

Eggs, Butter, Sugar and Disaster

By

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Tannbourne

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To my family and friends all over the world -
I wouldn't be the person I am without you all

Warning: To anyone impressionable, please do not imitate any of the things Sera does in this book, namely:

a: Drink anything strange and yellow.

b: Take things from stores without paying for them or wander onto other peoples' property, even if no-one sees you.

c: Start a cult.

Thank you.

To my family and friends: It's not my fault. Mythology is really like that.

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VANILLA FLAVOURED TROUBLE

Seralina pelted up the stairs, ignoring the rumbling that shook the castle and the roars coming from outside, trying desperately to remember which room her bag was in and which way it was. The castle may have been finished, but it hadn't been furnished yet; the glowing, white corridors all looked the same. As she rushed along, checking room after room, she wondered how on Ear- how on *Midgard* - this had all happened. She'd just wanted to help people. To make them happy. To give them pudding. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. She'd never suspected that being a goddess would be just like being a human. Only worse.

If Seralina had known what was going to happen, she never would have drunk the stuff.

Ambrosia. The Drink of the Gods. Thick, syrupy and vanilla flavoured, for some reason. It also contains enough calories to kill a mortal on the spot, so it's just as well that mortals are no longer mortals by the time they finish drinking it. Like Seralina, for example. She hadn't really meant to become a god. She hadn't taken the warning 'This will make of ye a god' seriously. It was her general policy not to trust any claim beyond 'It tastes all right, really'. She certainly didn't trust anything that sounded made-up or used words like 'dynamic'. Going round trusting words like 'dynamic' could get you into trouble. As it turned out, so could ignoring warning labels.

It was a hot day and Seralina was Lost. It was the

special sort of lost achieved by someone insisting to themselves and travelling companions that they weren't, that their destination would be visible any minute now and that cutting through that bit of trees was 'a shortcut'. After almost an hour of 'We're nearly there now!' from Seralina, her friend Meena's patience was starting to wear thin.

Then, like an oasis in a desert, they saw the café.

Their enthusiasm faded significantly when they saw it was closed, as cafés are in these situations, but their hopes were marginally raised by the sight of the two vending machines outside that seemed to be working. One had nothing but cans and cans of 'Idunn's Finest', a drink neither of the girls had heard of before, whereas the other had a wide selection of chocolate. Meena pulled her face at the gaudy, golden cans and bought two bars of chocolate. Seralina on the other hand had no choice but to stick with 'Idunn's Finest', because she had recently become allergic to chocolate and was desperate.

"You sure you don't want one?" Meena waved her second chocolate bar under Seralina's nose "I wouldn't drink that if I were you, it looks foreign to me. It's probably made of turpentine or something." Seralina scowled at Meena, waved away the chocolate bar and squinted at the back of the can.

"Says here it's made of apples" she replied "and... vanilla, apparently." she added, squinting even harder. The writing seemed to be in English, but it was really hard to read. It seemed to be in two different scripts at once, like one of those holographic cards with two pictures that are useless because you can't see either one and looking at it gives you a headache. "It also says... 'Warning: This will make of ye a god'. Whatever that means." she finished sceptically.

"Yeah, *right*." Meena retorted "Must be some sort of

sports drink or something. Whatever it is, it sounds dis-gust-ing." Meena replied, tucking into her chocolate. Seralina sighed and sipped her drink. It tasted more like vanilla milkshake than anything else. She watched Meena with growing resentment. It wasn't as if she'd even liked chocolate that much. It was just that now that she couldn't have it on account of it making her head explode, she realised she DID like it. It was like a friend you liked but didn't often visit suddenly moving to the other side of the planet without saying goodbye.

"What's your vanilla turpentine like?" Meena asked, opening the second bar.

"It's not bad, actually." Seralina replied, taking another swig "It actually kinda tastes like melted chocolate would taste, if it tasted like vanilla. If that makes any sense."

"It doesn't." Meena replied, breaking off a piece of her new bar "Anyway, you just *want* it to taste like that. It's probably like that whole 'tastes like chicken' business."

