

THE SEASTORM IN YOUR MIND IS GRIM THAN THE REALITY

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The floorboards creak and groan as Vragi, a young eighteen year old boy of average height, paces back and forth. His dark grey-coated wolf watched him with bright yellow eyes as he lounged on the boy's bed, his head laying on his paws. "I can't do this, Qlvir," Vragi's hands grip his short, light brown locks, his amber-brown eyes wide and frantic. He is nervous. And frightened. Today, Vragi has decided to tell his mother, Jarl Brynja, a deep secret he has kept for many years. The boy was not ashamed of this secret, he will firmly tell you such, but he was *very* close to his mother.

Vragi doesn't remember his father much, he had died from touching a poisonous mushroom when Vragi was six and he didn't have much of a connection with him anyway. But he does remember the 'values' that were instilled before his death.

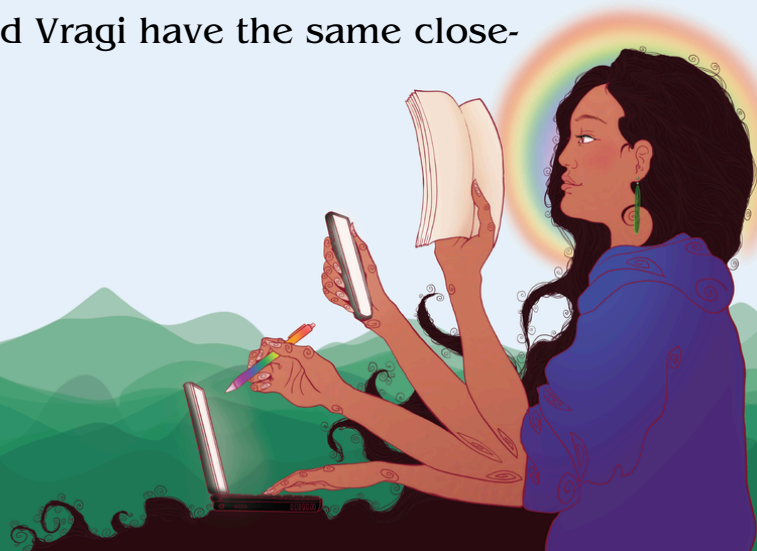
"It is a sin to make love before marriage, son," Alvin said while Brynja was at the Things held once a year. "But that is something you can be forgiven for. What cannot be forgiven is marrying the same gender."

Vragi, in the present, stopped pacing; he hugs himself tightly as the memory continues.

"How so, Father?" Vragi had innocently asked. Alvin turned from the fire, staring at Vragi with hard eyes.

"Because it is wrong. Unnatural. To like the same gender is to work with the Devil. No one likes someone like that, no matter how much they love and care for that person. And you won't either, understand?"

Vragi squeezes his eyes shut, wishing away the image of his younger self nodding. How could Alvin have thought of such things? How could Vragi agree with such things?! How could Vragi have the same close-mindedness when he—



A click and creak echoes from the front of the home. Qlvir perks up, panting excitedly as Vragi swivels around to look at his door. "Vragi! I'm home!" it was Jarl Brynja, Vragi's mother. A sudden shove from Vragi's behind causes him to stumble. He watches as Qlvir runs from behind him and to the door, looking at the boy expectantly. The brunette nibbles on his bottom lip, eyeing the door. "You think I can do it, Qlvir?..." the wolf barks loudly then scratches the door. Vragi takes a deep breath, placing a hand on his chest as he releases the air, then leaves his room with determination.

Brynja is in the dining area, having already unpacked a woven basket of freshly caught fish and is chopping off their heads and slicing them open. It's for dinner. Vragi assumes. His steps slowed, his previous courage slowly ebbing away as he entered the room, Qlvir yips as he rushes past to Brynja, rubbing his head against the woman's leg.

"Hail, Vragi," her hand holding a butcher's cleaver slams down on the fish, the head flying off the table and perfectly into a wooden box on the floor. "I was wondering where you were hiding." she jokes, grabbing a smaller knife and piercing the underside.

