

Spell-Crafted for Pleasure

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Dedication

Thanks to *April, Lady Vampire* for the title idea: *Spell-Crafted for Pleasure*. Damn, it's nice to have readers with fabulous ideas!

Spell-Crafted for Pleasure

Salem placed a hand over her pounding heart. She couldn't catch a full breath in the wake of her last powerful orgasm.

She realized how sweaty she was and hoped her sticky body bore a sensual perspiration glow as opposed to locker-room stink. Not that Kane was any better off than she. He'd gone south of her belly button and stayed there for quite awhile. An oral *ivking*—an adventure in Viking terminology—between her legs. Plunder, pillage, ravish. Right fucking on, man. This Norseman certainly knew how to come ashore!

He'd collapsed after getting her off for the third time.

She reached her other hand out to touch his soft reddish-black hair as his tight curls cascaded across her naked thighs. His breathing told her that he, too, was exhausted. As odd a time as it was to think of Martin Luther King's famous speech, the words "Free at last! Free at last!" rang in her head. Kane was free. And his blood-brother, well, he'd be kept busy in his long confinement.

Pinioned under his weight and tangled in a confused mess of jeans and undergarments, she figured until she could catch her breath, she'd just stay where she was. On the floor of her shop. With the front door unlocked and within view of the window. If someone walked in or glanced through the window in passing, so be it. The only folks who came into her shop were open-minded sorts, any way. Puritans certainly didn't whip out plastic at a place like hers—at least not that they let anyone know about. Brown paper wrappers had been invented to hide the mail-order sins of the holier-than-thou. A multitude of sins. A fine collection of sins. Salem displayed her sins in a glass curio case for the curiously errant to peruse and purchase.

Salem felt fairly certain she couldn't walk, much less rise from the floor at this point, anyway. If the ultra-moral right decided to picket her shop again, she'd just have to let them. Hell, she'd invite them in to meet the new man in her life. And such a man! Even the most uptight, anal-retentive, I-only-do-it-missionary-style with my husband kind of woman would like Kane! She managed an exhausted "wow," which was quickly answered by a single-word reply from Kane.

"More," he uttered. He slid his hands between her legs.

"Oh, no. No more. I can't," she begged. "Kane, no more."

Kane chuckled, the sound rising low and teasing from his throat. He slid two fingers into her swollen, sensitive vagina. "I need you," he whispered.

"Can we at least get off the floor?" Salem asked, squirming as Kane inserted a third thin, dark finger.

"The floor is nice," he replied. "You on the floor is nicer."

Salem wasn't sure she could muster the energy to command Kane to stop diddling her clit long enough for her to lock the shop and move their party somewhere else.

How many orgasms could she have before noon?

Salem knew she was about to head into uncharted waters as Kane reached for the ancient whalebone dildo that for so long had been both prison and refuge to him.

“Exquisite,” he whispered.

“You do good work,” Salem replied. “For a spirituous being only recently made corporeal, you do damned fine work.”

“I’m not talking about the *tool*. You are the true treasure of this shop. You are exquisite.

Remarkable. Thoroughly enjoyable. It's time to show you what this thing can *really* do.”

Salem wasn't about to argue. One does not argue with a horny Norseman recently given a second chance at life.

With unimaginable, unearthly skill, Kane re-introduced Salem to her most interesting acquisition to date: dildo, *Balaenae Eburneolus*, Icelandic. She'd met Mr. Whalebone dick before, but oh, my, not quite like this...

Salem put every other thought out of her mind as climax number four came crashing in on her.

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At the end of October, when the veil between light and dark was at its thinnest, Salem's shop received a number of unique visitors seeking celebratory items for Samhain and various winter rites. They came hooded, covered by shroud or shadow. *Salem's Fine Collection of Sins* was the only occult shop for a hundred miles, and this October had been a strange, wild ride.

Her poor little familiars, pet white rats Dax and Pheelyx, were exhausted from identifying shadow from flesh. The veil must have been stretched pretty darn taut, as the chirps and squeaks from the girls had been nonstop. Seems every earth-bound shade, spirit, wraith and demon needed something she had to offer. They tried to act human. They really did, bless their decaying hearts.

In the business of ritual supplies and erotic antiquities for a solid nine years, Salem Grier catered to practitioners of the dark arts, both living and not-quite-living, novice Wiccan practitioners looking for their first *grimoire*, and seasoned dark witches on the prowl for new acolytes. Her shop was community and kindred spirit to all those seeking magic and mayhem. As long as she was paid in cash or credit (no checks, please), Salem didn't care if her customers smelled like an open grave or Chanel No5.

Dark souls milling about society sometimes wanted in, but she'd set her grid of spells so deep that those aligned to the foul side of magic couldn't enter her shop. At least not yet.

She recognized that she might be too well protected. She hadn't had sex in months—much less a date of any kind. Seems spells meant to keep out bad'uns kept out potential lovers, too.

She'd lifted the spells once. Accidentally.

That had been a big mistake. Big, big mistake.

Previewing new spell books aloud without having safeties in place had brought things right out of the woodwork that wanted to bump *her* in the night.

She'd found that her building was infested by horny Revenants—restless spirits leftover from the

days when the structure had connected to a Boomtown-era cathouse. The Revenants, soiled doves with a no doubt colorful past, just wanted to go about their business, with her as their first customer in, oh, maybe a hundred years. Salem politely declined the offer of two rouge-tinted doxies and set her barriers up again.

She'd had a passion for Norse mythology since childhood and used protective symbols from that mythos as guardians for her shop and tidy little upstairs flat. She figured the Norse Gods were the patron saints of her shop. Business had been brisk. The Gods were pleased.

After catering to beings living on both sides of the veil, very little surprised her any longer. She felt she was too young to be cynical—but when less-than-human customers paid for their purchase with platinum American Express cards, she just accepted the fact that even dead things and demi-gods had better credit than she did. She didn't qualify for a platinum American Express card. But that sacred piece of plastic was the card of choice for deities and specters in need of anointing oils and smudge sticks. Karl Malden would be so proud. American Express and Godly influences—don't leave home without them.

With no lover in sight, her collection of vintage and historical *objets pour réjouir les sens* was looking pretty darn tempting. A little time with a toy might be just the ticket!

Salem unpacked each shipment and carefully cataloged the items to include as much information as she could about each piece. It wasn't enough to say *this leather sheath was worn by a Scottish lord at the turn of the century*. No, her patrons wanted to know whose penis had graced said sheath. Whose blue-blooded sperm had filled it? Whose vagina it had penetrated? That is, if it had ever been used vaginally. Salem knew that buggery was commonplace in more noble circles, and there was a good chance that her vintage penile sheaths and highly polished, splinter-free ebony dildos had come a knocking on someone's back door in years past. To avoid one's contracting the clap, you know.

Research was often painstaking.

She'd recently managed to procure two Italian *dilettos*, dating from the late sixteen hundreds. Delicately fashioned, and oh, so very valuable with a distinct aroma of olive oil still permeating their smooth wooden surfaces, these were naughty, naughty little toys. One *diletto* was smaller in girth and length than the other. Dual plugs for play or display. She scanned the accompanying packing slip for the authentication and historical data. Belonged to the second wife of Visconte Vincenzo Alighieri of Roma, Anno Domini Sixteen-Hundred Ninety-Seven. All right, what's the history of the second wife? Why did she need *dilettos* when she was married to an Italian stallion? Salem rifled around the manila envelope containing the customs declaration and other documentation. Of course! The Visconte had a nasty case of syphilis and did not want his wife to suffer as his dick rotted off. Nice story. That should allow for a couple hundred bucks markup. The caring husband commissions toys for his wife. How thoughtful.

Salem carefully set the *dilettos* aside and opened the next box. "And what lovely item did my hard-earned money buy here?" She held her breath as she clipped the strapping tape and air-filled packing materials. Oh, my God. Did he get it? Is this it?

Salem had herself a lovely little pigeon of a Dutchman who scoured the European countryside,

various auction houses, and estate sales to buy everything he could of fine naughty sensibilities, and then ship it to her for twenty percent, plus expenses. He had a penchant for the macabre and the twisted. If anyone could have found this particular item, it was he.

She exhaled and attempted to calm her inner level of jubilation to that of mere excitement as she unwrapped the soft, butter-colored piece of antique erotica. “He got it. He got the *Viking’s Member* for me!”

Long, hard, and decorated with scrimshaw-depicting scenes from Norse mythology—scenes of love between the Gods, both male and female—it was by far the most intricate piece in her collection.

Salem circled her fingers around the girth of the thing, feeling its heavy, sensual weight. “Oy vey, and to think this once pleased some Viking wench while her man was away burning English coastal churches! Lord, from the fury of the Norsemen save us—and from the sex drive of their women with their whalebone peckers, preserve our souls.” She laughed at her own joke.

Longfellow had nothing on her.

She touched her lips to the head of the dildo and gave the cold bone a pleased kiss. “Hello, gorgeous,” she whispered.

The contrast of bone to flesh, warmth to lifelessness, heartbeat to etched memories sent a shockwave through the air. She didn’t feel it. She couldn’t see it. However, the spirits of the *Viking Member* awakened as the cascading surge of life force passed them. They reached out, trying desperately to ride the wave. It was but a teasing taste of freedom. It would take more than a simple kiss to set them free. It wouldn’t be long now, as a woman finally held the *Viking Member* again.

When sweet release came to her, it would be subsequently shared by them. The stronger of the two spirits encased in the carved bone managed a split-second sending of consciousness into the world. He’d had a plan for centuries. He quickly adapted it to this new era, and dug in like a tick into the vulnerable mind of a well-heeled passerby harboring her own fine collection of sins as she strolled past Salem’s shop, her heart closed to love, but her mind frighteningly open to suggestion.

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The bell on her door chimed. Salem carefully set the whalebone piece back in its packing materials and dashed to the storefront, her mind still wrapping around thoughts of Vikings and their *toys*. “Hi, can I help you?”

“Santeria supplies?” the woman asked.

“Yes, of course. May I show you?” Salem replied.

“I need *sal negre*,” the woman continued. “Bad neighbor. He really needs to go away.”

“I carry *sal negre*. Black salt. I have it.”

“I need dove’s blood ink and a quill, as well.”

“I don’t carry true blood items. What I sell is made from various herbs and spices.”

“City regulation?” the customer asked. “No animal products?”

Salem nodded. Ink infused with blood—human or otherwise—technically fell under the umbrella

of religious goods, but she'd chosen not to carry any modern-era animal by-products in her shop. Her quills weren't even plucked. They were shed by happy geese.

"Let me show you," Salem offered, leading the customer to her mini-botanica section of Santeria candles, spells, and other ritual supplies. Not the best-selling items in the store, though occasionally she'd have a very good day Voodoo-wise.

"*Sal negre*. Good. Good. Is this the largest size you carry?" the woman asked.

"I have a large container in the back. How bad of a neighbor do you have? A little *sal negre* combined with the right spell should be enough to send the worst of demons packing."

