



the
AIRY QUEEN
and the **SHEPHERD**

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HO, ASSEIR, I HAVE COME LOOKING FOR WORK. HAVE YOU ALREADY TAKEN ON A SHEPHERD FOR THE WINTER?



I WOULD BE SURPRISED IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD ABOUT HOW THINGS GO HERE FOR SHEPHERDS EVERY YEAR DURING YULETIDE.

THEY ARE FOUND LIFELESS JUST OUTSIDE THE FARMHOUSE AND NO CAUSE CAN BE DISCERNED AS TO HOW OR WHY.



I WON'T EMPLOY ANOTHER MAN TO MEET HIS END AT THE HANDS OF FORCES UNSEEN. LET FATE CARE FOR THE SHEEP OR THE SHEEP CARE FOR THEMSELVES.



I HAVE HEARD OF YOUR TROUBLES HERE. I DON'T LET SUCH THINGS CAUSE ME MUCH CONCERN.

I'VE DEALT HARSH TREATMENT TO MEN AND GHOSTS AND HAVE NO FEAR OF CURSES OR THE DARK OF NIGHT.

I'LL TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR SHEEP REGARDLESS OF WHAT MISCHIEF IS AFOOT.

I CAN SEE THERE IS LITTLE HOPE OF DISSUADING YOU FROM YOUR INTENTIONS.



I SUSPECT THINGS WILL GO THE SAME DIRECTION AS ALWAYS AND I'LL BE BURYING ANOTHER SHEPHERD AFTER YULE AS MY FARM BECOMES MORE A GRAVEYARD.





IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER WORKERS, THERE WAS ALSO A HOUSEKEEPER AT ASSEIR'S FARM.



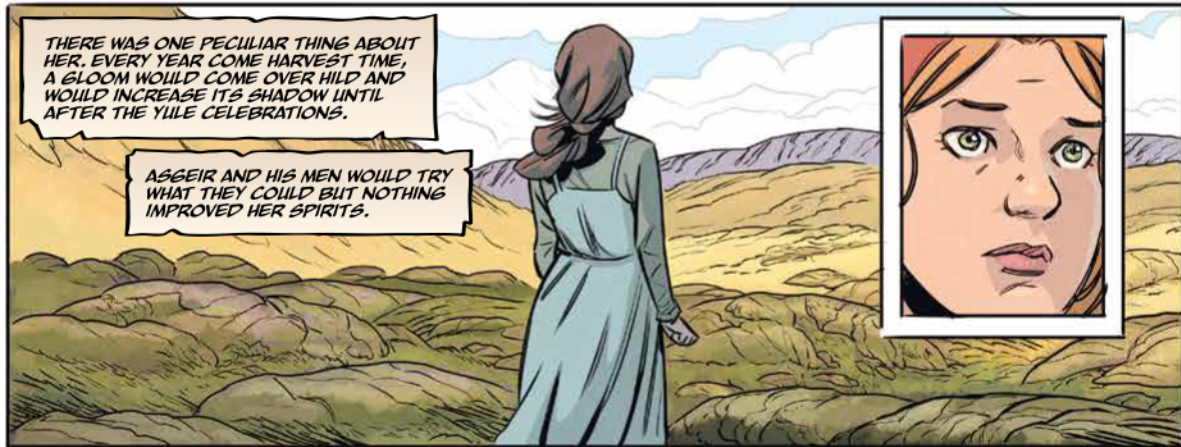
HILD WAS HER NAME.



SHE WAS FASTIDIOUS AND KIND AND WELL-LIKED BY ASSEIR'S HOUSEHOLD...

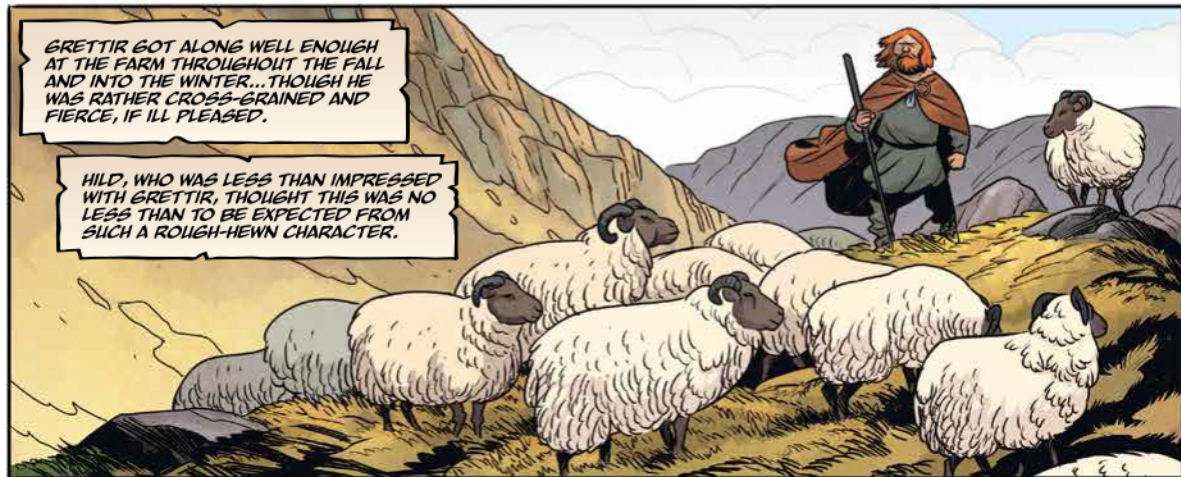


...AND ANIMALS ALIKE.



THERE WAS ONE PECULIAR THING ABOUT HER. EVERY YEAR COME HARVEST TIME, A BLOOM WOULD COME OVER HILD AND WOULD INCREASE ITS SHADOW UNTIL AFTER THE YULE CELEBRATIONS.

ASSEIR AND HIS MEN WOULD TRY WHAT THEY COULD BUT NOTHING IMPROVED HER SPIRITS.



GRETTIR GOT ALONG WELL ENOUGH AT THE FARM THROUGHOUT THE FALL AND INTO THE WINTER...THOUGH HE WAS RATHER CROSS-GRAINED AND FIERCE, IF ILL PLEASED.

HILD, WHO WAS LESS THAN IMPRESSED WITH GRETTIR, THOUGHT THIS WAS NO LESS THAN TO BE EXPECTED FROM SUCH A ROUGH-HEWN CHARACTER.

HARSH WINTER WINDS ANNOUNCED THE YULETIDE DAYS. AS WAS CUSTOMARY AT THAT TIME, ASGEIR AND HIS HOUSEHOLD PREPARED TO ATTEND A FEAST AT THE LOCAL GODI'S HALL.



A WHAT?



A GODI,
A LOCAL CHIEFTAIN.



GRETTIR, RIDE WITH US NOW. DO NOT TEND THE SHEEP TONIGHT. IT IS ALWAYS DURING YULETIDE THAT THE SHEPHERD DIES.



HILD WILL BE SAFE ENOUGH IN THE HOUSE. WHATEVER IT IS, GHOLL OR BEAST, IT HAS NOT THE COURAGE TO BREACH THE DWELLINGS OF MEN.

IT LURKS OUT THERE IN THE MOUNTAINS AND WILL COME UPON YOU OUT IN THE COLD NIGHT AIR.



I'LL TEND THE SHEEP AS I'VE DONE SINCE I ARRIVED. WHAT'S MORE, I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A LOOK AT THIS GHOLL WHICH GIVES YOU SUCH TREMORS.



THEN I THINK THESE WILL BE THE LAST WORDS WE SHARE, GRETTIR ASMUNDARSON.