"Hail, Mother..." Vragi twists the sleeve of his shirt in his hand, watching his mother's quick, practised movements with frightened eyes. "I was in my room, with Qlvir." Brynja glances at her son, her eyes barely visible to Vragi as two strands of hair frame her face; the rest of her hair in a high ponytail with a few braids. Blue eyes refocus onto her task, removing the scales from the fish.

"Hm... Did you go to the smith this morning?" Brynja inquired, her accent clear but her tone mysterious. Vragi swallowed thickly.

"I did. The logs are by the leather. I'll go get them-" the boy hoped to make a swift escape, prolong the inevitable. However, his mother knew him too well and was ready for it.

"The logs can wait; I need to let the fish dry out for a while." Brynja plops the freshly cut fish meat with the ones she had done before and chucks the remains to Qlvir to gnaw on.



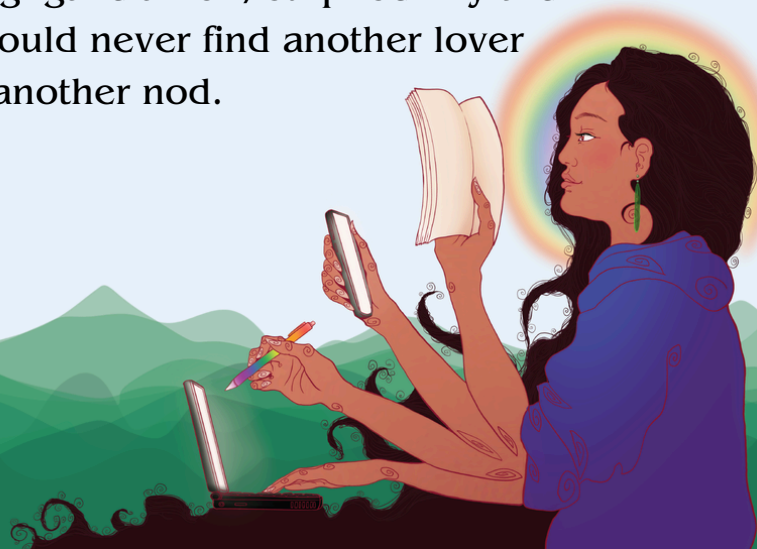
"I'm going to make your favourite. Fish-pork stew." that is Vragi's favourite. Filled with cut potatoes and carrots from the garden, the liquid stew boiled and seasoned to a perfect tang before being mixed with the fish body and beaten pork. Vragi's eyes burned with tears. He might not get it tonight, or any other night after he tells his mother.

"Mother, there is something, something I must tell you..." he takes a wobbly step closer, his hands wringing together. Brynja stops moving after another hard chop. She stops to let Vragi know he has her attention. The boy keeps his eyes cast to the aged wood flooring, too scared to meet his mother's eyes, to see the disappointment and disgust appear once he shares his secret. "I hadn't meant to leave it for so long, but I never felt ready to tell you about this," Vragi's heart races as Brynja lets go of the knife, leaving it wedged in the table to turn her body to him. "But I think...I think now I should tell you, otherwise I'll never get another chance and it will never be said," his hands and eyes squeeze together, a single tear escaping down Vragi's cheek. "I love men." There. It was out in the open. Now, to await punishment. The silence after is deafening to the poor boy.

The frightened Norse boy hears a soft sigh and soft steps on the wood. "Vragi," a gentle hand is placed on said boy's shoulder. "Look at me." Vragi didn't want to, didn't want to see the betrayal in her eyes, yet he does anyway. Slowly, he lifted his head and opened his teary brown eyes. He is shocked to find his mother smiling at him, but there seems to be nothing Vragi expected to see expressed by his mother. Brynja's blue eyes are kind and soft, a little glassy, too. "If you expect me to be mad about it then sorry to disappoint you, son, but I am not; if anything, I'm more angry at your Father than you."

