



FROZEN NORTH

Freya woke early and lay for a while in the dark, feeling her city shiver and sway beneath her as its powerful engines sent it skimming across the ice. Sleepily, she waited for her servants to come and help her out of bed. It took her a few moments to remember that they were all dead.

She threw off the covers, lit the argon lamps, and waded through dusty mounds of cast-off clothes to her bathroom. For several weeks now she had been working up the courage to have a shower, but once again this morning the complicated controls in the shower stall defeated her: She couldn't make the water hot. In the end she just filled the hand basin as usual and splashed her face and neck. There was a sliver of soap left, and she rubbed some into her hair and plunged her head under the water. Her bath-servants would have used shampoo, lotions, salves, conditioners, all sorts of pleasant-smelling balms; but they were all dead, and the rack upon rack of bottles in the walk-in bathroom cabinet intimidated Freya. Faced with so much choice, she chose to use nothing.

At least she had worked out how to dress herself. She picked one of her crumpled gowns from the floor, laid it on the bed, and burrowed into it from the bottom, struggling about inside until she got her arms and head out through the right holes. The long, fur-trimmed waistcoat that went over the gown was much easier to put on, but she had a lot of trouble with the buttons. Her handmaidens had always done up her buttons very quickly and easily, talking and laughing about the day ahead and never, ever getting a button through the wrong hole; but they were all dead.

Freya cursed and tugged and fumbled for fifteen minutes, then studied the results in her cobwebby mirror. Not *bad*, she thought, all things considered. Perhaps some jewelry would make it look better. But when she went to her jewelry room she found most of the good pieces gone. Things were always vanishing these days. Freya could not imagine where they went to. Anyway, she didn't really need a tiara on her sticky, soap-washed hair, or a necklet of amber and gold around her grubby throat. Mama would not approve of her being seen without jewelry, of course; but Mama was dead, too.

In the empty, silent corridors of her palace the dust lay thick as powder snow. She rang for a footman and stood staring out of a window while she waited for him to arrive. Outside, dim arctic twilight shone gray on the frosted rooftops of her city. The floor trembled to the beat of cogs and pistons down in the engine district, but there was very little sense of movement, for this was the High Ice, north of north, and there were no passing landmarks, only a white plain, shining slightly with the reflection of the sky.

Her footman arrived, patting his powdered wig straight.