

THE BLACKSMITH AND THE ICE ELVES  
A STORY OF THRÚDHEIM  
by Morgon Newquist

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**MORGON NEWQUIST**

Sample file

The sun had not been seen for days, and for days they had waited with baited breath. The winter winds from the dread mountains to the east had come early, and soon after them came the tales. By the time the deep and dark and unnatural clouds had rolled into Austr, they had heard all the stories from the fleeing small folk. They knew what was coming for them, but could do nothing but wait. The storms that came with blinding snow made it so they could not leave. So they waited in the bleak darkness for the great horrors from the mountains, a horror they could not stop as they were only a tiny town, and much greater towns had fallen before them. All of their men were gone on the king's orders, to defend against the raids of Jötunheim. To fight against men, when monsters were pouring from the mighty peaks of the Andlåtbergs. They were alone, defenseless, and trapped.

Still, the few men that were left did what they could to fortify their town. Some of them attempted to dig an escape path into the woods for whoever could make it out, but the attempt was futile. The snow fell so heavily that any progress they made was covered over within minutes. Eventually, once they had done what they could or given up on shoveling snow, they settled down to wait, for there was nothing else to do.

Their town was so small that it did not even have a skald to tell their tale. It only had Nollarr, the local blacksmith, to act as a leader. Nollarr was the only man older than fourteen and younger than sixty that remained; all the rest had gone west. He was a big, nondescript man with a brown beard and brown hair, and had no formal schooling and no riches to call his own.

Despite the apparent futility of many of the tasks, Nollarr could not sit still and wait. He made the rounds around the town, plodding through the thigh-high snow. He kept the bellows going in his smithy and herded many of the children into the room so they would stay warm. He worked with grandmothers to fill cracks in the houses with fabric and wool. Anything to keep his hands busy and the fear at bay, and anything to ease the bitterness of the cold. Who knew, perhaps the monsters from the mountains would pass over Austr, ignoring it because of its insignificance. Or maybe the tales were over exaggerated. Nollarr had always been an optimist, and keeping his townspeople from falling to despair was important. They would face whatever was coming, but he saw no reason to completely abandon hope.

As the force of the terrible blizzard increased, Nollarr made the trek back to his smithy after checking on a grandmother and her orphaned grandchildren. He was almost there, standing near the area in the street that could debatably be called the town square when he stopped. He had been contemplating the icicles forming in his beard, but now the hair on his neck was rising. Something was different. The blizzard was getting worse, but now it had the tingle of magic behind it. They were all used to the low, swirling thrum of the wild magic from the forests, but this electrified the air. Powerful magic rolled into the town, and they were all the more sensitive to it because it was not a force that mankind could wield.

All around him Nollarr started to see yellow pinpricks of light as the villagers opened their doors to try and see what was changing. Was it the enemy? Was it finally time? Everyone peered into the snowy grey, and saw the vague outlines of at least half a dozen

cloaked figures.

The small party came into Austr, barely leaving a mark in the freshly fallen snow. No one saw them before they entered the town because they were so pale and the snow was so thick. They might have been feared, if refugees had not been so common in the recent months. They might also have been driven out as monsters, if eye-witnesses had not been so sure of the size and might of the coming enemy. But they were definitely not human. The villagers could easily see that as they peered out their windows and doors at the newcomers.

The figures were tall and lithe and grey upon white upon grey. They were colorless – almost blank, a part of the swirling winter storm that surrounded them. Only their eyes – almond-shaped, wide and ice blue – had any color at all. In fact, only a few of them even had that color to call their own. The white and grey made them easily vanish into the blowing snow and the bleak light.

They were angular and lovely, and the power and beauty of winter radiated from them. They were clad in white fox-fur cloaks edged in pale blue silk and lined in heavy, dark grey fur. With their snow white skin and grey, silver and white hair, it was not too difficult for the elders in Austr to recognize the elves of the north. They had not been seen out of Svartalfheim in three centuries, but here they were, in a party of six, coming to treat with them in their tiny, unimportant town in the mountains.

Only one or two of the inhabitants of Austr had ever seen even a southern elf, who were more human-like than the six elven men standing in front of the smithy, so the party had a number of cautious followers that not even the blizzard could keep indoors.

After stopping in one of the open doors to speak to some of the residents, the elves turned and approached Nollarr after he was pointed out to them.

Nollarr watched them walking towards him, their feet moving lightly on top of the snow that he had left a two foot deep furrow in, and felt momentarily panicked. He knew nothing about elves, only the legends told to him by his grandfather in the evenings. He was not even the proper leader of the town. He was definitely not the type of man trained to deal with a foreign envoy. How should he greet them? Were they here to help? What if he caused an incident that would cause problems for Midgard? But none of these worries mattered; it did him no good to fret about the fate of Midgard when he couldn't even properly save his own home. Nollarr lifted his chin up in an effort to look more leader-like, and waited for them.

Despite his obvious lack of station and experience, the legendary elves greeted him with a deep bow, one of great respect.

“My name is Samr, envoy of Lyv the Winter Lily, Queen of Svartalfheim,” the leader said formally, straightening up and standing taller than even Nollarr's large frame. He spoke in the tongue of the north men, though it was heavily accented.

