

Chapter 11

"Just a little farther down this path," Catherine tells me as she skips along the path toward a farm. "It's just a bunch of widows, so they may be willing to let you do their laundry for pay."

"Who takes care of the farm?" I ask, seeing the ground, ready for planting and animals walking about.

"They do," she says with a shrug. "Women aren't expected to be helpless here."

We pass through the gate towards the house and look around and the farm. It's so big to be run by older ladies. "That's amazing."

She nods and knocks on the door. An older woman answers the door and motions for us to enter. Catherine talks to them, and two of the women smile at me, genuine smiles of happiness.

"They're willing to let you," Catherine tells me. "They want to know what you want to give him for the wedding."

I explain to her and she smiles, turning back to tell the women. They nod and she tells me that one of them has something that will work. I'll need to come help every day for three days, but they will give it to me after.

"Three days is plenty of time!" I tell her excitedly, smiling at the women in the home. "Thank you. Thank you!"

We make our way back towards the village, arms linked, skipping and giggling as we go. Anders has sent me with Catherine every day since they arranged for her to teach me to speak their language and while I have missed him terribly, it has been so nice to be around someone I understand.

"So, I can go and help them early in the morning and then go to Helga after," I tell her and she nods.

"You'll learn lots about the language just being around it," she tells me as we see the main buildings of the village ahead. "That's how I learned, but I didn't have a big, handsome man I was hoping to talk to. I wasn't in a rush."

"He is handsome," I say with a smirk. "I just... it's so confusing because I don't understand anything he says, but I am so sure about him."

She smiles as we approach the barn and I see Anders sitting on a fence railing. I smile, looking at him as he just exists there, so handsome. He doesn't have his hair tied back, letting the long, blonde hairs fall around his face. Somehow, his hair down makes his already chiseled jaw look even more so. He looks up and when he sees me, a bright smile spreads across his face.

"Love at first sight," she whispers to me. She follows me over as Anders stands, wrapping me in his arm as his hand rubs my back.

"Don't tell him about the laundry," I tell her. "I want it to be a surprise. Will you tell him that I'm helping Helga earlier for a few days?"

She says something and he replies, his hand never leaving my back as it continues to gently rub across my shoulders. Finally, he moves and takes my hand, leading me back to the farm.

The next morning, I wake up early and get dressed before Anders even moves. I place a gentle kiss on his head and climb down from the loft, leaving for the widows' farm. I eat the bread I had brought from dinner with Olga's family last night as I walk, enjoying nature along the way. It's beautiful today, the sun shining brightly and more owers emerging from the ground, welcoming the warm weather.

I knock on the door to the house and they open, inviting me right in. I'm immediately taken over to a table and served some kind of mush in a bowl, but it isn't too terrible. Honestly, it was very kind of them to even think of feeding me. That's something I've noticed here, people are generous with what they have, always welcoming you into their home to have a meal at the hearth.

After eating, one of the women leads me over to the re where a huge pot sits, water boiling inside. She lifts a bundle of dresses and tosses them in. She grabs a wooden paddle and stirs them around, but then takes my hands and places them on it, helping me move it correctly. I've never done laundry in this way, but it seems effective. The hot water looks gross, so it's definitely getting the ick out.

I stir the clothes into the water so long that I start to sweat, from the movement and the heat of the re, when she nally helps me move the clothes from the hot water to another large pot not on the re. I'm dismayed to learn that I have to stir it again in here. Eventually, she places her hand on the paddle to stop me and reaches in with her hands, pulling the items out.

Another woman, this one a bit younger than the rest, comes and takes the items from her and walks outside with them. Before I can even turn back to the pots, the woman is tossing in another batch of clothing and motioning for me to begin stirring all over again. It takes what feels like forever and three batches later, she nally takes the paddle and pulls the pot from the re, patting me on the back.

She sits back at the table and motions for me to join her. I've never been more glad for water to drink in my life and happily take it from her as she offers. She smiles at me, patting my leg and handing me some bread before motioning for me to leave. The work was so hard, and as I walk to Helga's hut, I try to remind myself that it's for Anders, to give him something for all he has given me.

I walk into Helga's to nd a woman lying on the ground and Helga pressing on her swollen stomach. She motions me over and places my hands where hers were, pressing down until I can feel the baby. She pushes on my left hand, the hand on top, and makes a motion like this is not good, before saying something to the mother.

Helga pats my head and points down and I realize, she's trying to tell me the baby should have its head down. She looks worried and sighs, patting the mother's leg gently and helping her to sit up.

She doesn't seem to be in pain, so maybe she has time for the baby to turn around before he arrives in this world.