

-CHAPTER 02-

-Turid, The Berzerk-

Months later, on the Karadra Mountains:

A young girl, about the age of thirteen, stepped out of her animal hide hut and into the early morning moonlight. The small, snow-covered village she stood in was littered with huts of varying hides and sizes, smoke billowing from the top of a few as some of the individual hut fires finally burn out after having burned through the night. Her name was Turid and she was intentionally up earlier than anyone else in the village. She had plans. She was dressed in tanned and fitted animal hide, mostly of a lighter shade coming from several pelts of smaller animals. She'd tied back her dark red, curly hair with a thin strap of leather. Having spent her entire life in the village, she showed no physical sign of being effected by the cold temperature or the ankle high snow. In her hands she held a large axe, a common weapon for barbarians, which Turid and her people were a variation of. Her father told her and her brother that it was her grandfather that led a clan of his people away from the Barbarian Forest and up into the mountains, starting their own culture and history.

Turid's little brother, Gunnar, stepped out of the hut right after her, grabbing her arm, trying to slow her down. But she continued forward, pulling him through the snow.

"Turid, don't go!" he begged her.

"Quiet, before you wake the whole village!" she sternly lectured Gunnar in a less than quiet whisper.

"But... if you die... then I will be all alone."

He sounded pathetic and it was breaking Turid's heart.

"I promise you that I will not die," she swore with all her heart as she hugged him.

"How soon will I see you?"

"Before breakfast." She flashed him a reassuring smile and he flashed her one back, but neither one was convincing the other.

Turid began her long trek up the steep mountain. It was slow moving as she lifted one leg at a time out of the ever-deepening snow. She took a second to look back down at her village, planted an equal distance from the top of the mountain range as from the bottom. And today she was heading for the highest point.

As the snow deepened to knee height, she cut her eyes up to a barely visible cave - no more than a black dot on an

otherwise white canvass. The steep hills reached up and broke into several peaks as if the hands of a giant god froze while grasping upward toward the thawing power of the morning sun.

The clouds seemed to skim along the tips of the peaks, the dusty snow swirling off gently with each gust of wind, pushing the sprinkling white powder down the slopes and against Turid's face. And as each flake melted against her equally pale skin, she felt the evil traveling down with it, coming from the dweller in the cave, the one they call The Dream Maker.

Turid's intentions were simple. She would reach the cave and speak to the Dream Maker. She would tell the Dream Maker what happened to her parents. She would curse the Dream Maker for what happened to her parents. And then she would kill the Dream Maker for what happened to her parents.

The air became still as she got closer and closer to the cave entrance, resting behind a tall drift. As she stepped over the snowdrift, she slips onto her butt and slid into the cave, dropping her axe as she did.

Turid blindly reached around the frozen cave floor for her axe, keeping her eyes looking around for trouble. But as she felt around all she touched were bones and decomposing bodies of small animals. She gasped and panicked, looking

around desperately for her axe. There it was. Turid exhaled in relief as she brought the axe close to her face. She was shaking as she slowly got to her feet. Her eyes followed a flicking light emanating from behind a distant, yet large, stalagmite that was tall and wide enough to hide any number of deadly things.

She quietly rounded the stalagmite, finding a roaring campfire, its smoke rising and temporarily collecting along the base of the stalagmites, ultimately escaping through a naturally-made, fissure in the ceiling.

The fire seemed to be alive, taking what seemed to be recognizable shapes and forms. For a split second Turid thought she sees her own father's silhouette in the flame. Sitting dangerously close to the fire, her back to Turid, was a haggard old woman. She was wrapped in a tattered religious robe of some sort but did not appear to be before the fire in an effort to stay warm. She was talking to the fire... mumbling... speaking words Turid could not understand. What Turid could not see were the blue glints reflecting off of the stone-embedded tattoos decorating most of the old woman's face. The stones used were rare, having a reaction to heat, which result in a blue glow. The tattoos, themselves, were poorly done, giving clear proof that the old woman applied them herself over the years.

"I wondered when one of you would come," the old woman said without turning to face Turid.

She first thought the old woman was again talking to the fire, until she realized she could understand her.

How did she know I was here? Turid wondered. Was it when I slipped at the entrance? Am I sweating? Can the old woman smell me even with so much smoke in the air? Or can she sense fear? I have heard of witches, warlocks, and mages having those abilities.

Turid stopped within reach of her. "You killed my mother and my father."

"I cursed them, dear. I have never killed a single person in my very long life," the old woman explained. Adding, "Your father wanted power so he could rule your village. I gave it to him and it drove him mad. That is why he killed your mother and then himself."