Nollarr, still shocked by the appearance of creatures from bedtime stories, was only able to stare for several moments. Their faces, while beautiful, were just human enough to be unsettling to him. And their poise and deference to him only confused him further. He bowed awkwardly after a moment, thinking of his frozen beard, sooty face, and stained clothes. What a sight he must be to these elves.

"Nollarr, um...blacksmith." was the brief response he gave, sharing his name with them. All six of the elves nodded their heads deeply in acknowledgement, and stated their own names.

Nollarr beckoned for them to move out of the snow into his smithy, where their otherworldly faces and lack of color only became more vivid standing in the orange light of his forge. There was a long silence, and cold wind whipped about the room as the front door stayed open so the people crowding in the streets could hear what was going on.

"Why are you here?" was the best question he could muster to fill the silence. He tried to sound polite rather than accusatory.

"We are half of an envoy sent to your King Haral about the army awakening in the mountains," said one of the other elves, one of the envoy who did not even have color in his eyes. Nollarr remembered that he had introduced himself as Eder.

"Our trek has been plagued with poor luck. Unnaturally poor luck, some might say," said Ake while frowning deeply. The other elves nodded in agreement.

"The blizzard?" Nollarr asked in understanding.

"No, we are not slowed by the blizzards, not even this one, that the enemy uses to cover their movement and keep their victims from fleeing," Eder answered. Nollarr was embarrassed; he had just watched them walk on snow, and the legend was that their capital city was built in the middle of a great frozen lake. Of course the blizzard did not inconvenience them.

"Rock slides, avalanches, missing bridges, feral animals attacking us in the night, and misaligned stars sending us in the wrong direction," Ake explained.

"Some power greater than us is trying to keep us from reaching Sjavik. I only hope our brethren have fared better," Samr finished. The air in the smithy where they stood was thick with anxiety and smoke.

"What do you need from us? Maps? Supplies? A guide? With your help in the blizzard, one of us can help guide you to Sjavik," Nollarr instantly volunteered. The whole town couldn't be moved, but if he could help the elves reach his king, then it might save his country from this unexpected attack.

Samr held up his hand for Nollarr to stop speaking.

"No," he began, and frowned slightly. "The enemy is on our heels. The force of the Andlåtbergs is upon us. We will not make it to the coast."

There were cries of despair from the crowd at his words. Even though they had all been preparing for this, hearing that the monsters were so close filled them all with terror.

And Nollarr understood. It was clear that the elves did not think they would make it much farther in their journey.

"What is coming?" Someone from the crowd shouted. They had all heard the rumors. But were they true?

Samr turned in the direction that the voice had come from.

"The Frost Giants. They have awoken from their enchanted sleep," he explained, and the murmuring from the crowd grew louder. If the long vanished ice elves had appeared, why not the frost giants? It was a night of fairy tale creatures. And the two races

had always been at odds. One almost couldn't have Ice Elves without Frost Giants.

The crowd continued to talk amongst themselves in panicked voices.

After a moment, the big blacksmith embraced the elf who had come to their rescue, and Samr awkwardly returned the gesture, surprised. Men and women alike fell to their knees in thanks, convinced that their salvation had come at the hands of the mythical elves that lived in cities built upon frozen lakes. The elves, saddened by the reactions of the humans, tried to bid them to stand. Unlike the people of Austr, they knew their own limits, and they knew the power of the monsters in the mountains. They did not bring the salvation that the small folk thought they did.

Whispers spread like wildfire throughout the town. Only the elves could conquer the magic that raged in the cold, wild places of the world. Only elves could bend it to their will. Anyone else who tried died in fire and in pain. Surely this ability would allow them to stop the coming storm.

Nollarr, Samr, and the other tall and silent elves of his party worked late into the night. What men and supplies they had formed a weak perimeter around the small settlement. The elves became beacons in the town overcome with snow; they could see in the darkness and the grey, and they lit up the night with their sorcery.

A large group of older boys from the town were working with Nollarr, following in the wake of Olin and Eder, two of the elves. Eder used his magic to blast an ice wall that was several inches thick fifteen feet high into the sky. Olin stood on the east side of the wall, lining it with large and sharp spikes to skewer the front lines of the invading force. Once they were finished, this would circle half the town, and provide one more line of defense. It was better than nothing, which is what they'd had before the elves arrived.

The group of boys reinforced the west side of the wall, packing snow behind it a couple of feet deep and as high as they could. There was certainly no snow shortage, so they might as well do something useful with it. One of the other elves would come back through and use his magic to reach the places that men couldn't. Anything to slow down the invaders and give both the elves and the humans extra seconds to kill them was worth trying.

Nollarr doggedly pushed large piles of snow against the wall and packed it in, his hands freezing even through the thick gloves he was wearing. It was hard work that made him sweat under all of his clothes, but it was so cold that the sweat on his face was freezing almost instantly. Every once and a while he stopped shoving snow to flick salty ice crystals off his brow, and then he returned to his work. It was hard not to feel encouraged by the appearance of the elves, despite the fact that the elves insisted to him privately that they could not save them from the frost giants. At this point, perhaps they had a chance. They had already done more for Austr than Nollarr could have even dreamed of doing on his own.

It was when he took another break, the boys beside him still working with their young, manic energy, that he noticed Samr and one of the other elves approaching him through the snow again. They stopped at his side, motioning that he should step away from his work and come speak to them.

"I have been thinking," Samr began, sounding slightly hesitant. There was a pause