Vragi's brows furrowed. "Wh-what?" Brynja gave a wet chuckle, cupping her son's cheek.

"Little Dragon, do you remember when I told you I didn't marry your Father out of love but out of duty?" Vragi gave a nod, surprised by the gentleness of her voice. "And I said I would never find another lover because I was not interested in love?" another nod.



"If you remember that, then you'll remember that I do not *think* like him – no one in our village thinks like that. Everyone here loves differently; some are wed to more than one person, some are in love with the same gender, and others prefer both or no one!

"I married your Father so our village would have some sort of truce with his town, not on the premise that we would *think* or *act* like them." Brynja cups her son's face with another hand, wiping away his tears with her thumbs. "If you love men then that is alright, my darling, don't let your Father's words run your mind. *Your* voice should run *your* mind, no one else." Vragi inhales sharply before releasing a sob.

"But-but what if no one likes me for it?" the dark brunette wraps her arms around her son, tugging him into a tight hug which he returns.

"My son, listen to my words," Brynja says into her son's hair. "It is better to leave the dark than stay in it. In the light there are only shadows that are small and weak compared to the sun. In the dark you are forever afraid and the darkness will forever be strong and cold.

"Just because outside, in the light, there is still some darkness it doesn't mean you should go hide forever, you can push through the shadows and find warmth with support of those who love you for *you*." Vragi hands fist the back of Brynja's dress, sobbing uncontrollably into her chest. Some tears fall from Brynja's eyes as she holds her son tightly. Her heart breaks that she couldn't have addressed this sooner, to avoid her son such ache and to feel afraid to tell her something like this.

Qlvir circles around his two owners, whimpering softly as he rubs his head against Vragi's legs. After a minute or so, Vragi's sobs dissipated into small sniffles and occasional sobs. Brynja caressed his head, still holding him tightly.

"I guess that explains the times you snuck out in the night, hm?" Vragi chokes and his mother laughs.

"Mother!" he shrieks, looking up at her. "You knew the whole time?!"



Brynja's laughter bellows across the longhouse, "Of course I did! I'm your Mother, *and* these floorboards like to snitch." to prove her point, Brynja leaned on one foot, earning a groan from the floorboards. Vragi groans, squishing his face back into her chest, Brynja laughs louder and Qlvir barks as he wags his tail, happy for the playful atmosphere. Brynja's laughs died down into quiet snickers, she stroked Vragi's hair some more. "Will I meet him soon?" Vragi stayed silent, thinking it over. Would Brynja accept his lover?

Yes, she would, because Alvin was wrong; loving someone the same gender as you is *not* a sin. As Brynja said, the light with some shadows is better than eternal darkness full of pain day and night. There will be people like Alvin, but there will always be people like Brynja, like Vragi, like everyone here, and that was enough for Vragi; it was enough for him to know he was not alone and that he can still have his place with his clan.

"Whenever you're free, Mother." Vragi finally said, resting his cheek on his mother's chest, squeezing his arms around her tighter. "You can meet him whenever you're free." Brynja adjusted her hold on him, too, scratching her fingers lightly on Vragi's scalp and threading them in his hair.

"He can come for dinner tonight, I have enough ingredients to make a bigger meal - assuming he's not opposed to pork or fish? I've met a few people who hate pork but are fine with other meat or prefer no fish." Brynja's voice held a light-hearted smile. It must have been contagious because Vragi could feel a smile making its way onto his face, small but there.

"No, he's fine with fish and pork. Whenever we'd have our late-night outings he would smoke fish for us to eat."

Brynja pulls away, much to Vragi's dismay, and returns to the table, "Ah, that's good," she begins to cut up more fish. "He's already providing for you, so he has my blessing!" Vragi's face erupted into a hot blush.



"Mother!" laughter, barks and half-hearted groans echo around the home, signalling to any who passed and to the Gods that would hear from above that the love in the home has not only stayed intact but has grown several amounts that afternoon.

