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| THE RELIC  by  M. G. Sinclair |

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| Adult  Fantasy |

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| CHAPTER ONE  Ylva |

Just west of Baldengard, among the great redwood pines of Direhal, sat Ethnaull’Ylva. It was nothing more than a few wood spikes planted, sharpened and stripped to show only their red, weeping flesh; a pit for fires; a ladder of meticulously spun fiber; and a small hovel, built from raw, slowly rotting lumber, and packed clay, and a sheet for a door, sewn from an amalgam of various animal pelts. It was hardly big enough to fit even a single small child. Even so, it was plenty for Ylva.

Though Ylva was only eight, she was small for her age. Though her small stature was only the edge of her uniqueness. She had long, wavy hair, that was whiter than fresh snow on the Cap, eyes a pale blue, the left side of her body: pale northern skin, the right side stained pure white, a mark she bore since her birth. Its causes were unknown, and its purpose could never be guessed, but Ylva resented it, hated the eyes it brought upon her, and hated the muttered conversation behind closed doors that it surely spired. But greater than all this, she was doomed to suffer it in silence, for the Gods had seen fit to not gift her with a voice.

But now, she was resigned to alienation in the solemn comfort of her fort, fiddling with a knife, and a sheet of bark, attempting to make a mask. The bark was long, old and dried, the outside was a dark greyish red, like rust, with streams of green lichen in the