanne came over to say goodbye.

-You're ready from what I see. To seek fame and be in the sagas-
Hanne said it without malice and with all good intentions. But he did not perceive anything of that, in a sullen and brutal way he answered:
-I am a battle animal, an imbecile Viking who wanted to live in peace and never achieved it. There is no woman alive who remembers me with love or will mourn my death. For me, Ra-ganök could come tomorrow, which doesn't matter to me. The world can split in two, I don't give a damn. I will die my way, fighting, breaking bones and cracking skulls. There will not be a damn saga that remembers my name nor a feat that a poet sings in a verse. I leave the living ones who are left to do whatever they want. I go in search of the mortal sword that pierces me standing, fighting. I want my freedom, to sail the seas and sleep under the stars.

Hanne saw the fury in his eyes and the resentment in his words.

-Björk, don't be so hard on yourself, I have learned to love you, we cannot lie to each other, I have not been able to love you nor were you interested in me doing so. But I have always respected you and consider you a friend. Heal your wounds, live as you want. Know? I once met in Thorstem a man from Scythia who had come to trade horses with my father. He told me about his Gods, I understood something like they allowed men to return to life through their descendants. I don't know why I remember it at this moment, but I hope one of your Gods has mercy on you and you can live again to find what you have lost in this life.

Björk realized his own exaltation, that he did not deserve to receive his wife, calming his spirits and wishing to say goodbye amicably.

-For now I only hope to enjoy a beautiful exotic woman, with abundant black hair and a dark complexion, with a malleable figure in my arms and who looks at me from eyes the color of hazelnuts. That's what I agree with, Hanne.

They both laughed at the spontaneous occurrence and kissed one last time.



Epilogue

It didn't remain in history
not even in the sagas
Neither hero nor bandit
was the titanic incarnation
of a fully man barbarian

Noemara

FIVE YEARS LATER.

Vidar went to meet the newly arrived ships, Carl and Anja came with them, news from Scania would come with them, the man who had raised him as a child got off the ship and behind him a young woman with a smile that shocked Vidar, He didn't recognize her until moments later, it was Anja, that girl turned into a woman made his heart race unexpectedly. Their smiling faces at seeing them again were mixed with a certain gravity. In the welcoming embrace, Carl, with a trembling voice, informed him of the death of his father on the coasts of Normandy, after years of failed raids, in one of which Björk died like a warrior. Anja bathed him with her eyes full of compassion and tenderness, those eyes would become a beacon of hope in the darkness many times for Vidar. Time would make the bond between young people become a deep love. Anja and her father spent some time in Dom-moc, the daughter insisted endlessly that he talk to Vidar about marrying her, but the father hesitated knowing that he had little to offer in that alliance. Tired of waiting for him, Anja confronted Vidar bluntly, the young man was enchanted by the impetu-

ity of his beloved, he did not care about the worth or not of his possessions and so they married in the Christian rite, the young man had succumbed to the heat of Christianity and their dogmas. Without being blindly devout, he assumed Christian values, knew how to be a good leader, fair but inflexible, cautious but daring in his decisions. He maintained strong alliances with the Danes and evaded the intrigues of the Bretons, peace was his time well earned. Life smiled at him without stridency, without fury or arrogance. His father did not remain in history or in the sagas, but his children remembered him as a man, fully human, neither hero nor bandit, he did not drink blood from the skulls of his enemies nor was he dark in his passions, he loved little, but he wanted a lot, he was the architect of his destiny when he could. Just and vengeful, titanic incarnation of a barbarian, expert in the use of weapons and reading runes. A great sailor and expert horseman, but overwhelmed by the past he sought peace in death.