"No, really. It's quite nice. It's really weird-" Seralina started and then... pop! She was gone. Meena suddenly realised that she knew exactly where she was and exactly how to get home, although later she inexplicably couldn't remember where she'd gone and who she'd gone with and was thought by all to have gotten drunk and taken a taxi home and was grounded by her parents for a week, even though she was twenty, for being so stupid as to get blind drunk by herself on a nature walk in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the day. And everyone involved had this nagging feeling that they were forgetting something...

Seralina was confused. Confused and sitting on a cloud. Definitely a cloud. It was quite clearly, unmistakeably a cloud and that, down there, was most definitely the ground. Way down there. Way, way down there.

"Um." she said thoughtfully to the Universe in general.

"I *told* you, you shouldn't leave that down there!" an angry voice said, its owner materialising behind her left shoulder, making her jump "I bloody *told* you!"

"Look, *no-one* should have been able to find it!" a woman's voice replied, equally exasperated, appearing on her right "It takes nearly an hour of getting Lost for a mortal to find it!" It occurred to Seralina at this point that the word 'mortal' was not a good word to be around. It is a word after all, that implies you can die. In fact it doesn't just imply it; if you don't get the hint, it points it out forcefully and announces it to the whole room in a loud voice.

"You're going to be in big trouble, you are!" the man chided, shaking his finger "This sort of thing isn't supposed to happen anymore!" He was wearing black shorts and a short sleeved, pale blue shirt. He was also wearing a flat, black hat and most notably, winged sandals. He looked tall and gangly. He was possibly medium and gangly. It was hard to tell, because he was floating in mid-air. Or at least, he was trying to float in mid-air, but he had to keep shuffling about to keep from falling out of his sandals. They looked like they were at least one size too big for him, and his feet kept slipping about, meaning he had to keep shoving his feet into them periodically to stop them falling off. It made him look like he was trying to balance on two invisible poles. He was also wearing the ugliest socks Seralina had ever seen. They were lumpy and a filthy shade of grey.

"I don't have to take that from you, *letter monkey*." snapped the woman, causing him to cringe. A stark contrast to the lanky youth, the woman was tall, well proportioned and glamorous. She had long, thick, blonde hair. She wore a figure hugging, hot pink dress. It didn't have any sequins on it, but it looked like it should. She wore big gold bangles, two

on each wrist and ruby red lipstick. It looked like she'd never heard the phrase 'tone it down' in her life. The youth opened his mouth to retaliate, but couldn't think of anything and shut it again.

"You!" the woman tapped Seralina on the shoulder "You are now a goddess. Congratulations, blah, blah, blah." she waved a hand in the air and then indicated the boy, who was still sulking "This letter monkey here will look after you." She handed Seralina a blank, shiny card. "Here's your card. I'm sure you'll be going to see *her* first." The woman pulled a face. "Well, ciao." she finished with a shrug, turned, and vanished into thin air.

Seralina just gaped. There wasn't much else she could do.

"Well, now she's out of the way..." the youth pushed his black hair back out of his eyes and extended a hand "The name's Hermes. Or Mercury, actually. Take your pick. Just don't call me something stupid like Hercury or Mermes." he pulled a face "Or *letter monkey*. That was Idunn, by the way."

"Right, right." said Seralina dismissively "My name's Seralina. Run that by me again?" Hermes looked annoyed.

"I said don't call me-" he started.

"No, no. Not that bit. The other bit." she said.

"Er..." Hermes frowned "You still remember your own name, right? You just told it to me. I mean, I know in these sort of situations, people can get rather confused, sometimes they lose their whole memory even, but you just said-" he rambled. Seralina cut him off mid-babble;

"No. The *other* other bit." she replied firmly.

"Congratulations, you're a goddess?" Hermes said hopefully.

"Yeah, that bit." Seralina nodded.

"Oh. Well... that's it." Hermes shrugged.

"Oh." Seralina finished. There wasn't really much else to say.

