

1.5 The Bet

Kàra closed her eyes as sand blew across her cheeks. "Boxed 'em." Kara said as she pointed to the large swarm of Skripi sweeping through towards the mill. Kara turned to face Bófreðr and continued, "Any casualties?"

Bófreðr replied with a stiff voice, "Burns, lacerations, and a handful of amputations. Casualties at a minimum, that is if Lieutenant Gunnar pulls through."

"What happened there?" Kara asked.

"A scorcher passed right in front of him before his platoon was fully engaged. Burned everything he was wearing, melt..."

"That's enough Major."

"We lost contact about with Talik's company fifteen minutes ago."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"They had finished setting charges, and the swarm shifted. I am certain they shall be knocking on Folkenvangor doors soon, should they be worthy." Bofreth said, as he stiffened, with a clank.

Bofreth's voice became solemn, and he finished, "May their lives be worthy of your doors." Kara finished, "till the battlefields of Ragnarok we meet, be you friend, be you foe... We... will shall always be, family."

They lowered their heads briefly and then said, "Skol." They both thumped at their chests over their heart with a closed fist.

They gave it a moment before raising their heads. *Ugh this wind.*

Kara shifted her position so that Bófreðr would block more of the oncoming wind. She wanted to avoid any more of those thoughts, for now.

"Did you see that joke of a finish?" Kara started, paused, and then continued a bit more up beat, and with a slight chuckle, "I only got part way through and then something hit me like a ton of bricks."

To be honest, I am a bit surprised that I even survived that. The AEtherial charges have enough blasting power to level an arched bridge.

Each.

Bófreðr slapped her on the shoulder, “After that showing, I am not sure you can win anymore.”

“Yeah, I definitely didn’t stick that landing,” Kara chuckled, “but seriously, I called call down lightning this time!” Kara struck a pose and continued, “It was as if I... were Thor!”

Kara relaxed her stance, and finished, “That has to count for something.”

Kara went inward.

Bófreðr was saying something about the rules, but Kara couldn’t hear him.

I have been working on an idea... it might be a bit... unorthodox.

Kàra raised her hand into the air, and with a simple gesture she began walking, and said,

“Bófreðr, I have an idea.” Finishing with a pointed finger in the direction of the ridge line.

Kàra and Bófreðr made it through the littered battlefield; scores of dead creatures pockmarked into the sand dunes which were quickly shifting in the wind.

After they reached the hard ridge, Kàra could see the fighting was not but one hundred meters below the, *maybe, five, six meter drop.* Kara looked out through what remained of the palm trees and towards the ruins. “Not as many palms as before, got a clear line of sight now.” She muttered.

“Aye.” Bófreðr responded, as he turned with a clank, and looked in the direction Kàra was facing.

The wind suddenly picked up again, and Kàra casually brought her right hand to her face to adjust her scarf. “Have you made contact with second or third company?” Kàra asked as they surveyed the battlefield.

“I have not been able to raise them yet, but, I’ll try to raise them again, now.”

Kàra watched and waited patiently as Bófreðr grabbed a small rune from his satchel, placed it in his large armored palm, thumb holding it in place, and he rotated his arm in a small circle in the air.

A small orb covered in flames appeared at the base of his palm.
Ahch.ew.

What was that?

Kara stared at the little orb, These things remind me of fire spirits, just floating next to you, ready to listen, and transmit kind of unsettling, when all the sudden a little cute orb appears in front of you, and wants to talk...

“Talík, Nevek, respond. This is Alpha, I repeat this is Alpha, please respond.” Bófreðr spoke into the orb.

A moment passed, and a gentle, but firm, voice responded with a somewhat garbled, “Nevek here.” before her image was being projected above the little orb.

“Talík, come in Talík.” Bófreðr repeated.

An explosion came through, and Kàra looked away from the orb and out towards the mill where she saw a massive liquid fire wall rise up and fall down on to a wide swath of Skrípi.

She could see the creatures melt into the landscape, and for a moment the black swarm began to retreat, until met with the resistance of those behind. Their legs melted into the landscape, sending the singed creature toppling into *what a lake of lava.*

Kàra turned back to the orb and spoke firmly, “Talík, report.”

A loud belly laugh came through followed by a gruff voice, “Talík here, the party is just getting started over here Colonel.”