The woman looked sharply at Salem. "I've separated from my husband and he will not move out of our townhouse. He's making it impossible for me to carry on...well, let's say he's making things difficult. And it's not because he wants or needs the house or me. He's just being stubborn. I'll take as much black salt as you have."

"I have five pounds. That should dispel even the vilest of future ex-husbands," Salem replied.

"I'll take two quills as well," the woman replied in a rather commanding manner that told Salem it was check-out time.

"I'll be right back with the salt. Go ahead and bring your quills to the counter. No ink?" Salem asked.

The woman shook her head. "I'll stop at the park on the way home."

Salem didn't ask any more questions. *Creepy, creepy, creepy*.

Her customer paid with that all-elusive Platinum American Express. The rings on her fingers flashed like lightning against the reflective, well-lit glass display case under the register.

"Blessed be," Salem offered as her customer departed the shop, her fabulous heels and heavy jewels carrying her toward the salty demise of her marriage.

She glanced at her watch. Nearly time to close, grab a bite from the deli next door and retreat to the comfort of her apartment with slippers and a glass of wine.

She retreated into the backroom to further inspect her new shipment. She pulled her price guide off a stool. Going rate for the only other known *Viking Member* was one-hundred—and-sixty thousand dollars, sold at auction.

She handled the whalebone penis carefully, stroking it as if it were the real thing. Gloves. She needed to put on white cotton gloves. "Screw it," she swore. Her gloves were put away. She liked the way the engravings circumnavigating the bone tickled her palm. She pulled her spectacles off her head and laid them on the bridge of her nose. She slipped a hair band off her wrist and pulled her hair into a ponytail.

The character depictions were as crisp as the day they'd been inscribed. Whalebone was like that. Someone had loved this thing. Kept it well-oiled and out of harm's way for a thousand years. She rifled through the box, looking for the authentication papers. "Unearthed by a farmer searching for the remains of lost lambs buried in several feet of purple moss, Berserker's Lava Field, Iceland, 1943. Sold by farmer Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson to the National Museum for ten ewes, 1945. Obtained by Prithan Auction House, 1997. Authenticated by University of Aberdeen, Scotland, 1998. Record of subsequent sales confidential," Salem read.

Salem continued searching through the packing materials. Her hand touched something round, hard and cold. A fourth dildo perhaps?

Her tone changed from one of elation to one of surprise quite quickly. “What the Hell is this?” She removed a spherical stone with a perfectly round hole chiseled through its center. The stone had one slightly flat side, allowing it to stand upright. It weighed a ton. “I bet this is Icelandic palagonite.” A flash of writing on a slip of paper in the box caught her eye.

It read simply “Odin Stone. Icelandic Palagonite. Naturally occurring center hole formed by volcanic gasses and magma cooling quickly in glacial waters. Once believed to be sacred to the God, Odin. Used in oath-taking and as a tool to discern fidelity between lovers and brothers.” Salem smiled. She wondered if the whalebone dick and the Odin Stone had had a fling during shipping.

She shook off the myriad jokes and sexually-oriented displays she could make about the two artifacts. They weren’t talking to her, anyway. Obsession and heavy concentration on a single subject made her personal grid of defenses weaken. The moment that occurred, her immunity to the wild memories contained in the various antique sex toys in her possession would come flying at her like a dust storm. Each one had a tale and each one wanted Salem’s undivided attention. It was her seventh sense...*I hear horny people.*

She had always heard voices emanating from objects around her. Disney said it best when he had his nubile young Pocahontas sing to John Smith, “I know every rock and tree and creature, has a life, has a spirit, has a name.” But Disney never mentioned that every sex toy ever to grace a snatch or bum had a story, too. Her *objets* wanted her to record their experiences. *Hello, madam! I am the leather sheath of the former Duke of Bourgeois, worn by him as a marital aid. The poor man suffered from an obnoxious case of premature ejaculation and I lessened his untimely outbursts with my thick, rough interior so that the Duchess would not have to resort to a succession of young lovers to keep herself amused sexually.* Followed by maniacal laughter that clearly meant the Duchess had screwed everyone while her husband, the Duke, had tried desperately to achieve an erection for more than thirty seconds. Someday, she was going to stick around and listen to the stories. Her, a bottle of wine, and a dozen antique sex toys. She needed to get a life.

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Salem snuck in the service entrance and through the kitchen of the Kosher Pickle Deli, helping herself to a delicious greasy potato latke as she made her way to the dining area.

“Hey, Miss Grier. Good day in the sex trade?” Misha, the Russian deli-owner, called as Salem pulled up a stool at the kitchen’s stainless prep counter. “Don’t worry about the latke. For you, it’s on the house. Your Reuben is ready and I put a surprise in the box. Something you’ll like very much.”

Salem smiled. “Thanks, Misha.”

“I’m no matchmaking gossip, Salem, but I need to tell you...”

Salem interrupted, “Again.”

Misha laughed. “Yes, *again*—that I think it’s wrong for a nice girl like you to be sleeping alone every night above a shop full of hoodoo candles and leather condoms.”

Salem laughed. “It’s a living. Now, about that corned beef on rye...”

“It’s in the cooler. Enjoy it if you can. You don’t get married soon I’ll be sitting Shivah for your youth,” Misha replied.

Salem shook her head and chuckled to herself. *I’m not in the market for something long-term. I just want something to lie atop me besides the book I’m reading when I fall asleep!* “Don’t cover the mirrors yet, Misha. I’m only thirty. There’s plenty of time for me to find a husband.” *If I bother looking.*

“You are the kind of woman who will meet your true love in a heartbeat and marry him in the next. I know you, Bubeleh. I work next to you for ten years. I think at first with your spirits and sexual items you might be *oysverf*, completely crazy, but now, I know better. If you were my son, I’d say you were a man of honor.”

Salem realized she was being given a great deal of respect by a man who refused to let his wife learn how to drive. “Thank you, Misha.” *Now, hand me that dry salami you have hanging in your cold case so that I can screw myself silly with it and I’ll be on my way.*

She retrieved her sandwich, dropped a five-spot on the counter and headed upstairs. But not before turning off her shop alarm to retrieve the *Viking Member* and the Odin Stone.

She couldn’t carry her to-go container and the heavy artifacts at the same time, so she tucked the bone dildo into her sports bra. It reached from the base of her bra to her chin, but at least it left her with two free hands to carry her food container and the rather large piece of palagonite.

The cold hardness of the Viking’s boner shifted in between her breasts as she climbed the steps to her apartment. She felt her female parts go tight at the thought of something hard and warm between her breasts. Something just as long and thick, but more animated than whalebone.

Maybe the Norseman who carved it. There was a man who knew how to give a gift that would keep on giving!

“Gods, I need a man. Maybe I should perform a Venus ritual and see if I don’t get some action.”

She paused. “No...a Freyja ritual. Norse passion. Bag myself a Berserker.”

She had never performed a ritual designed to draw in a romantic encounter. She’d read about them, discussed them, sold items designed to enhance their magic, but she’d never cast one.

She pushed the door open with one foot and set the stone and the container on her kitchen table.

She hadn’t locked her door. No need. Hers was a fairly crime-free neighborhood. She withdrew the dildo from her sports bra and inserted the tip through the hole of the Odin Stone. A little tease for the female object from the definitely male object.

Salem rolled her head back. “Crap, I forgot to feed the girls,” she cursed. “You two behave while I’m gone.” She patted the Odin Stone being teased ever so slightly by the tip of the *Viking Member* and jetted down the fire escape stairs.

The girls were going crazy in their tank—and it wasn’t because their dinner was late. Salem reached inside her jet-fridge for the field greens salad mix and cherry tomatoes and opened the tank. Dax nipped at her fingers as she removed food bowl. “Hey! What’s with that? Why are you

acting so skittish? There's no one around. And I'm human!"

Both rats turned their haunches to the plate glass and iron-barred storefront window, their long pink tails extended out like arrows.

Salem dropped the salad mix into the tank and squinted toward the window. The street lamps cast a reflective glare against the plate glass, and the store's security lights at the front entrance made it hard to see out the window. A shadowy figure lurked at her storefront, pressing his hands against the glass as if trying to get a good look inside. The bars held him back.

"It's just a lookie-loo, girls. The pub down the street is having dollar beer night."

Her little rats were insistent that the interloper into their airspace was far from human and, by their reaction, was probably extremely powerful. Salem took a step closer to the front of the store. The man reached one large hand through the bars and placed his palm flat against the glass.

Oh, my Gods... She could feel him. Who—or what was he? Salem slipped a runic necklace off its display peg. *The Helm of Awe*—a protective rune. Not that she wasn't already surrounded by spells and charms so thick she sometimes envisioned her shop encased in London fog.

She stepped forward, into the glow of her security lights. "We're closed," she called.

A deep, smooth voice replied as clearly as if he were in the room with her. "Yes, I can see that. You are *very* closed. How many charms and spells do you think you need for protection anyway?"

Salem laughed. *Well, ain't he a pisser?*

"I have enough. And a few mundane methods of protection in here, too."

"I'm not going to break in, Miss. I'm just wondering..."

Salem raised her left eyebrow, smirking. "Wondering what?"

The man continued, "Do you have an Odin Stone?"

Salem caught her breath. "Why?"

"Do you always ask potential customers why they want a certain item? If so, it's a wonder you're still in business," the man replied.

Salem wondered if she should say yes or no. She kind of liked the Odin Stone. Of course, if she kept everything she liked, she'd never sell anything and be out of business in a week. "Yes. I have one."

"May I see it?" he asked. "Odin Stones are aligned to the feminine side, you know. A woman is sacred, too. A keeper of oaths. The vessel for creation. Odin Stones are uniquely sensual. I need one for my collection. My own personal trove of sins."

"We're closed. Can you come back tomorrow?"

"I hate waiting," the man replied, his voice soft and teasing from behind the plate glass.

Salem smiled. "Tomorrow. Come back. I haven't even unpacked it yet."

"You don't lie well, Miss Grier. Give my regards to your pets. I've always enjoyed the company of rodents. I'll be back tomorrow."

Salem rolled her eyes. *Non-human beings making demands could be such a pain.* The creature locked outside her shop thanks to powerful magic was more vaporous than corporeal. As he walked away, she could very easily see right through him.

She called to her rats, "It's okay, girls. I think my new shipment came with a bit of extra baggage,

that's all. I'll work up an invisibility charm and the likes of that." Salem paused. "Rather sexy entity will forget all about my having the Odin Stone."

Why do all the hot guys have to be less than human? Hot guys...was even thinking about performing a Freyja ritual stirring up the ethereal sexual plains? Salem picked up a bundle of sage. "Smudge me, baby," she said aloud, giggling.

She pursed her lips, recalling the other items she needed to invoke and invite the sexuality of the Norse Goddess of Love into her life. A string of amber beads would avert Freyja's secondary role as the Goddess of War. Strawberries would invite sweet sensuality. She had strawberry jam. That could work. A falcon feather. A cat's eye marble. Something naughty. She smiled. The *Viking Member*. What could be better?