"Right, well now that's cleared up, we'll have to go and see the boss." Hermes said, grabbing Seralina's wrist and pulling. The stunned Seralina allowed herself to be led through a thick mist over what appeared to be some more cloud. She wasn't sure how she was managing to walk on a cloud, but she decided not to think about it in the hope that the universe wouldn't either. They emerged out of the mist onto a rainbow, at which point she shut her eyes, because rainbows have even less substance than clouds on account of not really existing at all. After a while, there was a change in the atmosphere and Seralina dared to open an eye.

They were standing inside a huge corridor, made of something like marble, in front of some equally huge mahogany doors with more fretwork than was necessary or decent. The doors and indeed the corridor were all rather tall. It was like someone had taken the place and stretched it out upwards. One of the doors was half open. There were people everywhere. Quite a lot of them appeared to be drunk. Either that, or Seralina was drunk. She wasn't entirely sure.

"I'll just go in and tell her about you. Then I'll come and get you. Stay here." Hermes instructed. He flew rather erratically through the open door.

Seralina decided it was time to pinch herself. It hurt quite a lot. It didn't help that a bunch of men, singing loudly and badly, bumped into her as she did it.

"Sorry luv!" one of them said and waved a mug at her. Then they started off again and lurched down the corridor, leaning on one another for support and waving their beer in unison.

"And don't come back!" a woman's voice shouted from

beyond the doors "Stick to Valhalla from now on!" and then "Yes? What do you want?" There was a brief pause "*Really?* Haven't seen any of *that* in a while." Then the owner of the voice swept through the doors, with Hermes in tow. He bobbed along after her like he was on an invisible leash. Perhaps he was. Despite her confusion, Seralina couldn't help thinking that Hermes would probably look a lot better if he didn't keep appearing alongside such glamorous women. Although whilst Idunn's glamour was gaudy, this woman's glamour was not. She wasn't quite as tall as Idunn; she wore a simple white dress and wore her long hair curled and pinned. It was exactly the colour of sun-ripened wheat. Draped over her shoulders was some kind of cloak made of feathers, it was pale brown flecked with black and white. It wasn't very big, it was almost like a boa or a small shawl.

"Lady Freya, this is Seralina." Hermes waved in Seralina's direction. "She's new." he added helpfully.

"Right. A new girl, eh?" the woman addressed as Freya began "I know *just* what to do with *you*. I'm Freya by the way. I'm pretty much your boss for the time being, but don't let it bother you. I wouldn't." She smiled and waited for Seralina's response with her hands on her hips and her head tilted.

"Freya, the Viking goddess of Fertility?" asked Seralina cautiously "That Freya?" Freya pouted a little.

"Is that all anyone remembers of me these days?" she sighed "Oh well. A day in the sun must turn to dusk."

"So you really are then?" Seralina had finally found a rock to cling to after being swept away and wasn't letting go in a hurry "You're really a goddess and this is really Valhalla?"

"Well, no this isn't Valhalla, this is *my* hall, Sessrymnir. Valhalla is up the corridor, third on the left. Probably. Over there somewhere, anyway." she waved a hand in its general

direction "Oh, and 'Viking' is just a rude word for pirate, so it's better to say 'Norse'." she thought for a moment "But yes, I really am a goddess. So are you. You *were* told weren't you?" She gave Hermes a hard look.

"Yes, I was. I think there must have been something funny in that vanilla-flavoured stuff or something." Seralina replied "This sort of thing doesn't happen. Especially not to me. Nothing *ever* happens to me."

"It used to happen all the time." Freya shrugged "Not always using Ambrosia, though. But now Idunn makes that, too. She's got the market cornered."

"That pink woman? *She* made me a goddess?" Seralina frowned "*Why?*"

"Pink woman?" an amused look flitted across Freya's face "That's Idunn, all right. But no, *you* made you a goddess. You drank the Ambrosia. It used to be Idunn's apples, but she makes it into canned drinks these days so you can carry it round with you without it going wrinkly. Funny thing really, they grant eternal youth but they go sour like nobody's business." Seralina finally panicked.

"But I don't *want* to be a goddess!" she protested.

"You *don't*? Don't humans want to be gods?" Freya asked, puzzled "I thought they were all for quests for eternal youth and so on?"

"Only if they're insane or completely self-absorbed!" Seralina explained desperately.

