

FANTASY

Incomplete

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The winds blew across the scattered village; burnt plains and broken homes littered the snow-dusted ash. A lone figure, taller than an average man, strode through with her thick hide cloak. It dragged across the ashen ground, leaving an undeniable imprint wherever she went. After hours of searching, she finally found what she was searching for on the edge of the village. Her strong, calloused hand gripped the broken door and pushed it to the side with surprising tenderness. She proceeded slowly, approaching the hearthstone, all that remained of its prior inhabitants.

She fell to her knees with a crunch of snow and charred wood, reaching down to trace the ridges with her right hand; with the left she pulled back her hood to reveal a worn but still youthful countenance. Delicate, intricate tattoos wove across her skin, the runes flowing together so that one seemed incomplete without the others. Her eyes, fierce and bright, stared down as her thumb brushed the ash from the surface, uncovering old grooves and fading paint. They were Jotnar runes. Her eyes lit up, but other familiar feelings soon overcast the spark of recognition. Her lips pursed as she began to push more of the blackened snow aside, uncovering the artwork inherent in Jotnar runes. She recalled an old story in the faded recesses of memory—a girl and her mother and how little time they had.



Deep within the northern forests had stood a house with walls of carved logs roofed by an upturned longship. An old warrior, with a thick beard and marks of battle decorating the leather of his face, dragged a deer carcass toward the house. Small eyes watched from the window.

Inside, a small half-Jotun girl named Fayr squealed with joy. “Father’s home!”

The older, far wiser voice of Leikr, the child’s mother, called from her seat near the hearthstone. “Not until we’re finished with our lesson, child. Come, we’re nearly halfway.”

Fayr whined, “Half? Can’t I just... go out and say hi, maybe help him a bit, and then come right back? I prooomise I’ll be quick!”

The request fell on deaf ears as Leikr chided, “no, Snow Lily, you must finish the lesson in its entirety, or it’ll never stick. Come, sit, and let’s continue.”

Fayr pouted briefly, moving with the sluggish boredom that only a child can muster. Finally, she slumped cross-legged near the fire, and her mother continued the lesson on the runes. A story of the Jotnar was painted across a sheet of vellum—a saga of Eld from long ago. Leikr traced her fingers across the runes, her words full of the knowledge of ancients. But Fayr, ever full of wild dreams, was only half-listening.

When Leikr finally finished, she spoke to Fayr. “Alright, now you tell me. Bring the runes to life.”



Fayr let out a low sigh, bringing her left hand to the runes—tracing them while speaking the Jotnar tongue in a hushed tone. The tale was spun upon her breath, bringing life to an ancient tale of the sun and moon as they swirled through the heavens, chased ever onward by twin wolves with coats of silver and gold, respectively. The cadence of the story was precisely recited, mechanical as a clock winding through the numbers. At the story’s end, the twin wolves clamped down on their prey, snuffing the sun and casting the moon from the sky. As the world darkened on the saga, so too did her voice.

“Fayr,” Leikr chided tiredly, “That is correct for the tales of Skoll and Hati, but that is the wrong story. Wolves, yes, but not these. We’re speaking of Fenrir, not of his pups.”

Fayr let out a groan. “They’re all the same, mother – every week, another story of some animal or giant or whatever.”

At that, Leikr rose in anger, grabbing Fayr’s hand. “These are not just stories, Fayr. This is our history and will be our future. You are our future, and if you don’t learn these stories, then I will have done all for nothing!” When Fayr’s eyes began to water, Leikr realized what she had done and released her.

Fayr reeled back, pulling her knees up to her chest while shutting her eyes tight. Soon, she felt her mother coil around her. “I... I am sorry, Snow Lily. I shouldn’t be angry with you. I sometimes forget that you are so young. If you want, we can finish up later; you can go help Father.”

Fayr’s eyes quickly dried, and she hugged her mother tight. “Really? Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Leikr’s lips formed a warm smile, “Yes, yes... go before I change my mind.”

With that, Leikr released her daughter, who darted for the door calling out for her father. She didn’t see the sadness and regret in her mother’s eyes.



The woman examined the cleaned hearthstone. Though the runes had stayed strong, Fayr’s knowledge had faded and distorted over time. The stories the runes held were fragmented; gaps in her memory obscured the full truth. Fayr folded to the ground and closed her eyes, laying her chest on the cold hearthstone. Through lips parched and cracked from the howling gale, in a whisper of sadness and regret, she addressed the hearthstone itself.

“I’m sorry. I’m ready now.”