“Don't torch that mill Major.” Kàra said stiffly.

Talík paused, and stiffly replied, “Aye. Commander.”

Kara could hear and see Talik lean to her side and speak to her xo, but couldn't make out what she said.

"Commander." Talik came back into focus.

"We are all squared away. All Knights to engage in CQM." Talik paused.

Close quarters magic.

When Talik continued, the gruff tone was replaced by a more gentle one, that spoke to the difficulty it was for Talik to ask, "Colonel, we are holding..."

Kara cut her off, "Yes, send word. Nevek, we need to shift to tactical fire. Have Astrid coordinate the remaining evacuation into the mines, and then I want her on the wall. We may need to fall back, and need them to cover our retreat. Major, concentrate the mass into a stout column if you can, and then fall back. You will have incoming, three minutes out. Kara out."

Immediately Kàra could hear the bombardment shift; she looked to Bófreðr to see him twist his hand, and the fire orb vanished. "Looks to me like we have a mission, Major."

The two took off in a sprint along the hard ridge. Kara felt her energy swell, and a gold shimmer crossed her body. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She focused on each step, each sound around her.

Kara opened her eyes numerous, apple sized, luminescent, sapphire colored orbs had formed around her body. A crackle filled the air as tendrils of lightning arced outward from the orbs; filling the air with a sweet and pungent smell. She closed her eyes once again as the orbs glow grew unbearable. At peak luminescence the orbs shattered into fine grains so small, that when she opened her eyes she could see nothing but a shimmer at arms length.

This one has taken years to figure out how to do... at least for more than just a moment.

I have had this one in my pocket for a while. I wasn't sure when to pull it out.

until now.

Kàra looked back to Bófreðr who was not far behind her, both moving at an incredible pace. Kara leapt into the air, and almost immediately felt her feet meet Bófreðr's hands; It was almost immediate that her feet sprung off with Bófreðr's added assistance.

As Kàra's vantage rapidly increased, high above the battlefield, she could feel her skin prickle as the rarefied air sapped her body heat[1] away.

She calmly observed the thick mass of arachnids climbing atop one another; they were being corralled by massive explosions of all shapes, sizes, and colors, as the Ætherial knights boxed the creatures in, south of the mill, and contained to the riverside.

The containment is working so well that the creatures are piling up against one another... forming a strange wall. No doubt still all racing to be the first to eat. The hunger insatiable, the vile digestive juices frothing at their mouths.

Brilliant white light, bathed the battlefield as Kara's shimmering bubble burst, sending small fragments outward from her body. Within moments the fragments coalesced along her back; a slight shimmer spread out left and right from her back in the form of broad, and angelic looking, wings.

This is my tribute to the Valfreyja, and her Valkyrja. Which is a common custom among my people. We, meaning the Valkyrja in fact, are Midgard's tribute, to her Holiness Empress Valfreyja; We are the pride of the Citadel, with each graduating class mustering its finest to serve as Valkyrja.

Kàra paused for a moment, hovering in the air, wings leisurely flapping to stay in position. Full of excitement, she drew in a deep breath, and as she exhaled a burst of color shot across her wings.

Then another, and another building until a shockwave of energy burst forth with one final flap of her wings.

The emerging the shockwave forced Kàra backwards, her world went dark as she plummeted towards the ground.

The tsunami of plasma that was unleashed from Kara's angelic wings washed across the lagoon, vaporizing everything within its path. Only that which should be remaining.

The column of Skrípi caught in the blast were superheated until they exploded into a large fountains of gore from the heaps of Skrípi atop one another. The plasma wave collapsed to a point within one of the heaps. A moment passed and a blue plasma ring burst outward, taking with it, a tidal wave of gore.

Halfway to the ground Kàra was finally able to open her eyes.

... It isn't usually like this...

ISN'T THIS EXCITING! A booming masculine voice echoed throughout Kàra's mind, followed by a sharp pain that shot across her temples.

yawning, and saying, Y'all need to keep it down.

Kàra quickly put her index fingers to her temples, closed her eyes and recited a prayer. A green glow reflected off of sides of her temples.

Hello?

Kàra slowly began to flap her wings, working the wings with a strained effort that at first slowed her fall, but with each aching flap her strength was progressively sapped. She could feel each passing moment it became harder and harder for her to control herself.