"You mean they aren't? I always thought they were both, to be honest." Freya shrugged "Oh. Well, there's nothing we can do about it now."

"Nothing?" Sera sagged.

"Nope. Now let's get you some armour." Freya finished and led Seralina into Sessrymnir. Seralina looked around for Hermes to thank him for his help, because she

might have gone insane, but that was no excuse for being rude, however he seemed to have fluttered off elsewhere. She thought she heard him curse as the door closed, it sounded rather like he'd banged his elbow on something. Then again, she was now insane, so it was probably the start of all that 'voices in your head' business.

An hour or so later after rummaging through a surprisingly small and poky armoury, Seralina finally had some armour. She felt like she was wearing half the contents of a kitchen, including the sink. She looked at herself critically in the mirror.

"I look like I'm wearing a bunch of pan lids." she said "*Stylish* pan lids, I'll give you that, but still pan lids." Her armour was constructed of many circular bits of metal overlapping each other. Underneath all the armour somewhere was a simple, toga-like, white dress, made out of enough material for three, which made it quite heavy on its own. Seralina felt like she was wading everywhere through her own clothes. In addition to the pan lid armour, her forearms and shins were encased in worn, metal bracers. Someone had clearly decided that that was enough of that, because her shoes were thick leather sandals and her helmet was merely a circlet with a lot of feathers stuck on it. If someone wanted to chop off her feet or her head, that was fine as far as the armourer was concerned, as long as it looked good. Which, despite having pan lids in its ancestry, it did. Not beautiful, but good. Even though Seralina was fairly short, had boring hair and was nearly a stone heavier than she'd like. She was impressed. Now if only she could move without something going 'clank' and pinching her, being a goddess might not be so bad.

"Do I have to wear this all the time?" Seralina asked.

"No." Freya replied "In the evenings you wear different

armour. It's all thin and has a lot of gold on it and it's as much use in battle as a chocolate teapot."

"Right. Er..." Seralina began, worried "I'm not going to have to do much battling am I?" Seralina would try anything once. Provided she thought she'd have the chance to do it again if she wanted to.

"Well, valkyries generally pick up people who are dead, and they're not likely to feel like having a swing at you." Freya replied.

"What about everyone else?" Seralina asked.

"Well, I would imagine they'll be too busy fighting each other. Anyway, you shouldn't be seen by anyone unless you want them to." Freya replied "Unless you're caught by surprise or just aren't concentrating. It's a bugger when that happens." she added. Seralina frowned.

"How do I know where I'm going and stuff?" she asked.

"Well, I lead the valkyries out when there's a lot needs doing. But there's not much like that that we deal with these days." Freya replied "Mostly you'll be working evenings. Until we find you a permanent job."

Freya had explained while they were looking for armour that usually girls who became goddesses started off as valkyries because it was the Asgard equivalent of a barmaid-slash-taxi driver, and not many pantheons had spare places for ex-humans in any case. Anyone could get the hang of it with a bit of training, she'd said. The world had rather a lot of gods and goddesses right now, so until they could find something better to do with her, basically, she might as well be a valkyrie. Freya offered to go with her on her first few jobs until she got the hang of it.

It wasn't long before they were flying off to Seralina's first job. Freya had needed to look for a while before she found anything, but was insistent that Seralina should have

done what she called 'real work' before she started the evening shift, whatever that meant.

The journey to Earth, or Midgard as Freya kept calling it, involved jumping off the end of a rainbow that jutted out from Asgard, which she suspected was where she'd just come from. Then there was a lot of rushing scenery until they got close to the intended destination. It was like bungee jumping without the cord or the extremely tall building.

Seralina was quite surprised how well she was taking it all. She was basically just getting on with it, one of the effective ways humans deal with things they don't like, the other being the famous ignoring-it-and-hoping-it-goes-away tactic, which wouldn't work in this situation because gods make themselves hard to ignore. Once they got to the general area though, they had to search by themselves. Freya had told Seralina that if they knew an actual battle was happening they just turned up early and hung around.

They ended up on a ship. As soon as they materialised, Sera tripped over a pile of rope and landed in a heap. As she was helped to her feet by Freya she saw they were in a narrow corridor above deck, lined on one side by the ship's railings. Life boats lined the corridor on one side as far as she could see. It looked to be some sort of huge cruise ship.

