***FREYA***
*Goddess of Love*

Freya, the fair Northern goddess of beauty and love, is the sister of Frey and the daughter of Njörd and Nerthus, or Skadi. She is the most beautiful and best beloved of all the Goddesses, and while in Germany she was identified with Frigga, in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland she was considered a separate divinity. Freya, having been born in Vanaheim, was also known as Vanadis, the Goddess of the Vanas, or as Vanabride.

As soon as she reached Asgard, the gods were so charmed by her beauty and grace that they bestowed upon her the realm of Folkvang and the great hall Sessrymnir (the roomy-seated), where they assured her she could easily accommodate all her guests.

*“Folkvang ’tis called,
Where Freyja has right
To dispose of the hall-seats.
Every day of the slain
She chooses the half,
And leaves half to Odin.”
              -NORSE MYTHOLOGY
               (R. B. Anderson)*

**Queen of the Valkyries**

Although Goddess of love, Freya is not soft and pleasure-loving only, for the ancient Northern races said that she has very martial tastes, and that as Valfreya she often leads the Valkyries down to the battlefields, choosing and claiming one half the heroes slain. She is therefore often represented with corselet and helmet, shield and spear, only the lower part of her body being clad in the usual flowing feminine garb.

Freya transports the chosen slain to Folkvang, where they are duly entertained, and where she also welcoms all pure maidens and faithful wives, that they might enjoy the company of their lovers and husbands even after death. The joys of her abode were so enticing to the heroic Northern women that they often rushed into battle when their loved ones were slain, hoping to meet with the same fate; or they fell upon their swords, or were voluntarily burned on the same funeral pyre as the beloved remains.

As Freya is inclined to lend a favorable ear to lovers’ prayers, she is often invoked by them, and it is customary to indite love songs in her honor, which are sung on all festive occasions, her very name in Germany being used as the verb “to woo.”

**Freya and Odur**

Freya, the golden-haired and blue-eyed goddess, was also, at times, considered a personification of the earth. She therefore married Odur, a symbol of the summer sun, whom she dearly loved, and by whom she had two daughters, Hnoss and Gersemi, so beautiful that all things lovely and precious were called by their names.

So long as Odur lingered contentedly at her side, Freya was smiling and perfectly happy; but, alas! this God was a rover, and, wearying of his wife’s company, he suddenly left home and wandered far out into the wide world. Freya, sad and forsaken, wept abundantly, and her tears fell down upon the hard rocks, which softened at their contact. We are even told that they trickled down to the very center of the stones, where they were transformed to drops of gold. The tears which fell into the sea, however, were changed into translucent amber.

Weary of her widowed condition, and longing to clasp her beloved in her arms once more, Freya finally started out in search of him, passing through many lands, where she was called by different names, such as Mardel, Horn, Gefn, Syr, Skialf, and Thrung, inquiring of all she met whether her husband had passed that way, and shedding so many tears that gold can be found in all parts of the earth.

*“And Freya next came nigh, with golden tears;
The loveliest Goddess she in Heaven, by all
Most honor’d after Frea, Odin’s wife.
Her long ago the wandering Oder took
To mate, but left her to roam distant lands;
Since then she seeks him, and weeps tears of gold.
Names hath she many; Vanadis on earth
They call her, Freya is her name in Heaven.”
              -BALDER DEAD (Matthew Arnold)*

Far away in the sunny South, under the flowering myrtle trees, Freya found Odur at last, and her love being restored to her, she grew happy and smiling once more, and as radiant as a bride. It is perhaps because Freya found her husband beneath the flowering myrtle, that Northern brides, to this day, wear myrtle in preference to the conventional orange wreath.

Hand in hand, Odur and Freya now gently wended their way home once more, and in the light of their happiness the grass grew green, the flowers bloomed, and the birds sang, for all Nature sympathized as heartily with Freya’s joy as it had mourned with her when she was in sorrow.

*“Out of the morning land,
Over the snowdrifts,
Beautiful Freya came
Tripping to Scoring.
White were the moorlands,
And frozen before her;
Green were the moorlands,
And blooming behind her.
Out of her gold locks
Shaking the spring flowers,
Out of her garments
Shaking the south wind,
Around in the birches
Awaking the throstles,
And making chaste housewives all
Long for their heroes home,
Loving and love-giving,
Came she to Scoring.”
              -THE LONGBEARDS’ SAGA (Charles Kingsley)*

The prettiest plants and flowers in the North were called Freya’s hair or Freya’s eye dew, while the butterfly was called Freya’s hen. This Goddess is also supposed to have a special affection for the fairies, whom she loves to watch dancing in the moonbeams, and for whom she reserves her daintiest flowers and sweetest honey. Odur, Freya’s husband, besides being considered a personification of the sun, is also regarded as an emblem of passion, or of the intoxicating pleasures of love; so the ancients declared that it was no wonder his wife could not be happy without him.