Ah tros. Kara plummeted to the ground, cratering into a sand dune east, ugh... her knees buckled and leaving her face down into the

collapsing sand. She spat, or tried to spit the sand from her mouth. She peeled herself up, and sat there for a moment.

They showed us a projection once at the Academy.

Kara caught sight of Bófreðr and could tell by his quickened pace that he was headed in her direction. Kara felt dizzy, and lightheaded, but she pushed her self up and to her feet.

"The debate has commenced."

Basically means that the watchers, the people who score you, listen in on those that they command. Always a senior officer, and always drawing a sense of

Kara jumped slightly with excitement. Feeling a strain in her ankle as she landed. Her face contorted slightly, but found the strength to greet the major.

"Report."

"Your work made substantial headway into the Skripsi lines... They shifted to the south for a while. It seemed as if they were attempting to backtrack, but got caught in the horde that was still charging forward. Needless to say it wasn't long before the horde regrouped and murmured in greater numbers into our lines."

Bofreth paused.

"You good?"

"Ye...ah..."

An acolyte found her way through to get to Kara.

"Astrid sent me." She said tersely.

"Now, Commander, if I may."

Kara waved her hand, "I know you are excited, go. Go."

"Watch how it is really done commander." Bofreth grinned.

Bofreth and took off into the sky with a blurred motion. An explosion of sand, water and gore shot up out of the flotilla of Skripsi as they streamed across the river. Water vaporized outward sending a warm blast of air outward. The ground began to shake slightly, building into a massive quake that shook the ground.

Kara could feel her body; A tug towards some unknown, a draw so queasily light, that she threw up a little.

Well?

What do you expect. It is a well. Like a gravity well or something.

It just goes down. And keeps going down. Dimensional rifts are weird.

Into what I assume is another universe, but the skripsi? Right now?

They are at the center of a mini-singularity. Taking space and time, and blending them together into a vortex of doom. Pulling at them so violently that their momentum they once had, as a mass, turns into a swirling disc of gore.

Gore so small you can't even see it anymore, just a faint memory. [they are still there you know, just different.]

I like to think of them as little vortices to the unknown. If you are able to look down upon one...

The inside forming these weird looking exponential curves - Imagine the arm of a twister. The wall of a cyclone. All vortices in their own right.

But imagine spacetime being made up of those. Eventually intersecting one another.

Creating these, like, pillars of the universe. Slowly eating away at spacetime. Eventually bringing it back into a state of order, like a spring, loaded with all of the energy in the universe.

How does it get out? The energy that is.

Is it like a quantum well? It just appears? Goes from one place to another? If loading the cannon, requires all of the energy in the universe. What sets it off? And are the vortices like Bofreths...

Kara looked in the direction of the gravity well, her vision feeling off she looked to the, accretion disk of gore.

Impressive.

Is this the same... The same vorticies devouring our universe?

Small drops along a multi-dimensional surface, slowly coalescing about the darkness. Eating at local clusters. Moving further and further away in time disappearing from sight given enough time.

A divergence...

Into Yggdrasil's roots..

We... are the root as it grows..

Bofreth has tapped into Yggdrasil's realm.

That is certainly unexpected.

Huh..

Nevek's Rangers launched their assault from the palms before Bofreth had finished..

Their assault is funneling the Skripi into Bofreth's vortex. Looks to be a combination of defensive barriers, magickal, and physical alike, and their selective fire.

They funneled 'em. Huh

Totally increases the efficiency of Bofreth's attack.

Cleaver.

The disk of gore just keeps growing. The skripi behind are just..

Blindly following until they are caught in the vortex. They just assimilate into the accretion disk of gore.

Fascinating.

Astrids though..

I mean to say, that upon this viewing this one, it will be my one hundredth time. Why do you think that it became a bet?

We all work hard to perfect our crafts, and we celebrate by placing a friendly wager and exchange notes and jokes about how we did.

We give it our all as if each battle could be our last, but we did decide that if anyone bites it, they automatically win forever.

But, anyways... Astrid's display..

They are always so graceful. They are full of fury, and rage, but not in a violent fashion at first. It builds.

Kara pointed to the darkening sky in the distance across the river.

Can't step foot on, didn't not that we couldn't fly over.