The girls had calmed down, but seemed quite intent on staring out their tank toward the window. Salem tapped on their lid. They ignored her, keeping their eyes focused on the street. She tightened her grip on her plastic sack full of ritual merchandise. "I'll bet *he* has something that could fill that Odin Stone's hole quite nicely." She walked out and reset the shop's alarm. *Talk about a cock ring!*

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Salem popped open a bottle of beer and downed it in three long swallows. She grabbed a second and sat down at her table. She popped the top off the second brew, took another long swig, and then addressed the artifacts. "Now what am I supposed to do with you? I have a spirit being after the stone, the bone is worth a bloody fortune, and I was thinking of keeping you both. You look like a matching set to me. One piece really should go with the other."

She finished another beer. Dark, frothy, and strong, it hit her empty stomach hard. She should have eaten before going for the beers. Two bites of a sandwich and a Kosher dill just didn't fill the void.

With unsteady hands, Salem set up makeshift altar on her kitchen table. A red placemat acted as her altar cloth. No pentagram needed; this was an invocation of a Norse goddess. Salem set out a peach tea candle, the jar of strawberry jam, the amber beads, and a small tray to hold the sage. She moved the Odin Stone and the *Viking Member* front and center.

She lit the candle and passed the end of the falcon quill through the flame. "I honor Freyja. I invite her into my home to make it ready for passion. May my true love enter in her wake and may the pleasure I receive in his arms delight the goddesses. I invoke the pure protection of the falcon and the clarity of the sage. Thank you, Freyja." Salem paused. "I vow to honor the relationship given me."

Now, bring it on. I'm horny and in need of serious lovin'. She giggled and held the Viking-age adult toy out over the altar and made the sign of Thor's Hammer over the objects, much like a priest making the sign of the cross before a congregation. "Freyja, hear my plea! May you weep tears of gold in joy instead of sorrow. May your ranks be filled with true and perfect soldiers. May Odin forgive you your transgressions and may you soar on falcon's wings in the hearts of all women."

Satisfied with her short ritual, Salem blew out the candle. She grabbed another beer and the container of food, and carefully navigated the piles of research books and occult references stacked in her hallway to the living room, the *Viking Member* again tucked into her sports bra. She wanted her treat from Misha—a piece of baklava. Honey. Nuts. Sounds like euphemisms for sex!

Salem plopped down on the sofa without grace or finesse and opened the Styrofoam container, ignoring the sandwich and going straight for the pastry. “Baklava,” she drooled.

She slipped the bone from her bra and set it on her coffee table. Misha had given her a huge chunk o’ glory. There’s nothing like baklava. Nothing. It’s better than sex.

The first bite sent her into a state of cascading delight from lips to toes. The phyllo literally melted in her mouth while the honey filled her senses with its rich taste and aroma. She took a swig of beer to cleanse her palate before enjoying a second bite.

“Tell me, my Viking stud, do you like baklava?” Salem picked up the dildo and ran its tip across the flaky goodness, covering the head with dripping honey.

The mushroom head of the carved bone dildo glistened with the golden nectar. “Damn,” Salem whispered as she brought the dildo to her lips. She flicked her tongue against the cold hardness, catching a drop of honey. The bone had a salty essence. It formed a contrast against the sweet honey and pungent beer with a kind of sensual balance found only in nature.

Salem lolled her tongue along the tip, capturing every last bit of the golden sweetness. She mouthed the head, as if it were the real thing.

Just like riding a bicycle. She could do this again. If she ever got the chance. She felt a flood of readiness between her legs. She pulled the dildo from between her lips and looked at its shining head. Why not?

She wiggled out of her cotton pants and ran the whalebone dildo across her thighs. “Oh, I don’t know Mr. *Viking Member*. You might be too big. It’s been a long time, you know,” she whispered, the beers doing some of the talking.

She pressed the carved shaft against her clitoris, through her panties. “You are a naughty Viking. All right, you can come inside and play.”

She reached for her beer and drained it. She then slid into a comfortable position on her sofa and maneuvered the dildo inside her panties. The honeyed head felt warm and sticky against her mound as she worked it between her labial lips and along her clitoris. She ran the head across her vagina, pressing inward slightly. She was wet. Really wet. She rubbed the member across her opening, and then let the Viking invader take the plunge.

It hummed and rang inside her. It vibrated with its own heartbeat. It lulled her into a deep fantasy—a fantasy so rich, the real world ceased to matter. In her alcohol-induced state of tranquility, she felt the fullness of a man inside her. Filling her.

She didn’t usually fantasize about blonds. She liked them a little more ethnic than that. But this masturbatory fantasy had a life of its own. And he was blond.

His long, braided, whiskey-colored hair smelled of salt and leather. The aroma of his maleness captivated her senses. This was a fantasy worth pursuing. Since it was taking its own course, she

didn't fight against the tide.

She was his sultry and helpless Irish captive and he was the Viking invader, ravishing her over and over until he coerced her into submission with pure pleasure. His need to conquer her consumed him. She held the key that would end his captivity. He couldn't steal it from her—she had to offer it.

His embrace enveloped her.

But he was not alone.

He had a friend—an unclothed, fully hardened friend with shiny dark skin and eyes the color of a summer field. They were brothers. Blood-brothers. The first child and the adopted child of a stout Norseman with white-blond hair and a penchant for eastern women. The dark boy was not his flesh and blood, but the son of a Norse mercenary killed in service of the Sultan. The Norseman had claimed the boy and the boy's exotic mother as his own, vowing to protect them in honor of his fallen comrade.

Born from the mating of Norse to Byzantium African, the adopted brother—the blond's blood-brother—had a radiant beauty never before seen in Iceland. He'd been popular during the long winters. With the women. With the men.

And he wanted *her*.

Salem reached out for him—Kane. She wanted to take them both on. Kane, the dark one, and Ketiljon, the blond.

Ketiljon growled. He didn't like to share. Not his father's affections, not the land his father left them. Never a woman, and even more potently, *never* his blood-brother. It had been over bruises and beatings that he'd given other men a chance at Kane during the long winters. Kane was his. Kane would always be his.

Ketiljon's obsession with his blood-brother distracted his love-making with Salem. He reached out his right hand and tried to urge Kane's thick penis into his mouth. Kane refused his touch. Salem felt Ketiljon's irritation as his pounding thrusts grew even more furious.

Salem parted her lips, inviting the dark Viking to fill her mouth with his dusky member. He smiled and allowed her to draw him in. He tasted like honey. He'd covered his thick member with the sticky golden nectar. She slid a hand around his sticky shaft and moved her head back and forth in time with her hand until her tongue tasted his sweet salt in the mixture.

"No," the blond brother ordered, pushing his adopted-sibling away. "She is mine. If you want her, you must let me have you, first. Like when we were boys—and during our long confinement."

Salem tried to protest, but found the blond's hand covering her mouth. His grip hurt. Ketiljon pulled away from her, leaving her rudely unsatisfied.

The look on the dark brother's face changed from soft to anxious. "Those days are over, Ketiljon." The blond, his expression sharp and his member jutting out from him like a ramrod, reached for Kane's arm, twisting it. "Is she worth it to you? One last time with me and she will be yours. At least for now."

"She is worth everything to me. Without her, we have no future," Kane replied.

"Then do as I wish."

Kane's voice strained over his blood-brother's heavy panting. "Let me take her from behind. While I am in her, you may take me."

The blond smiled. "Agreed!"

Salem sighed with relief when Ketiljon lifted his hand from her mouth. "Roll over, darling. Come along now. Since you are fantasizing that you are an Irish slave, then you must do as I say. That's part of the fantasy, is it not?"

Salem took a deep breath and rolled onto her belly. Who was he to control her drunken fantasy? Asshole!

"Bottoms up," Ketiljon commanded.

Salem pulled her knees up under her, lifting her buttocks in a frighteningly exposed manner. She didn't like him. He was hot, and she liked him fucking her, but she didn't like him—and she didn't think he really wanted her, anyway. He wanted to make love to another man. She could deal with that, but Jesus Christ, not in mid-fuck! Love the one you're with, bucko! This was not her fantasy! It was his! How did that happen?

Kane mounted her from behind. His hands went to her hips as he pushed his way into her vagina. She was so wet—still ready for sex in the wake of Ketiljon's withdrawal. His penis was longer and thicker than his blood-brother's. His style of thrusting was different, too. Whereas the blond was fury in the act, this man was molasses, using deliberate, slow strokes, easing his way in and out of her, making sure her pleasure was not ignored.

Just as Salem's clitoris responded to Kane's skillful technique, he withdrew and dragged the thick head of his penis across her anus, wetting it. Slowly, carefully, he pushed his way into her rectum. The pain was nearly unbearable at first.

"You're too...big..." she gasped.

He stroked the small of her back. "Relax. Relax and it will soon be over. Reach between your legs and touch yourself while I'm in you. You will enjoy this, I promise."

Something in his voice was not right. It was as if he was saying one thing, but meaning another. Like she should have been reading him between the lines. The blond guy, he was controlling them.

Nevertheless, Salem did as commanded. Her swollen clitoris responded accordingly. At this point, she didn't care how she got off, or by whom.

Ketiljon interrupted Salem's thoughts as he pushed Kane forward. "She will not enjoy you as much as I will, blood-brother," the blond said. Without a moment's hesitation, he assaulted his brother's anus, thrusting so hard he drove his way in up to his own pelvic bone.

The dark brother gasped. Though her back was to him, Salem could tell Kane's face was screwed tight from pain. Every muscle in his body tensed and rigid. For a few seconds he held motionless against her. In her.

She felt fear ball up her gut. Salem wanted to help him make Ketiljon go away. Far away. Kane relaxed and resumed his ardent lovemaking.

They succumbed to the bizarre, sensual rhythm of their ménage. Salem manipulated her clitoris in time to Kane's thrusts, who took his timing from the plummeting of Ketiljon into his ass.

“It is good, no?” Ketiljon asked, slapping his blood-brother’s butt cheek. “I am going to spill inside you.” He moaned loudly and made three long, hard thrusts into Kane. “I am coming,” he grunted.

“It is good to feel you orgasm inside me again. It has been a very long time since we swore off this behavior. Since this time will be the last, it is good that we can be together this way,” Kane replied.

Again, Salem envisioned Kane being nothing but a puppet on a string, mouthing words he didn’t want to say, but was forced to say. She wanted to cast a spell of Opening to force the truth to the surface.

Like wading through a vat of thick oatmeal, Salem tried desperately to mouth the simple spell to compel and pull truth to the surface. A very difficult act, when being buggered by a handsome black man being buggered by a handsome Nordic-type.

Open eyes. Open ears. Untangled tongues. Cast off the masks and remove the robes, for only the truth may enter this place.

A thousand images cascaded into her mind. It reminded her of a PowerPoint presentation on high speed. Her instincts were correct. The blond thrived on deceit and control. Control of his blood-brother. Control of her. Control of what he presumed was his destiny.

Ketiljon slid out of Kane’s rear, his erect member covered in semen. “Let me bring this act to a conclusion for you, Kane. I need to taste you. One last time.”

“What of the woman? She has not yet achieved climax,” Kane replied.

“What of it?” Ketiljon asked.

