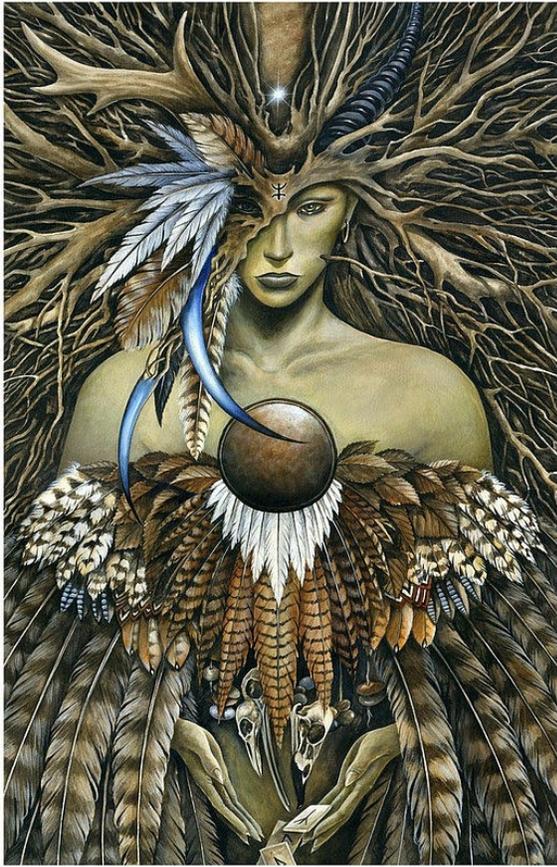


The Story of Who Owns the Land

The old ones say that Freya, Eartha, mother of all, goddess of the plow, mistress of cats, she of the sacred 13 moons, goddess of love, the great Sow Mother, comes riding on Fridays to dispense her wisdom to those who seek it and to engender the lives of those weary in body and sick at heart. It is on Fridays that the people eat of her sacred fish, bathe themselves in perfumed hot waters, and cling to their beloveds with sweet abandon.



“FREYA” BY MARC POTTS

hissed Ottar, “I’d take it from you!”

“I’ll use whatever I please to grow my crops on my land, Ottar,” rasped Angantyr.

“No poison!” yelled Ottar

Freya comes riding, they say, in her chariot of light, drawn by 13 cats as sleek and black as night. Swift and silent she comes, they say, to those who call out her name for comfort and truth. So quick and noiseless is she, they say, that always someone forgets her power and forgets to call out her name.

That is so now, and it was so even a thousand years ago on a Friday night in the dead of winter, under the shining Moon.

Two neighbors stood there in the snow shaking their fists and shouting at one another. Friends and relatives bundled in furs circled them stamping and calling punctuation to their fight.

“This Land is mine, fool!” yelled the taller one, whose name was Angantyr.

“It’s mine, I tell you,” said Ottar, the other. He put his face close to Angantyr and jabbed his finger. “And even if it weren’t mine, Angantyr,”

“No poison! No poison!” the friends of Ottar took up the cry.

The argument had begun three years before when Angantyr began to use poison to kill weeds and insects on the rich black land. Angantyr said poison made his work easier and gave him a bigger crop. Ottar said easier or bigger, he didn't care. He would have no poison on his soil, and he said the poison their leached into his water too. Ottar brought a rabbit he'd found bloated and dead to the house of Angantyr

“See what your poison does, and? Take your poison and get out!” he had ordered.

“You get out, Ottar, if you know what's good for you,” Angantyr had responded, slamming his door in Ottar's face. And the two neighbors had bickered and raged at each other until tonight, when they stood, sticks in hand, under the shining Moon.

“Wait,” said a hoarse voice. The excited folk moved aside to let an old woman makeup have to the two angry men. The people recognized her by her voice and her limp as the one the goddess speaks through. They saw that with her she dragged a huge bag that twisted and grunted with a live thing inside.