As Goddess of beauty, Freya is very fond of glittering adornments and of precious jewels. One day, while she was in Svartalfheim, the underground kingdom, she saw four dwarfs carefully fashioning the most wonderful necklace she had ever seen. Almost beside herself with longing to possess this treasure, which was called Brisinga-men, and was an emblem of the stars, or of the fruitfulness of the earth, Freya implored the dwarfs to give it to her; but they obstinately refused to do so unless she would promise to grant them her favor. Having secured the necklace at this price, Freya hastened to put it on, and its beauty so enhanced her charms that the Goddess wore it night and day, and only occasionally could be persuaded to loan it to the other divinities. Thor, however, wore this necklace when he personated Freya in Jötunheim, and Loki coveted and would have stolen it, had it not been for the watchfulness of Heimdall.

Freya is also the proud possessor of a falcon garb, or falcon plumes, which enables the wearer to flit through the air like a bird; and this garment is so invaluable that it was twice borrowed by Loki, and was used by Freya herself when in search of the missing Odur.

*“Freya one day
Falcon wings took, and through space hied away;
Northward and southward she sought her
Dearly-loved Odur.”
              -FRIDTHIOF’S SAGA, TEGNÉR (Stephens’s tr.)*

As Freya is also considered Goddess of fecundity, she is sometimes represented as riding about with her brother Frey in the chariot drawn by the golden-bristled boar, scattering, with lavish hands, fruits and flowers to gladden the hearts of all mankind. She also has a chariot of her own, however, in which she generally travels, which is drawn by cats, her favorite animals, the emblems of caressing fondness and sensuality, or the personifications of fecundity.

*“Then came dark-bearded Niörd, and after him
Freyia, thin robed, about her ankles slim
The gray cats playing.”
              -LOVERS OF GUDRUN (William Morris)*

Frey and Freya were held in such high honor throughout the North that their names, in modified forms, are still used for “master” and “mistress,” and one day of the week is called Freya’s day, or Friday, even by the English-speaking race. Freya’s temples were very numerous indeed, and were long maintained by her votaries, the last in Magdeburg, Germany, being destroyed by order of Charlemagne.

**Story of Ottar and Angantyr**

The Northern people were wont to invoke her not only for success in love, prosperity, and increase, but also at times for aid and protection. This she vouchsafed to all who served her truly, as is proved by the story of Ottar and Angantyr, two men who, after disputing for some time concerning their rights to a certain piece of property, laid their quarrel before the Thing. In that popular assembly it was soon decreed that the man who could prove that he had the longest line of noble ancestors would be the one to win, and a special day was appointed to hear the genealogy of each claimant.

Ottar, unable to remember the names of more than a few of his progenitors, offered up sacrifices to Freya, entreating her aid. The Goddess graciously heard his prayer, appeared before him, changed him into a boar, and rode off upon his back to the dwelling of the sorceress Hyndla, the most renowned witch of the day. By threats and entreaties, Freya compelled this old woman to trace Ottar’s genealogy back to Odin, naming every individual in turn, and giving a synopsis of his achievements. Then, fearing lest her votary’s memory should prove treacherous, Freya further compelled Hyndla to brew a potion of remembrance, which she gave him to drink.

*“He shall drink
Delicious draughts.
All the Gods I pray
To favor Ottar.”
              -SÆMUND’S EDDA (Thorpe’s tr.)*

Thus prepared, Ottar presented himself before the Thing on the appointed day, glibly recited his pedigree, and by naming many more ancestors than Angantyr could recollect, obtained possession of the property he coveted.

*“A duty ’tis to act
So that the young prince
His paternal heritage may have
After his kindred.”
              -SÆMUND’S EDDA (Thorpe’s tr.)*

Freya was so beautiful that all the gods, giants, and dwarfs longed for her love and in turn tried to secure her as wife. But Freya scorned the ugly old giants and refused to belong even to Thrym, when urged to accept him by Loki and Thor. She was not so obdurate where the Gods themselves were concerned, if the various mythologists are to be believed, for as the personification of the earth she is said to have married Odin, the sky, Frey, the fruitful rain, Odur, the sunshine, etc., until it seems as if she deserved the accusation hurled against her by the archfiend Loki, of having loved and married all the Gods in turn.

**Worship of Freya**

It was customary on solemn occasions to drink Freya’s health with that of the other Gods, and when Christianity was imposed by force in the North this toast was transferred to the Virgin or to St. Gertrude; Freya herself, like all the heathen divinities, was declared a demon or witch by the invading christians, and banished to the mountain peaks of Norway, Sweden, or Germany, where the Brocken is pointed out as her special abode, and the general trysting place of her demon train on Valpurgisnacht.

*CHORUS OF WITCHES*

*“On to the Brocken the witches are flocking —
Merry meet — merry part — how they gallop and drive,
Yellow stubble and stalk are rocking,
And young green corn is merry alive,
With the shapes and shadows swimming by.
To the highest heights they fly,
Where Sir Urian sits on high —
Throughout and about,
With clamor and shout,
Drives the maddening rout,
Over stock, over stone;
Shriek, laughter, and moan,
Before them are blown.”
             -GOETHE’S FAUST (Anster’s tr.)*

As the swallow, cuckoo, and cat were held sacred to Freya in heathen times, these creatures were turned into ones having demoniacal properties by the alien forces of christianity, and to this day witches are always depicted with coal-black cats close beside them.