Kane shook his head. “I will not leave a woman unsatisfied.”

“Then put your mouth to her, and when you are finished, I will put my mouth to you.” Ketiljon paused. “Oh, the witch is scrying. As we make love with her, she is divining our true natures, brother. Look at her. She is lost in a trance. Well, we must remove her from that state so that she can enjoy our time with her.” Ketiljon raised his palms, directing his dark energies toward Salem. “Forget what you have seen and remember only the pleasure.”

Kane slid out of Salem and in one motion, rolled her onto her back.

She wanted to speak, but felt tongue-tied. She couldn’t remember something...something important.

Before she could take a deep breath or sigh in relief at having been freed of his anal love, much less clear her mind of the dim, suppressive numbness filling it, Kane’s dark, curly head disappeared between her legs.

It was almost comforting, the long, slow caresses of his tongue against her burning privates. Like a healing salve, his tongue made everything all better.

The protesting, swollen edges of her vagina and anus were soothed into warm oblivion as he gently and quite adeptly lolled his tongue across them. His beautiful full lips encircled her clitoris. He rolled her bud between them, inspiring it to new heights.

Salem slid her fingers into his thick, curly hair, and held his head against her mound as she exploded in orgasm.

As soon as her grip relaxed, Kane turned to face his blood-brother. Ketiljon dropped to his knees and eagerly took Kane's member into his mouth. It was obvious Ketiljon relished the act. His satisfied sighs told Salem that much. Kane seemed stoic. Hands on hips, he stood motionless, watching Ketiljon perform fellatio. He climaxed quietly, seemingly holding back embarrassed cries of pleasure. Ketiljon, however, had busied his right hand between his own legs and had brought himself to a second orgasm with vigorous gusto. Salem came down slowly from her orgasm. Her fantasy had drawn her into a very deep well. Seems her new acquisition had a bit of memory embedded in it. Memories of pleasurable moments between men and women and any combination of the two who liked their stories shared, not just told. That would make a good selling point. Because no matter how good it felt inside her...she still had to sell the *Viking Member*. Reeling from the beer and the force of her orgasm, Salem meandered to her kitchen and cleaned the dildo with alcohol wipes.

* * * *

Downstairs, in her shop, an otherworldly interloper zipped his fly, his head still swimming from his own climax. "Salem...hear me..." he called softly. "Not if I can help it," a second voice replied. The interloper's body went rigid as he looked out the window. "I am the first born, Kane, and it is I who shall reap the benefits of this woman's passion," he called. "Go away, blood-brother. You are a painful reminder of my father's poor decisions." "What our father left to you, he also left to me, though my mother was not born of Iceland, nor I of his loins." "Dark brother, be gone. Kane, there is no room for you here." "Ketiljon, remember the oath we took as boys and remember the bargain we made with the gods to escape death? We are bound together for eternity. If you are freed, then so must I be." Ketiljon spat on the floor. "Three hellish days with you at my side is too long. I was forced into the oath and I long ago forsook the gods. What pledges I made to them in times of imminent death, I now regret. And revoke." He paused, his bright blue eyes flashing lightning bolts of hatred at his blood-brother. "You cannot enter here and the stone shall not leave. This woman shall set me free. She is already learning the power of the stone, though she doesn't recognize it yet. I shall be set free." Kane laughed. "She will invite me into her life. I feel it. Though you controlled her mind and body in that fleeting moment of ecstasy born of loneliness and alcohol, I shall have her heart. You are trying to make her believe I am but a vessel for your pleasure, when in truth I have refused you all my life and taken beatings for defending myself from your advances. She will know the truth. I am not your lover, nor the lover of any man. I have loved only once, and her name was Grettir." Ketiljon scoffed at his brother's goodness. "Before you bury your bone in the keeper of the stone,

I will rip your heart out from between your shoulder blades and suck the living blood from it.”
“Spoken like a true Berserker. It was that talk that put us asunder in the first place, brother. Have you not learned anything in the last thousand years to calm your temper? Has not the wait been enough?” Kane asked.

Ketiljon moved to the window and placed a palm against the glass. “Do you remember the old days, Kane? When we lived and drank and fought side by side?”

Kane nodded. “I cherish those memories, Ketiljon. I remember the laughter of our father and the way he looked at my mother with such love and respect, until she died.”

“Your mother was not born to live in our homeland. She grew cold and could never find warmth,” Ketiljon replied.

Kane interjected, “Save in our father’s arms. She grew to love him deeply after the death of her first husband. She was a consort for our father and surrogate mother to you. Without him, she would have been stoned for bearing a half-breed child and I would have been emasculated.”

Ketiljon looked sharply through the glass. “I hated her. Though I am glad Father brought you to Iceland. I would hate to think of your balls being touched by the kiss of steel. They should be touched by something much softer. From the moment you came to live in our house, I thought there was no more handsome a youth in all the world. I have never wanted anything for you, save for your happiness.”

“Your obsession with me and hatred of my mother have poisoned you to the love of any woman, Ketiljon. It was your hatred that imprisoned us.”

“In a widow’s bed warmer.”

They’d had this same conversation a thousand times over a thousand years. “My plea was heard and the deal was struck. I assumed the place our souls were to be sealed should be something other than rock or stone. I did not want to be overlooked. The carving was ideal.”

“I might as well have died in that hot pot, brother. A thousand years trapped in a whalebone penis is humiliating.”

Kane wished his fair blood-brother would someday understand the necessity of going into the carving, as opposed to being lost in the wilds of Iceland’s interior rocky permafrost. “Freyja said choose and I did so. I carved the bone for my love and, though you found our captivity painful, to me it was just an extension of my love for her. Though I, too, long for freedom now. I had no other object save my leather breeches, which would not have withstood the ravages of time. And you were nude! It is to the goddess Freyja, my savior, that I pledge my sword. It is to her I owe my chance for freedom,” Kane said.

Ketiljon pounded his fist on the glass. “And to her I owe a lifetime of misery being shackled to your heels. Through your selfishness I have lived a thousand years as an extension of an object meant to pleasure a woman in her husband’s absence!”

Kane sighed. “There is no shame in survival, brother.”

“The shame I feel is that I did not gut you like a pig and then bugger the goddess as she stood over your rotting corpse! You shall never enter this place and find freedom between the thighs of Salem Grier! It is I who shall put the bone to the stone!”

Kane shook his head. “Your rage will be your undoing, brother. She will never accept you as her lover.”

Ketiljon smiled a devilish, loathsome smile. “I have always taken what is mine, and this shall be no exception.” He looked to the ceiling and raised his spirit to the upper floor where Salem lay sleeping.

Kane vanished into the night, knowing that his blood-brother would never win this battle. Though light dispelled darkness, his light was but a thin disguise. Dusk would conquer dawn.

* * * *

Silent as a cat, Ketiljon stepped around the sofa to the table where the Odin Stone and the *Viking’s Member* lay joined. He nudged the whalebone deeper into the hole. Salem moved and sighed in her sleep.

Ketiljon smiled. “Tonight you pleased yourself with my prison, dear one. And though you are a skilled witch full of magical spells to ward off the likes of me, you turned the latch on the first door exiting Hell. I’ll have you soon, and freedom shall be mine, alone.”

He ran his hand along the carved shaft of the dildo, and then brought his fingers to his lips to taste Salem’s essence. “Soon, I shall be set free. My pretend brother will never cross your boundaries. The weak-minded are easy to seduce and I found my accomplice readily. *She* was so easy to coerce. To control. To cut. It was a good victory over wealthy sensibilities and her blood was so rich and sweet. Tonight, I am sated.” Ketiljon melted into the carvings, vaporizing in a swirl of firefly lights.

Just around the corner from the deli, slumped over in the alley, lay the body of a rather attractive older woman; her receipt from *Salem’s Fine Collection of Sins* clutched in her cold, dead hand.

* * * *

A strong, urgent rapping at her door awakened Salem with a jolt, causing her to fall off the couch, thinking the place was on fire. “Who is it?” she called. Jesus. It wasn’t yet five in the morning. “Misha! Open the door!”

Salem hadn’t locked her door. “It’s open, Misha. What the Hell is going on?”

“I came to work to start the bread and there is a body in the alley. A woman. I lost my keys. I cannot get into my place. Call the police, eh? I need to find my keys before the police take them as evidence,” Misha blurted.

“A body? In the alley? A dead body?” Salem asked.

“You phone now, yes? You should start locking your door.”

“Christ. Yes, I’ll phone. Right now,” Salem replied reaching for her telephone. She dialed 9-1-1. She didn’t wait for the operator to finish her standard *what is the nature of your emergency* response. “Hi. There’s a woman, dead in the alley behind my store. Behind Misha’s Deli and Salem’s Fine Collection of Sins. Sixty-seven-hundred Crowley Way. Downtown. No, I don’t know who she is. I haven’t looked. Misha found her. He’s with the body now. No, he won’t touch

anything. Yes, thank you. Please hurry.”

Please hurry? She’s dead. She ain’t going anywhere. Salem paused, realizing the absurdity of her comment. “Me? I’m Salem Grier. I live above my shop. And Misha Ivanov found her. He owns the deli. Thank you.”

She hung up the phone and slipped on her clogs. The metal handrails of the fire escape were covered in morning dew. A heavy chill still clung to the darkness of pre-dawn.

Misha had found his keys. She also heard the soft wailing of the Mourner’s Kaddish emanating from her friend. *Yeetgadal v' yeetkadash sh'mey rabbah...*

“Did you know her, Misha?” Salem asked.

He nodded. “She bought a cup of coffee from me yesterday. And struck up a conversation with a man who ordered warm milk. He looked like warm milk. What man drinks warm milk?”

“Blond man?” Salem asked.

“Like a banana he was blond,” Misha replied.

Salem sucked in her breath. “She came into my shop today. She bought black salt. Said she had to get rid of a bad neighbor. A blond man showed up after closing. He kind of gave me the creeps.” *But he turned my cookies, too. He was hot.*

“You think he’s the one who did her in?” Misha asked. “Do you see how he did it? Look at her throat. Those marks—someone strangled her. And cut her. How could someone do such a thing?”

“Does she have something sticking out of her ear?” Salem asked, squinting to make out the object without having to get too close.

“It’s a quill. Drilled into her brain.”

Salem turned and vomited.

* * * *

She still had shakes and the dry heaves when a black and white pulled into the alley. A svelte female officer stepped out of the car, radio in hand. “Confirming need for wagon,” she said into the speaker. “Hi. I’m Officer LeBrey. Who found her?”

Misha held up his hand sheepishly. “I did, ma’am. I am Misha Ivanov. I had Salem phone you.”

“Touch anything, Miss?” Officer LeBrey asked.

Salem lifted her head slightly and whispered a hoarse, “Salem Grier. No, I touched nothing.”

“I got close to her to see if she was alive and touched her cheek. That’s all,” Misha replied.

An ambulance and two additional police cars rounded the corner.

Shocked and cold, numb and feeling like she’d taken a fist to the gut, Salem wasn’t sure if she could stand for much longer. “I know who she is,” she said softly to Officer LeBrey. “I mean, she bought something in my shop yesterday. Used plastic.”

