

In the Northern Room

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From each of three red candles on a table, rises a sinewy line of smoke. Each smoke-line curves ever so slightly, in perfect unison with the other two, bending, turning slowly in a meditative dance choreographed by the opening of a cupboard door, a puff of wind, the slightest movement of people. The table is pine and polished, plain, and there's a narrow linen runner of red squares down its centre. On it there's a simple basket of red napkins ready for crumbs and spills, and a few plates with unfinished gingerbread and morsels of home-baked biscuits that dissolve with buttery sweetness on the tongue. There's a plain sofa in cream, with a blanket folded lovingly over one arm, neat and ready for a nap or to cover cold. Later there'll be coffee, in petite cups, for it will be filtered, strong and biting; even later there'll be chocolate, quietly removed from that small china dish which is mysteriously always full. The northern room is a little inviting, and warm.

The floor is timber, covered only with the odd rag-rug. The walls and ceiling are wooden too, tightly fitted to ensure insulation, with the miniature eddies and swirls of the elements of nature visible in the grain. There is a white fireplace, angular and straight, with a few logs stacked in formation waiting to be burnt; and the metal instruments of flame-stoking hang from a small iron stand, awaiting the delicate craft of a fire-surgeon. Yet even with the warmth of the fire, we need woollen socks on our feet and slippers: for the Norwegian mountains know the meaning of winter.

The fire, the candles on the table, smaller clusters of candles around the room and a few lampshades speak softly: painting the room in dull yellow, radiating shadow-patterns, flickering, fluttering in a conversation of light.

The many ornaments speak of a time before time. There's that creature of legend the troll, tricky, malevolent and humanlike. Here, it's a small statue hewn from wood: with a big belly and a foreboding brow, shaggy hair almost as a lion's mane and oversized furry feet. The many types of troll belong to Norway. They are said to lurk on its hillsides, behind its waterfalls and in its caves: this one wears overalls with basic patches on each leg