"This doesn't look like a battle." Seralina said, looking around nervously for any signs of sudden warfare "People aren't going to suddenly fall out with each other and get thrown overboard or something are they?" It looked safe enough. She was both relieved and concerned; relieved because she didn't want to have materialised in the middle of battle with people chopping other people's bits off and concerned because she didn't want people to *start* chopping each others' bits off in the middle of the ocean. She couldn't swim very well and it had never bothered her, but there was

a difference between swimming in a pool or at the ocean's edge knowing you can stop anytime you like and being stuck in the middle of nowhere with several fathoms below you knowing you can't.

"We're just here for one person." Freya nodded towards the deck "He seems to be down there." She set off down the corridor.

"How do you know?" Seralina asked hurrying after Freya.

"You just *know*." Freya replied "It's part of being a goddess." Seralina, who currently felt as if she'd never known anything, ever, said;

"What if you *don't* know?"

"You wing it."

"*Wing* it? *Goddesses* wing it?" Seralina was shocked.

"It's practically in the job description." Freya said over her shoulder "If it goes all wrong, you just say 'I meant to do that' and no-one's going to argue with a goddess, are they?" She stopped suddenly. "There he is."

If there had been more than one person on the deck Seralina would have wondered who she meant. As it was, there was only one rather old man on a red and white striped deck chair, snoozing with a book over his face.

"It might just be me." Seralina began "But he doesn't *look* like a battle hardened warrior."

"Well, with battles being a lot more political these days and mostly involving nasty comments and embarrassing photographs there isn't much work around for us these days. That, and no-one believes in valkyries any more." Freya explained. She sighed. "*And* they think I'm just a fertility goddess." she added sadly.

"He doesn't look like he believes in valkyries either." Seralina paused and frowned "If you aren't a fertility goddess,

what are you?"

"You can never tell what someone believes just by looking at them." Freya replied, flicking her hair over her shoulders "Besides, these days people don't necessarily *need* to believe in us. They just need to *want* to."

"Isn't that a bit... *wishy-washy*?" replied Seralina sourly. She'd grown up being told that just because you want doesn't mean you get. It seemed unfair. She *wanted* to believe she'd lost some weight since she'd become allergic to chocolate and stopped eating it. It didn't make it true.

"Well, we have to take work where we can find it these days." said Freya sadly.

"Hang on a minute." Seralina started again, puzzled "My knowledge of Viking- sorry, I mean Norse mythology isn't that great, but don't you have to die in battle to get taken to Valhalla by a valkyrie?" she hesitated and her puzzlement became concern "Someone isn't going to come and chop that poor, old man's head off, are they?"

"No, no." Freya reassured her "Nothing like that. He's going to die peacefully in his sleep."

"Oh. Well that's all right then." Seralina replied. Then her ears caught up with what her mouth had just said- "Wait, no it's not! Is he really going to die?" Freya gave her a pitying look;

"No-one knows anything about the Norse pantheon any more, do they?" she said sadly "That's what valkyries *do*. That's why we're here."

"But that's so sad..." Seralina started, trailing off. Freya just shrugged.

"You've got to die sometime." she said matter-of-factly "Unless you're immortal. Then you have to find something to do to keep yourself amused until the end of eternity. That's what causes most of the trouble."

"I see..." Seralina replied sadly. Then logic kicked in. It had a treacherous way of doing it when it would most make Seralina look like a cold-hearted cow. "But strictly speaking, he's not dying in battle, is he?" she added sceptically. Freya shrugged again. "Would you *rather* someone came and chopped his head off? We could probably arrange it."

"No!" Seralina replied quickly.

"Well there you are, then." Freya replied. "He *is* dying in battle anyway." she added "It's just not the conventional, run-at-your-enemy-and-scream battle we're famous for handling."

"Oh?" Seralina couldn't imagine what kind of battle the old man could be in, aside from a battle against old age, in which he seemed to be faring pretty well. He looked like a typical British tourist. He'd gotten slightly tanned, he was wearing a terrible combination of a yellow t-shirt and red shorts and he was wearing white socks with his sandals.