LeBrey’s ears piqued. “Can I get the merchant copy of that transaction from you, Miss Grier?”

Salem nodded. “I’ll go get it.”

As the cops drilled Misha who, with great enthusiasm, recounted the same story five different ways, Salem somehow made her feet carry her body to the back entrance of her shop. She punched in the code to the alarm and opened the back door using the electronic keypad.

She rifled through her receipts for the previous day. “Marguerite Pamona. Five pounds of black salt and two quills,” she mumbled. “Rest in peace, Marguerite.”

She re-secured her shop and somehow managed to make her way back to the flashing blue and red lights. She handed Officer LeBrey the slip, took a step back and then felt everything go black around her. Literally.

* * * *

Salem was revived by a paramedic. “You’re all right, Miss. It’s called a visceral reaction. You fell right into LeBrey’s arms. Good thing, huh? Not a scratch on you. I’ve seen people go down and knock out their front teeth.”

Salem tried to focus. She wasn’t in the ambulance. She wasn’t on the pavement. “I’m in Misha’s shop.”

“You are, yes. We couldn’t very well put you in the wagon now, could we? Thanks to you, we have a good idea as to whom we did load up, however,” the paramedic commented.

“Are you trying to be funny?” Salem asked. *He’s cute.*

“Never while on duty, ma’am,” the medic replied.

Salem sat up. “Oh, please don’t call me that. I had to call my mother ma’am and I never want to be that stuffy.”

“What—and when—shall I call you?”

Salem smiled. “Are you flirting with me, sir?”

He nodded his head yes, but he replied, “No.” He paused. “I need it for my report.”

“Salem Grier. That’s my shop next door.” Salem felt very, very comfortable in spite of her surroundings and the trauma of the morning. Why pass up the chance to flirt with a Warrick Brown look-a-like? “Why don’t you come by and see me sometime? I’ll make you a nice cup of tea.”

The paramedic smiled. Salem liked his cool green eyes and café-au-lait-colored skin. And those shoulders! And his voice! Like honey! *I think I need mouth-to-mouth, Mr. Paramedic.*

The medic smiled slyly at Salem, as if he were reading her mind. “I’m not sure I can cross your threshold. All those runic inscriptions. You seem to be very well protected against the wiles of bad boys.”

Salem’s smirked. “You’re a bad boy? With that baby face?”

The medic nodded. “I come from a long line of men who know how to revive a still heart.”

“Well, how nice for you. And me, as the case may be. I have actually been realizing of late that I could use a little less protection. Do you read runes?” Salem asked.

He nodded. “My adopted father taught me when I was a boy. He was an old-world Iclander.”

“And your mother?” Salem continued.

“North African. My father met her while he was traveling down that way in his youth. I am the biological son of one of his countrymen. My father was a good man and took me into his home as if he’d sired me.”

“Where were you born?” Salem asked.

“Tunis, Tunisia. But I spent most of my life in Iceland.”

“Forgive me for playing twenty questions...” Salem began.

“Oh, don’t worry. I’ll ask you some questions here in a minute,” the man replied.

Salem smiled. And he smiled right back at her.

“When did your family immigrate to the United States?”

“Recently.”

Salem sat upright. “You don’t have an accent, Mr...”

“Call me Kane. Oh, and I’ve worked very hard to blend in.”

Salem held out her hand. “Nice to meet you, Kane. So, tell me, in your professional opinion, which charms should I remove?”

“I was teasing. I can cross the rune charms as long as I am invited to enter. At least that’s what my father taught me. All I need is an invitation from the owner.”

“I thought I’d already done that,” Salem replied. God...she hoped she looked attractive in some way. After passing out in an alley and vomiting, she doubted she looked her best. Jesus Christ. She wasn’t even dressed. “You a vampire?” Salem asked. “I mean...needing to be invited in sounds awfully Bela Lugosi to me.”

“Nothing as grand as that. I’m just an aide car driver. The morgue bus picked up Ms. Pomona’s body. The police have the place taped off. Your friend Misha closed his shop for today and went home. I’m off the clock. I said I’d stay with you until you were ready to return to the living. No hurry,” Kane replied. “Are you going to open your shop today?”

“Life and death are opposite sides of the same coin. If I don’t open my shop, I don’t make rent.” Kane helped Salem to her feet. His touch inflamed desire in her. “Well, let me walk you to your door. Maybe I’ll get that cup of tea if you invite me properly.”

“What time is it?” Salem asked. “I’m not wearing my watch.”

“Nearly nine.”

“I need to open in about an hour,” Salem replied. “Misha’s rear door locks automatically. We can go out that way. You don’t have to walk me to my shop. I need to shower and change.”

“I can wait.”

Salem mused over Kane's comment for a moment. She wasn’t used to men wanting to be around her; to protect her. She needed to know if this was the result of her Freyja ritual, or just another horny crazy. “You know, Kane, I’m grateful you waited here with me while I recovered from my visceral reaction to having a dead body in the alley behind my shop, but I can manage from here. Why don’t you drop by later?”

“I really don’t have anything better to do right now,” Kane replied.

Salem shivered. This guy was now going from teasing to possessing. “I have things to do. I’ll see you later, all right?”

Kane smiled. Oh, goodness, he has a beguiling smile. Salem felt like melting into his parted lips. She reached up and squeezed the amulet around her throat. Her protective touchstone. “I’ll see you later.”

“I need a proper invitation. Old custom,” Kane replied.

Salem ran her thumb across talisman emblem on her amulet. “I’ll see you later, Kane.”

“My pleasure.”

“Until then,” Salem said, backing away. She exited Misha’s shop, fighting a pounding headache and muscle tension that seemed to concentrate in the area right between her thighs.

She dashed as quickly as she could up the fire escape to her little apartment and locked the door. Salem slumped down onto her sofa where she’d been sleeping quite soundly until Misha’s frantic cries had awakened her. A quick, shadowy image darted out of her line of sight as she scanned her front room. Something felt funky. Out of place. “I don’t have time to acknowledge you right now. Come out when I have more time!” she called after the shadow. “Damned Revenants. What the Hell are they doing out of the woodwork?” she said aloud.

A loud thud from the wall separating her living room from bedroom alerted her to the fact that the Revenants were, indeed, awake. What had caused them to stir? She had this place so well spelled that nothing should be able to say boo without clearing it with her first. Salem rose and stripped as she headed toward her shower. She knew she was being watched. Horny old whore-spirits.

“Can’t you ladies move on to that great big cathouse in the sky?” A second loud bump from inside the wall and soft giggling like the sound of wind rustling through trees gave Salem her answer. Her house spirits liked it right where they were, thank you very much.

It was hard not to feel a tad bit paranoid behind the shower curtain, nude, vulnerable and soapy. Everyone has one thought that, when played over and over, can frighten the living daylights out of them. Salem’s was the shower scene from the original *Psycho*. The murder, the awakening spirits, the damned fine horny dream—and that heavenly ambulance driver who had left her with too much to sort out. Her personal defense grid was down. That’s why the spirits were restless. She towel-dried herself quickly and applied a little eyeliner and mascara to brighten her face. She looked tired. Really, really tired. If she even had any customers, she’d likely frighten them off. She dressed simply in khaki pants and a white t-shirt. She wrapped the Odin Stone and the *Viking Member* in towels and slipped them into a plastic sack.

Her first step onto her fire escape stairs made her skin crawl. It felt like she was walking on beetle shells. Black beetle shells. She bent over to examine the gritty substance covering every step from landing to alley. “The black salt. Someone has sprinkled black salt all over my…” she paused. “Oh, crap. Someone’s trying to cast a spell of banishment—on me!”

Her first thought was to sweep the stairs clean and hose down the alley to melt the salt. That would only send the spell further into her environment as the water trickled into the cracks and crevices of the concrete alleyway and building foundations. Sweeping it up and burning it would be no better. The salt fumes would permeate the air and saturate her environment. Salem stood on her landing, paralyzed with indecision. And that meant the spell was working.

Advice she often shared with customers seeking to cure a curse put upon them rang through her head. “If it’s not within your belief system, it’s not going to work.”

No wonder the Revenants were acting out. They were frightened. A dark spirit had oozed over the alley last night and left its slime behind. And while she was out of it, someone had salted her

stoop. She needed to re-charm her shop, or she'd be out of business in a week. Something wicked this way comes—and it was centering around her!

Salem closed her eyes, concentrating on her years of knowledge. There was a way to combat a black salt curse. Agrimony, lavender, and sage. She re-entered her apartment and reached for her mortar and pestle. “I am going to fight fire with fire.”

Her thoughts turned momentarily to the fire department medic who had flirted with her after she'd fainted. Salem tried desperately to clear her mind of carnal thoughts. Hard to do when she'd invoked Freyja's passion. She couldn't take anything to chance with a Freyja ritual working its magic, a murderer on the loose, and a damned whalebone dildo wanting her to drop everything to play hide the boner. However, the counter-charm had to be true and pure, or she'd end up a blithering idiot singing “My bologna has a first name...” in a corner somewhere. Black salt curses could send a person on a little holiday...from themselves and everyone else.

She dismantled her makeshift altar and chopped up a portion of the sage bundle, adding it and dried lavender and agrimony to her mortar. “I invoke the power of the *Helm of Awe* to protect my travels on dark roads,” she said softly, grinding the herbal mixture to a fine powder. Salem stopped. “All this started happening when I received the *Viking Member*. There are strong spirits trapped in that thing.”

She opened the plastic sack and unwrapped the bone and the stone. Salem reached for a dinner plate and placed the Odin Stone on its side so that it resembled a doughnut made of rock. She poured the herbal powder from her mortar into the center of the doughnut's hole. “I invoke the power of the *Helm of Awe* to protect my travels on dark roads,” she began, this time using the *Viking Member* as her pestle and the Odin Stone as her mortar. “In darkness and in light I repel and avert all souls who would trick, tease or hinder me.”

As a girl, she'd once played with an Ouija board. The planchette had rocked and swooped across the board seemingly moving with the aid of some unseen hand. Frightened the crap out of her, while at the same time giving her the impetus for her career. The *Viking Member* now buzzed and rippled in her hand as she used its boney head to further grind the herbal powder welled within the Odin Stone. Though she was not moving her hand forcefully, for both artifacts were too valuable to abuse, the bone pulled and tugged, wanting to break through some invisible barrier within the circle of the Odin Stone. Salem forced her hand open as the dinner plate under the stone cracked from the weight of the bone's strikes against it.

The *Viking Member* slipped from her hand and onto the counter, spinning wildly. A soft blue glow enveloped the bony beast. Moments later, every metallic object in her kitchen throbbed to life with a rich, bluish fire. The electrical current sparked by the spell had ushered forth the miracle of St. Elmo's Fire...in her kitchen.

“Holy shit,” Salem cursed. She knew better than to touch anything metallic as the blue ball of lightning arched and jetted from toaster to blender to oven to ladle. The Revenants reacted to the electrical charge, too. Salem turned her head to see a doxy in turn of the century cotton bloomers standing transfixed in her living room. The spirit's mouth opened, as if to ask, “What the Hell is going on here?”

