

Engleverdenen

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“Where the hell...?” Major Raven Stormfeather, United States Marine Corps, was disoriented. She had been in a transport vehicle. She had been in Iraq. She suddenly found herself scrambling to her feet from a frozen ground. Her M16 rifle was still strapped to her chest, and she raised it as she began to search the fog. Determining that she was, for the moment, alone Raven released her hold on the rifle and began unrolling the sleeves of her blouse. She felt like she was in a walk in freezer. Her Sea Bag and her War Bag had both been on her lap in the transport, and they were both on the ground in this new place.

*“Hold on Major!”* The voice of her unit’s medic invaded her mind as excruciating pain and extreme heat seared her back and legs. Unprepared, Raven screamed her anguish to the fog. As she fought to overcome the sensation, two figures came at her from the fog. She tried to fight through the pain and raise her rifle, but she couldn’t lift her arms.

The figures had morphed into women as they cleared the fog that was surrounding Raven. One was very tall, with fire red hair and clothing made of fur. She carried a sword, and had no problem using her arms as she stuck the sharp weapon in Raven’s face. The Marine stopped her movements immediately. The other woman was dressed as a nurse. From the 1940’s, cloak and all. The nurse ignored the sword and moved to comfort Raven.

“Stop. You do not know if she is a trick.” The woman with the sword admonished in a low voice. The nurse stepped away from Raven quickly.

“You don’t know that she isn’t!”

“True, Healer. But I do not wish to take chances. We have been searching for a way out for years, without encountering this foul smell and fog.”

Raven felt a wash of relief flow down her body. The fog surged and intensified before dissipating almost completely. Instead of filling the atmosphere and blocking her vision, it settled around the knees of the three women. Another wash of the relief and the fog vanished all together. She straightened her posture and stepped back from the tip of the sword.

“I am not sure where I am.” She announced to the strangers, “In fact I am certain you are the trick. Because I should be in the desert right now, not in the Tundra.”

The nurse laughed, “Wherever you were, you still are. Only your spirit and mind are here. Hopefully you don’t get stuck, like us.”

The warrior woman growled and stepped closer to Raven, “Do you work for Mikkell of Raumsdalr? Are you here to prevent us from leaving Engleverdenen?”

*“Major Stormfeather! Can you hear me?”* The voice was loud, but still muted, and unfamiliar to Raven. She looked around, but saw nothing but frozen ground and stunted trees. The sword was removed from her face.

“They are not here. The person was talking to your body-in the human world. I am satisfied that you are not a trick. My name is Ingrid, the healer is April.”

“Raven Stormfeather. United States Marine Corps. Where are we?”

“This is Engleverdenen. In our language it means Realm of Angels. I don’t understand it, but to be here something bad happened to you there.” April replied, “For instance, from what we can determine, Ingrid was killed in battle and revived by her goddess, Freya. But she was already trapped here, which is why Freya tried to bring her back. She was supposed to go to Valhalla.

“We cannot stay here, the little king and Mikkell will find us. We must stay ahead of them.” Ingrid interrupted, “You will have to carry your own things. We cannot do it for you. Are you still in pain?”

Raven shook her head and picked up her bags. She strapped the sea bag to her back and shouldered the War bag. “I am a Marine, Ingrid. We carry our own load.”

“Good. I think we need to go to the mountains. That is what Freya said when I first arrived. I was not expecting Helheimr and I was terrified that I had somehow shown cowardice when I died to end up there.

“Freya had to explain that I had become trapped between Midgard and Valhalla. She bade me to find my way out and said that she would argue for me to go to Fólkvangr instead.

“After I had ben here for many years, Freya returned. She and Odin had placed my body in everlasting sleep. I was not meant to die in that battle therefore I became trapped here. I must finish my life on Midgard then I will go to Fólkvangr after my appointed time to die. It has been many years. Mikkel and his army of little men work tirelessly to keep us here.”

She had begun walking at a brisk pace towards a range of mountains that Raven had missed in her perusal of her surroundings. The Marine was easily keeping pace with the warrior and the nurse. She tripped over a small tree root and felt hands wrap around her ankles. Without a thought to the stupidity of it, Raven fired a short burst from her M16 into the hands. She watched in awe as they retracted into the branch.

“OI!” a voice shouted from beneath the root, “Can’t you take a prank, love?”

Just as Raven opened her mouth to respond to the lilting shout, Ingrid pulled her away. She roughly shoved the younger woman forward, turned, and severed the root with her sword.

“Don’t talk to the invisible voices, Raven.” April lightly admonished, her voice lilting in a way that announced her Irish-American upbringing. “They report to the Faery, and we can never be sure if they serve the King or the Queen. Grabbing you was a pretty mean joke. That one must serve the King.”

“No more talk of Faery royalty, April.” Ingrid stated in a tone that ended the conversation.

“*Raven, I am sorry.*” The soft feminine voice rang across Engleversdenen. Its grief was clear, and none of the women could ignore it. “*I don’t think anybody has told you yet. They are keeping you in a coma while your burns heal. Your brain waves are all over the place, so you must be having a great dream. I love you and will see you tomorrow.*”

“Huh.” Raven was confused, “How long have I been here. Not even a full day, right?”

“Time passes more slowly here.” April replied. “The only task you have it to find your way out, I myself have only been here for three years. I remember answering my door on December 10, 1941. The base chaplain had come to tell me that my husband had been presumed killed on his ship. I do not remember anything else. I was just suddenly here.”