"I believe he's called Thomas Turner. It seems that he met up with an old school friend a few months ago and they got to talking about all the things they'd planned to do when they were young." Freya explained "And he got rather fired up and decided he was going to do all those things after all."

"I don't see how that's a battle." Sera replied, frowning.

"Ah yes, but then his friend said 'Not at our time of life, you won't' and he said 'Wanna bet?'. And so his friend got fired up too, and they're having a competition to see who can go the most places and do the most things. Apparently you get extra points if it's something particularly crazy." Freya finished.

"I see." Seralina replied, not bothering to ask how Freya knew all this "It's not an actual battle as such though, is it?" Freya merely shrugged.

"There are many kinds of battle." she answered vaguely.

The old man gave a snort and woke up.

"Who's there?" he demanded "Oh." his tone softened on seeing the two women "What are you ladies doing up 'ere?" He took in their unusual attire. "Are you part of the entertainment? They goin' to do an opera today? It never said anything about them doin' an opera." His eyes misted over in recollection "I've seen some wonderful operas, I have. Just wonderful." He waved at the pair of them "I saw one once, all about valkyries and Valhalla it was, and I thought to meself, 'that's how I'd like to go'."

'Ah.' thought Sera to herself. Freya had been right. You never could tell, just by looking.

"Carried off by beautiful women to go feasting and such." he continued, and made a face "Meals on Wheels I was having before I came on this holiday. Well, I say holiday. I'm in a fierce battle, I am!" he grinned "I bet my old mate Albert that I could do more stuff than 'im this year, and I reckon I'm winnin' too."

"Good for you!" Freya said and smiled at him.

"Damn right!" the old man continued, still grinning "We was talkin' about old times and we 'ad all these plans when we was kids, but they never came to nothin'. So I said we should do it, you're never too old sort of thing. And 'e said, 'Knock it off, you daft old codger!' but I wouldn't listen and anyway, he came round. I reckon we can die happy now, the both of us. You should 'ear what 'e's been up to!"

"I'm glad to hear that." Freya replied.

"Yep. I reckon I can die happy now... Best few months of my life, these last few months have been. Been all over. Tried all sorts." He smiled. "Best few months of my life." he repeated.

"Well, we have good news and bad news then, Mr. Turner." Freya began and then nudged Seralina. "Go on."

"Er... well..." Seralina began. She wasn't sure how you told someone they were dead. It wasn't something you would expect to have to do. She decided she may as well just be direct. "Well, I'm sorry to say that you are, in fact, dead."

"I am?" said Mr. Turner and looked around "Oh. So I am." It was then that Seralina noticed that there were *two* Mr. Turners in front of her. One, the Mr. Turner lying on the deckchair with a book still over his face, and the second, his remarkably solid ghost sat up talking to them. He looked so real she hadn't noticed. But now that she *had* noticed, he also seemed to be younger than the Mr. Turner on the deck chair. In fact, he seemed to be getting younger all the time. She also couldn't help thinking that some poor soul was going to get a nasty shock when they lifted up that book. "What's the good news?" asked Mr. Turner cautiously "Unless that *was* the good news?"

"The good news is that I am, in fact, a valkyrie." Seralina answered "And that you are invited to Valhalla."

"Well, blow me down!" Mr. Turner exclaimed "I reckon that takes the biscuit! Ol' Albert ain't been to Valhalla, I know that much!"

"Well, shall we be off?" Freya asked. Mr. Turner nodded.

"You know it's a shame though." he said, solemn all of a sudden.

"What is it, Mr. Turner?" said Sera, as kindly as she could.

"That bugger'll never know I won!" he shouted.

On the way back to Asgard, Mr. Turner talked to them at length about his family, his cruise and the things he'd done

and seen, including the operas with valkyries in them. He was vaguely disappointed that they hadn't turned up on a white horse and that there was no singing, but other than that he was surprisingly happy. By the time they got there, he was a strapping young man with a mane of red hair. He strolled off to Valhalla humming to himself and grinning at anyone who came past. They grinned back. It looked like everyone in Valhalla was sharing the same private joke.