Salem bit her lower lip and closed her eyes. Hoping her next move would not be her last, she reached for the contents of the Odin Stone. Though her eyes were tightly shut to avoid being burned by the electrical current dancing around her countertop, Salem managed to get a pinch of the herbal mixture between two fingers. She released it into the air, hoping the good magic of the herbs would cleanse the space.

She opened her eyes as the popping sparks dissipated. The blue glow faded. Salem exhaled. She quickly sprinkled the herbal powder on the floor, slipped off her right clog and made the sign of the *Helm of Awe*—the *Ægishjálmur*—with the tip of her bare toe.

She snatched up the bone and the stone and jetted down the fire escape in one breath's time.

The hair on her forearms was singed. The distinct aroma seemed to permeate her airspace. Salem lit a few sticks of sandalwood incense hoping to dispel the noxious odor. Oy, Mr. Hottie should be dropping by today, too. Well, she was sure he'd smelled burnt flesh before. But how did she explain it? *Oh, I was casting a spell of protection and my giant whalebone dildo decided to go St. Elmo on me and nearly burnt down my kitchen. But I'm fine. No damage done. I whipped out my magic powder, made the Helm of Awe on my floor, and opened the shop like nothing unusual happened around here, at all. Everything is copasetic. Just peachy. And how are you? Wanna fuck?*

* * * *

She opened her shop two hours late. Disappointingly, there was no throng of wealthy wiccans outside the door to enter in droves to buy beeswax candles and books on Egyptian rites. However, a quiet day would afford her time to research and price her new acquisitions. And re-grow her arm hair.

Salem had no problem pricing, tagging, and setting up a display for her new Italian toys. Italian and French sex toys were fairly commonplace. The history of the piece is what made the sale. Unscrupulous purveyors often fabricated fanciful tales to market their wares. Salem figured the truth was usually more interesting than fiction—especially when it came to the whys and wherefores of buggery and illicit sex.

She moved her current display of early twentieth century whips to her secondary curio and set about making a fabulous display for the boys—her two Italian *dilettos*. Of course, that would leave the problem as to where she should display the Viking-age artifacts. She looked around her shop.

“Of course,” she said aloud as her eyes fell over the tank used to house her pet rats. “Look, ladies, I need to move you to your habitat for a while and clean out your tank for a display.”

Dax and Pheelyx spread out across their wheel in defiance.

“You’ll have little tunnels to play in. You like that! I’m not going to go buy another fish tank, ladies. You two are just going to have to let me use your tank.” Salem shook her head. Why was she arguing with rats? She knew why...they were smart...and they saw things she couldn’t. But that didn’t alter the fact that she needed their tank. Sorry, girls!

Salem retrieved the plastic habitat from the closet and set it up on her work table in the back

room. After filling the habitat with paper litter, little treats, and fresh water, she moved her rats. Her unhappy little white rats with their pink eyes flashing at her as brightly as if they held St. Elmo's fire in their skulls. "Enough of that, girls. I've played with enough fire for today." She took the tank out back and hosed it down with bleach water, then polished the glass sides to a high shine.

Using tempera paints, she designed a seascape on the outside back of the tank, filled it with polished rocks, some inscribed with runes, and a bit of dried purple moss for show, and then placed the Odin Stone and the *Viking Member* in their new home.

It looked fabulous. Eye-catching. She set the tank on a little table next to the *diletto* display and affixed price stickers that read, "Serious inquiries only."

As she finally sat down at her computer to research her new toys, the bell on her shop door chimed.

She couldn't believe her eyes. An angel just walked into her shop. Salem took a few steps back to check out the girls. Like dogs begging for a treat, both chubby white rats were up on their haunches facing the entrance to the store, their tails curved around them and their pink eyes flashing. The customer smiled at Salem and nodded.

Angel-speak. The gentle nod of his head was all he needed to say. In fact, if he didn't open his mouth and say anything at all, she could die happy, entranced by the tall, blond man with his magnificent blue eyes and graceful, fluid movements.

"Hi," Salem said, hoping he wouldn't reply so that her fantasy bubble wouldn't burst just yet. She checked out his ring finger. Clear! She checked out his package. *Lovely! Thank you, Freyja!*

"Good morning," the customer replied. Salem took a breath. He had the voice of an angel, too. Smooth, rich. Like warm, melting chocolate. "I am new to your city. I wondered what you have in your fine collection of sins."

"I sell occult practices merchandise and historical *objets pour réjouir les sens*," Salem replied.

"Ah, yes, it does sound better in French. Saying you sell antique sex toys does come off a bit crass, does it not?" The customer held out his hand in introduction. "I am Ketiljon Heraldsson." Ketiljon. She knew that name from somewhere. Where? Salem slipped her hand in his, feeling his large, warm palm and fingers wrap around hers like his legs should have been doing to her body. On the floor. Right now. Angel-sex. "I'm Salem Grier, owner. Is there something I can help you with?"

Ketiljon smiled. "I'm sure there is. I am a collector of certain artifacts. Norse Age. I don't suppose you have any? Oh, but you do! Look at this lovely Odin Stone and my...you have a *flannfluga*. And a very nice one at that. How much for the set?"

"What's your offer?" Salem asked. "And what is a *flannfluga*?"

"Ah. It is a term not used too often, even in Iceland. It is the word used for a woman who flees from a man's sexual organ. A man's living member. She turns to the bone. We also call it *níðstông*—the scorn pole. It insults a man when a woman turns to the bone for pleasure."

"Well, that's something I didn't know about my *Viking Member*. I do know it is very valuable, however."

“Of course it is. Do you see the markings—the scrimshaw? They depict acts of true love between the gods and humankind.”

Salem nodded. “Yes. I’ve studied the carvings. Odin and Loki. Odin and Frigga. Odin and Freyja. Freyja and everyone. Loki and everyone—as a man, a horse, a serpent, and I’m not sure what that is, but I don’t think I’d want to sleep with it.”

Ketiljon laughed. “It’s a fly. He became an insect. Loki was quite the god.”

“Fly fucking. How lovely,” Salem commented, realizing she shouldn’t have used such a vulgar term in front of a customer. “Oh, I’m sorry. My language…”

“I am not offended. There are other stories on the bone, too. The tale of two Berserkers—blood brothers who loved and fought side by side. They shared everything—until a woman tore them apart and they died at *Berserkerhraun*, the Berserker’s Lava Field.”

“Oh, my. Do tell,” Salem said. She slipped on a white glove and came around the corner.

“Ah, it is nice to see more of you,” Ketiljon said. Salem didn’t reply. Was he flirting with her, too? Happy days!

She reached into the tank and carefully withdrew the *Viking Member*. Of course, she’d used it more aggressively than this on herself, but she didn’t want a potential buyer to know that.

“Roll it around. Yes. There’s the tale. It is very famous. How did you come by it?” Ketiljon asked.

“My buyer picked it up at an auction. Tell me the story, please” Salem replied.

“Ah, yes. It is a good story. May I sit?” Ketiljon asked.

Salem offered him a chair. “Would you like some tea?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Salem wandered back around the counter and plugged in her electric kettle. “Please begin.”

“Once, many years ago, there were two brothers. Blood-brothers. Their father cut their arms and mixed their bloods to quit the bickering between them, proclaiming them of the same flesh and, thereby, full kin. He claimed both boys as his own, and he wished everyone to know that. One son was born and bred in Iceland on the Snaefellsjokul peninsula in the western region of the country. Life was very hard there. The boy’s mother died of lung fever one winter and the next summer his father placed him with relatives while he went off in search of fortune. The father stayed away for many years. When he returned home, his son had grown into a fine young man with a bright mind and a good hand for working what little fertile soil there was on his father’s land. With him, the father brought a new mother and a new child. A boy of mixed blood. The woman was as black as night and had been wooed by a fellow Norse mercenary in far away Byzantium where he and the father had served as mercenaries for a potentate. Her eyes glowed like coal embers and her hair was as soft as lamb’s wool. In the land of the midnight sun, her dark beauty radiated like a star-filled night. Her son was strong and quick. He took to the tundra like he’d been born there. He had his mother’s coloring, dark skin and hair, but his father’s eyes. Green like a fertile plain. Green like new shoots of barley.

“Although he had not married her, the father made the mistress of the dead mercenary second wife in his house and placed the mixed-blood bastard child at the table with his legitimate son. The boys fought, as boys will do, but eventually became as close as true brothers. Of course,

having one's wrist slit will stop any fighting. They fought side by side at the battle for Helgafell and shared all they had. Until Grettir, daughter of Ragnar Olrudsson, came to Snaefellsjokul. The oldest brother loved her madly and had asked Ragnar Olrudsson for her hand. Before the bride price was set, the younger brother stole her away in the night and ravished her. He ruined her. He poisoned her mind. She was a simple girl who could not make up her mind as to which brother she would wed. Though the eldest had made first claim, the younger had taken her virginity and had filled her belly with child. She was a silly girl, truly. She could have had the younger brother killed for his crimes, but her mind was poisoned, and she would not hear of it.

"Ragnar took Grettir to the church at Skalholt to be looked after by the priests during her confinement. He then set a plan to rid himself of both meddlesome brothers, as he knew that there would be no peace for his daughter as long as they both lived.

"He called upon the brothers, begging them to journey to his farm beyond the peninsula at the great lava field beyond the mountains. There, he said, he would let them bargain for his daughter and her unborn child. He said he cared not which brother wed his Grettir and raised her child, for they were both sound and decent men who loved her." Ketiljon paused, taking a sip of the tea offered him by Salem.

"This is quite the tale. All this is carved on the bone?" she asked.

"In a manner of speaking. One must know the entire saga to understand the inscriptions. Now, where was I? Oh, yes...the brothers made their way across the mountains to the lava field beyond. The journey took twelve days by horseback, and they were very tired when they reached their destination. Ragnar greeted them and bade them rest for a day at his hot pot."

"Hot pot?" Salem asked.

"His geothermal pool. Ragnar had a hot pot on his land. He'd built a stone shelter over it—rather like a sauna. The brothers relished the idea of a warm place to sleep and it is easy to cook one's dinner when boiling water is so easily obtained. In Iceland, one must simply look down to find hot water! They accepted Ragnar's offer. He gave them flatbread and smoked lamb to eat, and a large flask of mead. The brothers ate and drank their fill. Ragnar spied upon them. What he saw confirmed his dislike of them both to such a degree that he wished them both slow, painful deaths. The brothers engaged in a sexual union. Forbidden and outlawed in Iceland, it was a crime so severe that the farmer knew he would not be banished for the killing.