“Ottar and Angantyr,” she wheezed. “Freya shall decide on the question of your land.”

The group of neighbors crowded close and a noise rose up among them when the old woman open the bag. Out of the opening and on to the snow lumbered a huge mother pig, swollen with the babies she had inside her.

“Freya,” the old woman whispered. The light from the moon shone down on the white and pink of the sow's back, and the animal stood perfectly still.

“Freya,” whisper the people and stepped a little away.

Ottar and Angantyr stood breathing hard, but quiet now. The old woman look sharply at Ottar and then Angantyr and pulled from her hands the skins that covered them. Slowly the two men knelt in the snow. The old woman set a hand each on the shoulders of the kneeling enemies and looked up at the Moon.

“Freya!” her voice quivered in the stillness. Then a shutter passed through her. “The rightful owner of this land knows who has owned this land before him,” she said. “The one of you who can name the most names of the owner shout on the land. You shall have until the next full moon.”

The old woman dropped her hands.

“So be it!” said the people and dispersed into the night.

Angantyr and Ottar spent the next month gathering the names of the owners who had come before them. People buzzed with opinions and conjectures about which of the men would have the longest list. Some said angantyr was sure to win, as he had the best memory. Others said Ottar should win because he loved the land best.

“It’s not a matter of love!” said the others. “Freya requires the names of the owners who came before. That is all. Whoever has the longest list shall own the Land.”

So the Saturdays and the Sundays, the Mondays and the Tuesdays, the Wednesdays and the Thursdays and the Fridays rolled around and away. On the night of the next full moon, the people gathered in a barn at the edge of Ottar and Angantyr’s land. When they arrived, they found that the one the goddess speaks through was already there. By the side of a small fire she knelt, next to a mound of hay on which lay the great mother sow. At each of the huge pig’s 13 teats suckled a tiny white and black piglet. The stillness, filled only with the crackle of the fire and the grunts of the babies, was broken by the tramp and bustle of the people. Only when Ottar and Angantyr came and the old woman rose did the people hush.

“Freya hears you now, Angantyr,” said the old woman.

Angantyr puffed out his chest and cleared his throat. “I have searched,” he said loudly. “By listening to the elders, by reading the records, and by my own memory, I know the ownership of my land backward for seven generations.”

A ripple of approval moved through the friends of Angantyr. Seven generations reached far back into time, and if Angantyr could name those names, surely he would win. Ottar could not possibly name names farther back than seven generations.

In a proud voice, Angantyr recited the names of the owners who’d come before him, calling each one the son of the next. His friends cheered when he finished.

“Freya will hear you now, Ottar,” said the old woman.

Ottar, too, cleared his throat. “There are 20 generations right now on my land,” he said. “And each of those generations who owns this land goes backward to the beginning of time.”

The people's voices rose. What could he mean? 20 generations? When Angantyr had had 7? Impossible. Ottar was lying.

“Wait,” said the old woman. Then she called for another stick of wood for the fire. “Speak Ottar,” she said. The people silenced themselves.

When Ottar spoke, he did not name the human names of a line of Fathers and sons. instead he named the mold and the mushrooms, the worm and the grass, the insects and the herb, The spider and the flower, the bee and the mouse, the mole and the minnow, the turtle and the frog, the snake and the tree, the squirrel and the rabbit, and the fox and the hawk.

“They are the owners of the land,” said Ottar. “Then and now and forever.”

And so it was that Ottar that night won the argument with Angantyr. Nevermore, while those men lived, did Poison for weeds or insects spoil the soil and water of that place.

Things were different in older times, the old ones say, and some are sure that such wisdom is never more to be heard from the great Sow Mother.

But there are those who swear that on a Friday night, especially a Friday of the sacred number 13, the wisdom of Freya, the great Sow Mother, can be had by those who called down her chariot of light drawn by her sleek black cats whose eyes wink slow as the Stars.