But, anyways, the storm just deepens. A coiled giant ready to pounce.

To the enemy their minds slip into a trance as her storm seeps into their minds.

It is as the hurricane blows. She is the eye, projecting an outward maelstrom of - plasma rain, (the bits of the sand she picked up with her cyclonic winds, were being super-heated until they became a plasma), little

meteors streaking across the battlefield, chaotic winds bringing its bits of plasma careening into your skin.

Burrowing.

Larger chunks, you might just have a hole in your clothes, or hole in your body. She lets herself hover over center of the maelstrom, guiding it and shifting the storm's path, from her protective shell of energy.

I am starting to think they all choreographed this. It the skripsi just simply marching into the accretion disk. Driven by the storm, and the blockade the rangers set up. The horde slams into their barriers deflecting off, binding up, and slipping into the gore-tex.

Yeah, I like that one.

I thought this was supposed to be flashy though. I mean sure lightning, plasma sparkles across the sky.

Everything went quiet. Bofreth, had been pulled from the singularity by Astrid, and it imploded in on itself for a moment and burst outward in a blue-white burst of energy that sent a heatwave outward that Kara felt as a blast of hot air that took her breath away for a moment.

She could feel her face heating up as the blast passed by.

"Okay," She said to herself, "Okay."

The part that brings me awe is how peaceful she looks.

She is dedicated to her craft, she hones it.

Her power, a reflection of her beauty. She does not get showy, but she does make it known that she has it within her.

She is smart, and funny, all the things you weren't. She was absolute beauty.

tears

I love her, so much.

Through all the painful, hurtful times. Through the feeling of dread I got before I came home. How would I need to save the day again?

It is good to be needed, but every day, all day?

You feel you can't be yourself anymore.

You lose sight of who you were as you search aimlessly in the present for a direction to go. You strive to stay on target. But if you can't be yourself, and you don't know which kind of person someone wants them to be. Or you do understand who they want you to be, but you just don't want to be that person.

I wanna get lost in my work. get lost in my family, in my life that bring joy to me. I wanna get lost in feelings. I wanna get lost in you. I don't wanna get lost in me. I don't wanna get lost in life.

I found the courage to explore. I found the courage to challenge the "Norman Rockwell" way of life with my choices. I wanted pieces of that dream, but I didn't want it all. It just wasn't my dream.

I wanted my own personal sanctuary. I did not want to relegate my interests to the background, waiting to get on the field, but the coach, doesn't play them.

I wanted our marriage to be a blending...

I feel we had a fantastic time blending our beings when the idea that bore fruit came from your head.

With me, I could ask for permission and usually be denied, or I could just go ahead make a decision, right or wrong.

If it was a right decision, I got a light scolding. If I made the wrong decision I got a long and drawn out scolding that hung over you like individual threads slowly creating your own noose.

I just want to make right or wrong decisions, and you just support me, by talking it through with me.

I wanted you to assume my idea was just as valid as yours and tell me what you like and don't like about it.

Give me your pros and cons. If you don't care don't fight. If you do care, don't fight. Just ask questions, bring up concerns, explain your feelings. If you do that, I change my tune.

I use feedback from people as guidance. And with you...

Your feedback was special to me.

It was how I understood how to back to you, and to not get seperated from you.

Confusion and chaos reign when I can't understand what you need from me, and most days I didn't know what you needed from me.

I am certainly no picnic either, I have so many wild ideas and interests. I have things I don't talk about, the things I think you don't want to talk about, the things I do talk about, and the things I think you think you want me to talk about.

If I were to be honest, I think for quite some time...

I haven't seen you as a person I can share myself with. Or at least I didn't perceive you as open to understanding what I was going through.

I felt like I would start to explain, you would start to understand, and then the next day we were back at square one.

A cyclic conversation that repeated over and over.

These are the things I like. This is me. I don't know why, but this is.

All of me.

I've been me for what I realize, as a deep memory came to me just today. I have wanted to be me, since I was a child.

I am sorry, that it took me so long to figure out who me was, and that our family had to suffer my baggage. But despite my shortcomings, our little family is pretty amazing. We have done something special together, and I hope we still do.

I love you Astrid, and I always will.

A large column of flames began forming on the outer ridges of Astrid's storm walls.

What is Talik doing?