"After the brothers fell asleep, he sealed the entrance to the pool, knowing that it would soon erupt like a geyser if the steam was not allowed to escape. A great rumbling in the earth awakened the brothers. They could not move the great stone blocking the exit and the heat had become unbearable. The ground shook again. It was an earthquake! This is a common occurrence in Iceland even today; but when the earth rumbles one does not want to be in the vicinity of a geothermal pool. The water levels rose and, little by little, the brothers were cooked alive. The younger brother called upon Freyja to save them. Now, asking the gods for a favor is to invite trouble. But Freyja heard his plea and granted reprieve. Their bodies would die, but their souls would live on, trapped in an object of their choosing, until such time as a magical spell was cast to free them. The younger brother removed a gift he'd been making for Grettir, for those times he

was away from her. The older brother scoffed at the lewd gift and said he should rather be trapped in a stone buried in three feet of moss than in a penis of whalebone. But it was the younger's decision, for it was his prayer to Freyja that had been answered. He chose for their souls to remain trapped in the whalebone penis for all time. Or at least until the right words are said at the right time to free them."

"What happened to Grettir?" Salem asked.

"When she learned what her father had done, she took her own life. Never was it known which brother was actually her true love. The elder, who courted her according to custom and would have made her a fine husband, or the younger, who took her by force and convinced her to accept his love."

Salem asked a second question. "Which brother do you believe was her true love? And why, if they were gay, would they have wanted a woman in the first place?"

"The fairer brother, of course. The eldest. The younger brother, the dark one, had only ill intentions for Grettir. He used her body and stole her mind. It is not believed by scholars that the blood-brothers were homosexual. Sometimes in the times of the Vikings, one man would subjugate another by using him as a woman. The older brother was clearly the stronger of the two and it was his right to control the younger."

"That's a very interesting story. Where on this thing is all that depicted?" Salem asked, holding out the *Viking Member*.

"It is here. See the two lads encircling the girl? This is symbolic of their love for Grettir. They both wanted to take her."

"It looks like a Grettir sandwich to me," Salem replied.

"Yes, exactly. See how the hair on this brother is curly like sheep's wool? That is the younger brother. And the long braids are those of the elder."

"I need a magnifying glass to see it better, but yes, I see the differences in the men."

"Have you set a price for this marvelous object?" Ketiljon asked. "Perhaps we can discuss it over dinner, hmmm?"

Thank you, Freyja! Salem was just about to respond when a crashing noise in the back room interrupted her. "I'd better see what that was." She placed the *Viking Member* carefully in the tank before moving the entire display behind the counter. "Excuse me for a moment."

"Of course. But I believe it is just your pet rats showing you their dislike of their new home," Ketiljon replied.

Salem stopped dead in her tracks. A cold sensation washed over her. "How did you know I moved them to a new habitat? I don't recall you visiting my shop before."

"I..." Ketiljon began.

"You've been watching me, haven't you?" Salem asked.

"Well, yes. I am sorry for the deception. I did not think it was wise to tell you I followed your shipment from Amsterdam, in hopes that you would sell me the *Viking Member* and the Odin Stone."

"Are you a dealer?"

Ketiljon shook his head. “No, I am a collector.”

“I’m sorry. The *Viking Member* isn’t for sale. You need to go now,” Salem replied. “I don’t take kindly to subversion.”

Ketiljon rose from his chair. “It is I who am sorry. I must have the *Viking Member* and the Odin Stone. You must offer them to me. And then we must make love.”

Salem turned. She turned a cold eye to Ketiljon. “Excuse me?”

Ketiljon repeated, “Please, you must offer me the artifacts and then we must make love.”

“I’m reserving my right to refuse service. Please leave my store. Now,” Salem commanded.

Ketiljon gave her the distinct impression that he was surprised by her response. “Leave? You want me to leave?”

“Now,” Salem replied.

“I cannot. I must have the artifacts. We must consummate the agreement by sexual relations. Were you not aware of the curse?”

Salem glanced right and left. No baseball bat. She wasn’t near the phone. Why was this freak bothering her? Did the Freyja ritual weaken her no losers spell? “Curse?”

“Yes, of course. Did not your buyer tell you why he was able to win the artifacts at auction?

Valuable Norse-age items such as these would fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars, and yet he bought them for a few thousand,” Ketiljon replied.

“I don’t question how my money is spent. I trust him.”

“Then he is a liar and a thief, for he knew of the curse and I know he put many thousands of your dollars in his wallet. He won the auction because no one else would bid on accursed items.”

“If it’s not in one’s belief system, it won’t work. I don’t believe in curses,” Salem lied poorly.

“Now who is the liar? Of course you believe there is a curse and I think you want to know more, do you not?” Ketiljon asked.

Salem nodded. “Yes. But I’m not offering you the bone, the stone, or a roll in the hay.”

Ketiljon smiled. Salem felt it hit her like a ton of bricks. His huge blue eyes looked just like those bluish fireballs in her kitchen not too long ago, only his orbs were hidden behind thick blond lashes like a lion’s mane. And those lips. Full lips. Like soft pillows. Why were all the nut jobs so hot?

He began slowly, not moving anything but his voice across the room toward Salem. “There is a part of the story about the brothers I did not tell you. To call upon the gods for a favor is to invite a bit of mischief as well; I said this. The old ones are best worshipped from afar. There is always a trick. In this case, Freyja had her dark-elf husband forge a very special Odin Stone from the rock of the lava field. Only if the great vow is taken through the stone can the souls trapped in the *Viking Member* be freed; but the stone is just the catalyst for the magic. If, however, a woman pleasures herself with the *Viking Member*, a taste of freedom shall be given to the spirits. Three days. Three days to taste life and attempt to bring the stone and the bone together.”

Salem raised her eyebrow. “I get it. We’re not actually talking about the dildo being plunged into the doughnut hole of the stone. We’re talking about the spirit in his temporary corporeal form boning the hole in the woman who holds the stone. Namely, me. And you’re the doer of the dirty

deed. Right?”

Ketiljon smiled. “My blood-brother must not be first in breaking the curse, for only one of us can return. He is an evil man, a rapist. A murderer.”

“I haven’t met your brother,” Salem replied.

“No, of course not. I put the black salt all around you so that he must stay away.”

Black salt? Oh, my God. Salem looked around again, willing a handgun or any weapon to appear before her. “But you can enter through the charms and spells surrounding this place?”

“Yes. Because it is I who poured the *sal negre*. I am neither immune nor repelled. I am invisible.”

“This has become neutral ground for you. I get it,” Salem surmised.

“I was born first, so my spirit was released first when you made love to yourself. Now, it is my turn to make love to you. I have much to offer a woman. You will enjoy your time with me.”

“Where did you get the black salt? Bring it with you from the ethers?” Salem asked, afraid of Ketiljon’s reply.

Ketiljon laughed. “No! I had a woman buy it for me. It was before I could enter your store.”

“She’s dead, you know,” Salem replied.

“My brother killed her. I told you he is a bad man. It is best you make love with me now, and release my spirit from the bone.”

“I’m not the reincarnation of Grettir, you know,” Salem smirked. “I don’t love you. I don’t know your brother, and I’m not going to have sex with you.”

“I am sorry,” Ketiljon replied.

“You should be!” Salem stormed. “This is the twenty-first century, not the tenth. Women don’t just leap into the arms of the first handsome Viking they meet.”

“No, you don’t understand. I am sorry *for you*. I’m going to have to convince you to give me what it is I need. And you may not like my methods of persuasion.”

Salem didn’t like being pushed around. Especially by a damned ghost on leave from the spirit realm. “No one threatens me in my shop, you son of a bitch. Get out!”

Ketiljon’s bright blue eyes grew flaming yellow and his once absolutely flawless golden complexion took on a gray pallor. “I am going to have to hurt you. You are a very nice woman and to you I shall soon owe a large debt of gratitude. When you have felt pain, perhaps you will offer the artifacts to me and I shall make your pain vanish with my love.”

Before Salem could release the scream forming in her throat, Ketiljon lunged at her, knocking her to the floor. In two quick moves he had her on her belly with her arms twisted around behind her back. She kicked at him with her legs. He screwed her arms tighter.

“Get off me,” she cried. “You’re breaking my arms!”

“I do not sleep. I do not eat. I can hold you here for quite some time. When you say you are ready to comply, we shall make the exchange.” He leaned forward and brushed his lips across her ears.

“I am hard for you.”

Salem squinted, seeing a flash of white dart before her eyes along the wall. The girls hadn’t run off. They were watching. Waiting. As Ketiljon’s hands pawed at her ribcage and the sides of her breasts and his hot breath steamed against the back of her neck, she summoned every bit of

strength she had and called her white rats into action. Every white witch has a familiar, she had two.

Dax ventured away from the safety of the wall first, her tail straight and her eyes burning red. Pheelyx snuck out behind her sister, a bit more intimidated, but heeding the call of her mistress, nevertheless.

Ketiljon bent Salem's wrist back and dropped a knee against the small of her back. He again leaned forward to nuzzle her. "Are you ready, pigeon?"

Attack! Attack him! she cried with her mind, visualizing Dax's sharp teeth sinking into Ketiljon's face. Dax complied.

The white rat leaped like a panther onto Ketiljon's face, biting into his lower lip. Ketiljon shook his head to free himself from the rat's vice-like grip. The rat bit again, chewing through the web on the side of his mouth, blood spurting from her sharp teeth.

In her mind, Salem saw Pheelyx sniff the air, answering the call of blood's primal scent. A caged vegetarian pet rat didn't get a chance to taste blood and she growled at the opportunity. The usually timid of the two dashed to Dax's side and sank her teeth into Ketiljon's chin. Ketiljon screamed as he released Salem, in pain or defeat she didn't know, or care. As soon as her arms were free, Salem rolled and punched her assailant with the skill and fury only a girl born between two brothers could muster.

Ketiljon fought his way to his feet, ripping and clawing at the chubby white rats now scurrying around the back of his neck. They leaped to the table they'd knocked their cage from. Ketiljon wiped his bloody face with his hand and spat. "I'll kill them!"

Salem shook her head. "Not a chance. They're quicker and smarter than you."

Ketiljon snarled at the insult, gingerly touching his swollen, bruised lips with his fingers.

Salem looked around for a weapon, any weapon, and spied an unused floor lamp. In two swift steps she retrieved the floor lamp and swung its heavy base at Ketiljon's head. Her aim was true. The crack of the metal lamp base against her attacker's skull was deafening.

She later recalled more blood and the sound of his body hitting the floor. Later. That moment for her became shrouded with cotton fuzz. Salem went cold.

Then everything went black around her.

* * * *

A gentle rapping at her front door pulled Salem out of her exhausted catatonic state. She tried to stand and take a step forward, catching her balance as her stiff body balked at the movement. What's that sound? The door?

A blood pool had formed around the broken lamp where she'd dropped it...next to Ketiljon. He moaned. Salem tensed. He wasn't dead. She hadn't killed him. She touched him with her foot. No reaction. Unconscious. She'd downed a spirit. Wow. She wondered if she should call an ambulance. Her stomach fluttered. Maybe that hot medic would show up again. What a thing to think after beating the pulp out of someone. She needed help. Professional help. Little bloody footprints led away from the body. Salem made a chirping noise and followed the

rat tracks into the storefront.

There was an eerie calm in the air. Not suffocating, but heavy, like the first moments after spraying a room with air-freshener. Three hours had passed, if she was to believe the concept of time as displayed by her black cat wall clock.

