

## My Fairy Cats

When I moved into a fairy tale stonemason's cottage in the forests of Vancouver Island, a Finnish friend recommended a legendary Norwegian Forest Cat to complete the dreamscape. (Another friend called out "Swedish Flower Chickens!" but that's another story.)

Freyja and Nur, Flóki, Helios, and now Luke, have joined me over the years, and I have settled into the lifestyle of the Goddess Freyja with her court of magical cats. Norse legends tell of enormous bushy-tailed cats drawing Freyja's chariot through farmer's fields, and if the farmers left out a dish of milk for Freyja's cats, they would enjoy a bountiful harvest. And, because Freyja was the goddess of love, fertility, and beauty, giving a cat to a new bride was a guarantee of a happy marriage.

My clowder (the name for a group of 3 or more cats) loves to hunt, and the local mice and rats have either scampered off to the neighbours or been laid out on my doorstep as gifts to their Goddess. Dragonfly and butterfly tributes are less frequent, and occasionally I shriek when I'm stroking a cat and find a sticky garden slug taking refuge in belly fur.

Norwegian Forest cats love people. They are sweet, gentle, and affectionate with all the fairy, human, and (some of the) canine folk who visit our magical gated kingdom. Helios loves my lap best, or rather, my whole upper body, which he occupies with paws under my chin, tail flowing to my knees, and a purr like a generator (which I sometimes could use to run the water pump, but there are no generators in fairy tales). This breed loves to sit near (or on) their Beloved and trill and chirp about the politics of the Nether-49<sup>th</sup>. They don't need constant activity, and even though they are playful and curious, they have a reserve that makes them good companions for older people.

There is never a question about dinner, or breakfast or lunch. It is a Demand. Hungry **Neowwww**! I ignore my Wegies at my peril. I have been stomped on while in REM sleep, woken by purrs crawling into my ears, the sound of claws on the edge of the trundle bed, and worst of all, caterwauling when the neighbour's roaming housecat taunts my Fairy Cats in their attached closed catio.

When the weather gets colder, my Fairy Cats sprout a second coat of long luxurious fur, attach a huge ruff collar, and put on a pair of furry britches. The cat-walk of the modelling world was invented by Norwegian Forest cats, who show (off) best in winter, and absolutely loooooove admiration, especially in form of scratches along their jaws and ears, and a little bit of fawning while being brushed.

Nur and Freyja guard my cottage from the top of the china cabinet (aka Northern China) while their kittens hide out underneath the china cabinet (aka Taiwan). They go to Hollywood regularly (on the TV cabinet), and nest on the Great Wall of Kitchen when the place must be guarded from the middle of the Kingdom. They have a Fur Salon beside the hallway window, and check in with their beautician for irregular love-in brush-outs. One of Nur's daughters has learned how to parkour between tall trees on her way down, and she regularly goes hunting with her black buddy Odin.

Flóki the Flokinator, demanded to be let **Ouuuut, Neouw**, and proceeded to overpee the entire kingdom twice daily. During his reign, not a rat, not even a mouse, dared to come near the cottage (but the rats took revenge by birthing little rats on top of my car radiator, and nesting in the cabin filter. One day I will see the road going by under my feet as I'm driving. I'm sure the Goddess Freyja has holes in her chariot too.). Flóki's legacy lives on, not only in the 16 kittens he sired during his reign, but in the abiding scents that stick to his favourite ferns, and to certain blocks of wood in the woodshed. Helios and Luke slink past Flóki's markers, not daring to correct the Flokinator's peemanship (or instead respectfully peeing just below the F-Mark). (nb – peemanship is an outdoor activity only.)

Norse folk tales tell of the 'Skogkatt' – the giant mountain-dwelling fairy cat who melted in and out of fog, and scaled sheer cliffs. The Norse Skogkatter were fierce mousers on Viking vessels, and travelled to the Americas with Leif Eriksson to mingle with the local cats and originate the newer Maine Coon breed. Even today, Norwegian farmers prize their natural outdoor working Skogkatter, whose powerful, heavy-boned bodies and broad chests show years of natural selection through harsh

Norwegian winters. This breed has never been modified or tinkered with, and their resulting woolly undercoat, covered with long, shiny, waterproof guard hairs, is a distinctive attribute. The Wegie has a tall tufted ears, large tufted paws, and longer back legs perfect for climbing. There are many reports of this breed catching fish successfully, but my clowder is lazy around the koi armada in our pond, and dines elegantly on sardines and salmon instead.

Finally, if you want to follow the feline fairy tale in the magical kingdom of Gudrun's Place, we are on social media and have a website. Who knows – there may even be kittens with fresh passports to loving homes.

Gudrun

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