"Liar!" Turid fought back her tears.

"I have nothing worth lying about, child. Not anymore. I am old and my time is ending. I have told my secrets to the fire and it has admonished me of any and all of my wrongdoings."

"You are mad, woman. You speak to fire as if it were alive."

"Why it is alive. It lives and breathes as we do. It struggles to sustain itself, as we do. And not just this

fire you see before me, but the fire that lives in all of us. In some it is a flicker. In others, like yourself, it rages. But fire cannot be allowed to burn freely within or it will become a conflagration, destroying everything." She turned away from the fire, looking at Turid for the first time. "I warned your father of the same thing, but he would not listen." She could see the growing rage on Turid's face, while the fire silhouetted the old woman, preventing Turid from seeing even the slightest of her features. "If you are here to kill me, girl, then please get on with it."

Turid didn't know what to do. Kill a defenseless old woman? That was why she came. But she expected the Dream Maker to fight back.

"I hear he chopped her up into several pieces, your father did."

Turid's anger boils, eventually releasing itself when she raises her axe and lets out a battle cry like only a tearful child could.

The witch's malicious smile was unseen by Turid.

HACK!

She brought the heavy axe down hard. Her accuracy was off due to the weight, lodging the axe into the old woman's right shoulder blade. The force of the blow immediately drove the old woman to the ground, her spine snapping and crumbling like brittle twigs.

The old woman weakly raised her left hand, extending her shaky index finger, and pointing it at Turid. "Your father's curse upon you," she weakly whispers as her finger wobbled about. Then the last bit of air left her lungs. Turid was sobbing as she yanked the axe out of the old woman's crumbled body. She stopped for a second, feeling uneven. She was not sure if it was the weight of the axe or the inkling of guilt in having done what she had done. She pulled herself together, but as she took another step she stumbled again, using the axe to support her. BOOM! The flames of the Dream Maker's campfire explode into the air, covering the cave's ceiling with fire. Turid turned and stumbled toward the cave exit, sweat running down her forehead.

Turid scampered on all four, climbing out of the cave and falling into the snow - the flames of the campfire chasing her, evicting an unwanted pest.

Once the flames subsided, Turid pulled herself up, the snow melting from her sweaty face as she turned to make sure she had reached safety. With relief in her heart she looked down the long mountain slope to her village far, far below. It took no time at all for her relief to go dark, plagued into sadness, becoming as cursed as Turid's father was to kill his wife - her mother. As cursed as Turid now was.

Gunnar slowly hiked up the hillside along the outskirts of the village. Along it sat Turid under an old, rotting tree - the only tree remaining on the hillside that was not cut down and used by Turid's people. Could she call them that anymore? Her people? Would they even accept her after what trouble she may have just brought to their village by killing the Dream Maker? For the curse now flowed through her body that once flowed through her father's.

Turid's head was up, looking at the morning sun through the filtered, dormant branches of the tree, her axe resting beside her.

"Turid? Turid?" Gunnar yelled again and again as he arduously stepped through the snow toward her. "Are you okay?"

"Stay back, Gunnar!" she barked.

Gunnar stopped in his tracks. "What's wrong?"

"I did it. I killed the witch," she softly replied.

"But that is good, Turid."

She looked up at him, long and hard. He's all she had left. They were the last of their parents and their grandparents, and their great-grandparents. And it was all because of that damned curse.

"The witch cursed me, Gunnar. The way she cursed father."

"A-Are you sure," his voice was shaky as he replied, worried that she was telling the truth. Nonetheless he took a step toward her.

"Stay, Gunnar!" This time she yelled. And not as an order but as a threat. "Stay where you are. I'll hurt you like father hurt mother."

Gunnar reluctantly did as he was told, stopping and sitting in the snow, right where he was standing. His eyes started to well up, causing Turid to look away from him for fear that the tears would become contagious.

"What will we do?" he asked in a sobbing whisper.

"I have to leave, brother."

His eyes opened wide with fear, "You can't."

"I have to. I don't want to hurt you."

"What will I do without you, Turid?"

"You'll be strong. Until I get back."

"But I'll be all alone."

"I'll come back, Gunnar. As soon as I find a way to break this curse."

He knew there was no changing her mind. He also knew she was right. He wiped his tears, sniffed up the snot running from his nose, and tried to force a false bravado. "Are you leaving now?"

"No," she smiled. "I'll spend the day with you. Right here. Sitting. Talking."