A knocking drew her out of herself again. There *was* someone at the door. The door should have been open. Had it not been open?

Salem stepped closer to the front, continuing to follow the red tracks. She spied Dax, streaked with blood and desperately trying to clean herself inside an empty basket Salem sometimes used to display bundles of sage.

Salem concentrated her sight on the figure outside her shop door.

“Miss Grier!” a voice called. “I can’t get in!”

It was the medic.

“Kane?” Salem called. *Christ! This isn’t a good time to get a cup of tea!* Wait...she needed him.

“Open the door! I can see it’s unlocked,” Salem called.

“The spells, Salem. Remove the spells. There’s black salt everywhere and levels of protection nine layers deep,” Kane replied.

“You’re not human, are you?” Salem asked.

“No, I’m not human—but you must see that I’m harmless. Your familiars aren’t on alert, after all.”

That was true. With Ketiljon they’d stood at attention as if watching a train wreck, so terrible, yet unable to turn away.

“I’ve kind of had a bad day, Kane. I’m not sure shedding my defenses is a good thing right ’bout now,” Salem replied.

“Trust me,” Kane continued. “I am not your enemy. *He* is your enemy, though I cannot call him mine.”

Salem held the impulse to glance backwards. “Of whom do you refer?”

Kane’s voice came softly, “My blood-brother, Ketiljon.”

She again fought the urge to turn around, though the sensation that she was being followed had turned from prickling to churning. “He’s behind me, isn’t he?”

“Salem, remove the spells. Remove them all. Quickly. I can help you.”

She turned her head. Ketiljon had risen to his feet, but was far from a threat at that moment. He seemed confused. Dazed. As he should have been since she’d knocked the crap out of him.

“That’s what he said.”

Kane placed one dusky palm against the glass door. “He is untruthful.”

“And you always tell the truth?” Salem asked.

Kane laughed. “No, I have lied many times. But right now, I am telling you the truth. Listen to me, carefully.” He paused. “Whatever Ketiljon has told you is truth shadowed by jealousy and vindictiveness. He has entered your mind, Salem. He wishes you to believe that I am less of a man so that you will not be attracted to me. He wishes to return, not to make amends for his crimes, but to punish those he believes have wronged him. He has been controlling your personal

fantasies. He is aligned with dark spirits of torment and trickery.”

“Aren’t all those he wants to punish dead? I mean...it’s been a thousand years.”

“Death is irrelevant. There are ways to exact revenge that go beyond the earthly plane, though in Ketiljon’s case, he must return to the living to have an advantage...”

“Over you?” Salem asked.

“Yes.”

Salem strode forward, raising her hands before her, palms toward the door. “Fetters unbreakable forged from the footfall of a cat, the roots of a rock, the beard of a woman, the breath of a fish and the spittle of a bird, allow this being entrance if his intentions are true.”

Kane put his hand on the doorknob and opened the door. An unseen force punched him in the gut. He doubled-over from the blow, trying to catch his breath. Salem repeated the spell. “Fetters unbreakable forged from the footfall of a cat, the roots of a rock, the beard of a woman, the breath of a fish and the spittle of a bird, allow this being entrance if his intentions are true.”

Kane, in obvious pain, his bright green eyes tearing, clenched his fists and took a step forward. “Invite me to enter,” he choked.

Salem cocked her head to one side, thoughtfully. “Would you please come in?” *And rescue me from your evil brother and tell me the truth about my bone dildo and then screw me until I scream.*

Kane nodded. “All of the above, yes. Yes.”

Shit! He heard me! “Did I just say that aloud?” Salem asked.

Kane sloshed through the quagmire of spirit spells trying to stop him. Little by little, his passage grew wider, and easier to tread. “I know your heart, Salem. You are the binding oath of the stone. I can hear your thoughts and your desires as strong as though they are my own.”

Salem turned in alarm as her white rats bolted from the shop to the door between the storefront and the backroom. Looking more like guard dogs than pet rodents, Dax and Pheelyx took defensive positions between Salem and the groggy and slowly moving Ketiljon.

Salem turned back to Kane. “If you know my heart, then prove it.”

“I can defeat him only if you release my soul,” Kane replied.

“What? Now? I have to screw you, now?” Salem exclaimed. “He’s fucking nuts and he’s going to beat and rape me and you want me to drop my drawers and do you? Please! There must be another way.”

Ketiljon stumbled, falling to his knees. “Kane!” he cried. ‘Help me.’”

Kane’s face softened.

Salem shook her head, she could see the genuine love Kane had for his brother. “You wouldn’t dare!”

“We are bound by blood. I know I must defeat him to save many others from his wrath, but my heart bleeds for him.”

“Kane!” Ketiljon cried again.

“I come, brother!” Kane replied. “I shall take you home, and there you shall be healed.”

“Like Hell!” Salem spat.

Kane lowered his gaze, his eyes meeting Salem's. "Let me take him somewhere safe." He winked, mouthing the word *Revenants*.

Salem nodded. He wanted to give his brother to the Revenants. Smart. Very smart.

Kane continued, speaking just loud enough for his ailing brother to hear. "Let me help him. Stand aside. There is strong magic in the very walls of this building that will afford him safety and rejuvenation. Please."

Salem had always liked acting. "No! I'm going to finish him and spell-lock him into...into..." she tried to think of something that would mortify a Viking. "Into a tube of lipstick! Or a box of tampons!"

Ketiljon groaned. "Bitch!" he cried.

Salem turned again and stepped closer to the hunched-over body of Ketiljon. "No. It's *witch*, you lying sack of..."

With the grace of a gazelle, Kane darted past Salem, standing between her and Ketiljon. "We have company," he whispered.

Salem glanced to her right. One of the old whore-spirits had materialized beside her. The turn-of-the-century lingerie, brilliant rouge, and crimson lipstick glowed against her nearly transparent form. Salem knew her.

"Hey, Sal," she said to the Revenant. "You want him?"

The Revenant nodded.

"Release me, Salem. Release me and your household spirits will never want for male company," Kane said softly.

Ketiljon spit blood. "He lies."

Salem shook her head. "No, he's telling me the truth. You reversed the characters in your story. It was you who took Grettir from Kane. It was you who killed my customer and left her body in the alley. And I don't believe the things you put into my head. The sexual relations between you. That's your fantasy, not mine! I get it now. You've been trying to control me, and sway me from releasing Kane. You stupid son of a bitch! I'm not a tenth century woman ready to believe anything that pops out of a man's mouth."

Ketiljon spit blood. "I am dying, brother! This wicked white witch has knocked what life force I had from me. I am dying!"

Salem shook her head in disbelief. "The dead can't die. Go back to Hell, Ketiljon." She stripped off her shirt and threw her arms around Kane's neck. "Kiss me, Kane."

Mashing like teenagers in heat, Salem fell against Kane frantically. Urgently. Lips locked to hers in eager exploration, he dragged her to the floor behind her counter, ripping at her clothing while she tugged recklessly at his. The desperation of the moment drove her to complete the act with little or no foreplay. Not that she needed any.

She took control, urging Kane onto his back. He had a trim, muscular body. His chest was covered by delicate little black curls that trailed down his tight belly to his groin. As much as she was ready for sex, so was he. Salem squatted above his thick member, holding on to the display case countertop with her left hand to steady herself as she reached between her legs and guided

him into her.

As her softness enveloped him, Ketiljon emitted a sickening gurgling noise. Salem pushed her body down as hard as she could to swallow all of Kane.

Salem felt Sally's ghostly hands stroking her hair and shoulders as she rode Kane. And it wasn't Kane's lips across her breasts and bottom, either. Other Revenants had appeared. Their none-too-subtle encouragement of Salem's sex act with Kane was far from a distraction. She felt like she was in a horse race, and they were the crowd cheering her on.

Between Kane's moans, Salem heard a steady murmur of words in Old Norse. She recognized the incantation. It was a form of *Galdr*, a sing-song chanting spell.

Kane's voice became increasingly strained as he came closer and closer to orgasm. His breathing was labored and the words of his spell became nearly indiscernible. Salem recognized the name Freyja repeated several times, though she, too, had difficulty concentrating on the spell. She gave up trying to decipher Kane's words as the invisible tongue lapping at her clitoris and the throbbing penis embedded inside her sent her into a climactic state she didn't know mere mortals could experience.

Her world went dark as she came. Dark like the man under her. Dark like the ethereal prison he'd been trapped in for so long. Dark like his brother's tainted soul.

Her eyes were sealed shut and she did not witness Ketiljon's departure. But she heard it. The protesting. The rage. The joyful laughter of the Revenants.

* * * *

Salem opened her eyes slowly. Fluttering open like little butterfly wings, her lids wanted to remain closed, afraid of the light. A brilliant blue light. Kane's earthly aura; a deep, rich healing blue.

Soft, full, warm, moist lips pressed against hers. "Kane," she sighed.

"Yes."

"Is it over?" she asked.

"Thanks to you, yes. Ketiljon will not be lonely in his confinement; and your house spirits are most certainly going to enjoy the passion of their new guest for a very long time."

"My artifacts?" Salem asked.

Kane laughed. "Always the businesswoman! Here I am ready to make love to you again and you think about business!"

"If Ketiljon went with the Revenants when I released you from the *Viking Member*, did it destroy...?"

Kane silenced her with a kiss, his tongue flicking against her lips until she responded in kind.

"The magic is drained from the bone, and Salem, you were the magic of the Odin Stone. The artifacts were spell-crafted for pleasure, but now, that magic has drained away, leaving only valuable antiques for you to keep or to sell. A woman has more magic in her than any sacred object. You channeled their magic. We channeled their magic. And the Revenants captured Ketiljon."

“Now what happens?” Salem asked. She let Kane kiss her throat and shoulders. She felt his long fingers slide between her legs.

“Right now, I want to make love to you again,” Kane replied. “I need to thank you.”

He trailed his kisses across her smallish, round breasts, stopping to suckle her dark pink nipples before turning his attention to the curve of her belly and beyond. “It has been such a long time since I have tasted a woman’s flesh. There is nothing sweeter.”

“Grettir?” Salem asked.

“Yes, but that was long ago.”

“I’d like to hear your version of the story someday,” Salem replied.

“It starts like this,” Kane said, pushing his tongue through her nether lips to coax her bud from hiding.

Salem relaxed her legs, opening them to allow Kane full access. “I think I’m going to like this story,” she whispered.

The End

About the Author:

Darragha lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and daughter, in a one-hundred-sixteen-year-old house that is continually under renovation. The house is haunted by the spirit of a Union Civil War-era soldier who seems to enjoy watching the construction every now and then.

Someday, he may turn up as a character in one of Darragha's stories. Darragha’s pretty certain the old gods are happy with *‘Teaching Old Gods New Tricks’* as two ravens have been hanging out in her yard for months.

She’s named the birds ‘Thought’ and ‘Memory’ after Odin’s ravens and tips her cup of joe in mock-salute to the symbolic birdies every so often, just to keep on the gods’ good side—’cause sometimes we choose our gods—and sometimes they choose us.