Centuries later Scania fell under the clutches of the Swedes, today no one remembers the Viking Björk and her tragic story, like so many brief stories of men that the past erased. Nor was there anything left of Dommoc, absorbed by York and Wessex, devoured by the swampy waters; Nor was there left a legacy of Vidar and his children, as leafy vines were intertwined in the story of a lost Danelaw.

end

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ACADEMIC TRAINING

- PRE-SELECTION JURY BANCO PROVINCE LITERATURE GRAND PRIZE 2022
- INSTRUCTOR IN ART THERAPY FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS UNIVERSITY OF BUENOS AIRES CERTIFICATION 2022
- TRAINING IN ART THERAPY I AND II NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS 2023
- NATIONAL DRAWING TEACHER GRADUATE FROM THE MANUEL BELGRANO SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS 2004

COURSES CARRIED OUT

- TRAINING COURSE DIVERSITY OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE SCHOOL OF EDITORS 2024
- EBOOKS DIGITAL EDITORIAL DESIGN E-LEARNIG NATIONAL TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY 2023
- DIGITAL ART AND DIGITAL NARRATIVES E-LEARNIG CENTER NATIONAL TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY 2020
- PARTICIPATE IN THE DOMESTIKA.ORG CREATIVE COMMUNITY FROM 2020 TO THE PRESENT <https://www.domestika.org/es/courses>
- HUMAN FIGURE WITH THE ARTIST JUAN HERRERA NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF VISUAL ARTS 2009
- SEMINAR WITH THE SURREALIST PAINTER AND SCULPTOR ROBERTO AIZENBERG 1993
- EXTENSION COURSES AT THE NATIONAL SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS PRILIDIANO PUEYREDON 1992

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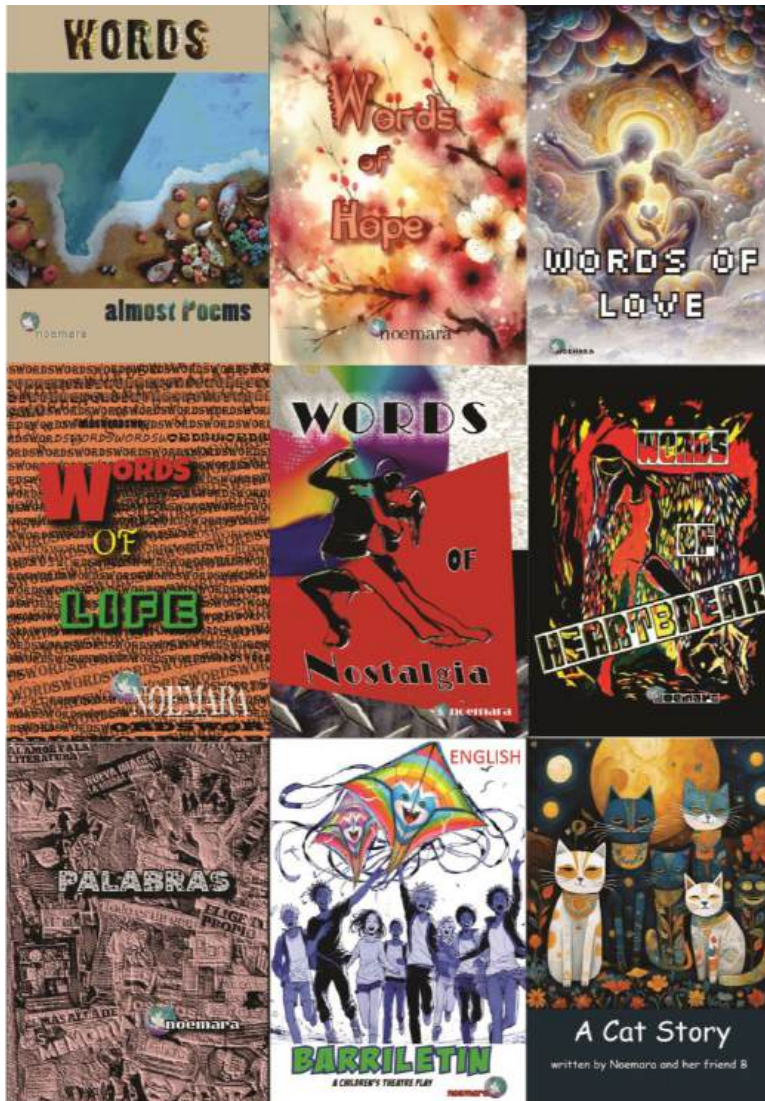
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Facebook https://www.facebook.com/noemara_arterapia

Daniel j Leveratto <https://www.instagram.com/elosodanes>

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Ruiz, Marcela Noemi

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