Somewhere, a gong banged. Three times. Seralina looked round in alarm.

"What's that?" she asked "It's not some sort of alarm, is it? We're not under attack or anything, are we?" Seralina had been trying to remember everything, or indeed *anything*, that she had ever learned about Viki- the Norse. But all she could remember was that battles were important and mentioned a lot. Battles and dying. Usually both together. It was their favourite pastime, or something.

"No." Freya replied "It's just time for the evening shift."

"Evening shift?" Seralina asked "What do we do in the evening?"

"Well, you know all the food and mead and so on for feasting in Valhalla?" said Freya.

"Yes?" replied Seralina, a little cautiously.

"Well it doesn't serve itself." Freya finished.

It turned out that there were two parts to being a valkyrie... well, three parts. The first part was collecting the dead. The second part was serving the fallen warriors - or delighted ex-pensioners - with platefuls of meat and gallons of alcohol. The collecting of the dead Seralina was more-or-less prepared to do. The serving of a hall full of drunken men and the occasional woman - "What with equal opportunities these days" as Freya had explained - was tolerable because basically she had to just ditch massive plates of food and

huge pitchers of mead and beer on the available space on the massive, long, tables that ran the full length of the hall and smile politely at any of the men who grinned at her and gave her a thumbs up. But she wasn't prepared to put up with the third part. It wasn't the sort of thing you could put up with.

In short, what it amounted to, was being a 'lady of the night', which might well involve working at night, but is not very ladylike at all. Needless to say, when Seralina found out she was less than pleased.

"I'm supposed to do *what*?" Seralina demanded of the valkyrie who'd dragged her out of Valhalla to stop her smashing an entire pitcher of beer over an einherjar's head.

"It's what valkyries *do*." shrugged the blonde-haired woman who'd pulled her away "Don't you know anything about Norse mythology?" Seralina was livid.

"Yes! But I didn't know that!" she yelled.

"If it's any consolation, you won't remember in the morning. It's part of the whole eternally virginal thing."

"The whole *what*?" Seralina said, exasperated. She hadn't signed up for this. In fact, she hadn't signed up for *anything*. "Look, can I talk to Freya about this?" The valkyrie shrugged.

"Knock yourself out." she said, and hustled off back into the hall.

Seralina stomped off down the hall and then realised she'd forgotten where Sessrymnir was. She wandered aimlessly along the corridors until she saw a sign.

'Sessrymnir Grand Re-Opening!' it said, then in smaller letters underneath it said 'A modern approach to the Norse Afterlife! Ask about our two year package!' There was an arrow. Seralina followed the signs until she saw Freya's hall. There was a huge billboard outside proclaiming more of the same. Underneath was a smaller sign that read 'We no

longer serve beer. If you want beer, go to Valhalla. Vegetarian meals available on request.'

The doors to the hall were closed. Seralina knocked on them. Nothing happened. She tried to push one ajar, but it wouldn't budge. She leaned all her weight on it, but it didn't move even one millimetre.

"What's the deal with this stupid door?!" Seralina yelled, losing her temper and kicking it. Just then, it opened.

"Did you just kick my door?" Freya asked sternly.

"Yes." Seralina admitted, slightly ashamed "It wouldn't open." she explained "Also, I was mad."

"Sessrymnir is impregnable unless I, personally, open the doors." Freya explained proudly, swelling a little. Then she asked "You were mad?"

"Yes." said Seralina sharply, remembering why she'd come in the first place. "I was mad about... the other part of being a valkyrie. The bit that isn't picking up dead people or serving drinks."

"Hmm." Freya thought for a moment "I think you'll be perfect for my hall."

"What do you mean?" Seralina asked suspiciously "Is this something to do with those signs I saw on the way here?"

"That's right. Times have changed. I want to modernise my Sessrymnir. Anyone who wants to go and drink themselves silly with beer and sing badly all night is free to do so at Valhalla... but I'm turning my hall into something a little more modern." Freya threw open the doors behind her and waved a hand proudly at the inside of the hall. "Behold! Asgard's first Ginza bar!"