

Chapter 2

The man carries me towards the center of the village, the looting all but done now, as he stops in the center and places me on the ground. I look around, waiting for what's to come next, when he reaches towards his belt and unhooks something that looks like a silver hammer made of metal and places it on the ground. Grabbing a stick, he draws something in the dirt next to it with his nger before lifting me again and continuing on his way.

I look around and see neighbors and friends lying dead on the ground. It's so quiet. I just know that everyone else ran or is hiding, and I send a prayer that they made it somewhere safe, and they weren't followed.

We reach the edge of the sea and I nd boats lined up where my father used to take me shing. "Eleanor," he'd say seriously, "You're a lovely girl, but you need to know how to feed yourself. I don't want you to have to depend on a man for everything. What if something happens, and you're left alone?"

I hated shing, mostly because I hated touching the sh, but I CAN catch a sh and cook it if I need to. I was hoping that would help me attract a husband soon. Father had told me he'd take my opinion into consideration when selecting, but I know my dowry isn't as big as others and after today, it's gone. Now, I have no options. No father. No dowry. Nothing.

The man carries me onto one of the boats and places me on the ground next to a small bench, handing me the blanket tied round my clothes. I nod in thanks and pull the fur blanket around me for comfort. I had always dreamed of seeing something outside my village someday, but this was not what I had hoped for. There's some yelling as more men and women, load into the boats before they start rowing, taking me from my home.

An older man comes up and looks at me, turning to say something to them. My blonde protector says something back to him, motioning to me, and that seems to satisfy him. They row for hours before they nally stop and pull up the oars.

He moves to sit next to me on the ground, reaching into his bag and holding out a piece of salted meat to me. "Thank you," I tell him and he wrinkles his forehead, but smiles a comforting smile.

He reaches his hand up to his chest. "Anders." Reaching out, he places his hand on my chest, a questioning look on his face.

"Eleanor," I say softly.

"El-nor," he says, trying to pronounce it correctly as he reaches his hand up and twists one of my curls around a nger.

"El-a-nor," I say again, trying to emphasize the syllable that he's missing.

"El-nor," he says again, a look of frustration on his face, like he just CAN'T say it right.

I smile at him. It's so nice that he's trying. I take his hand and place it on my chest as he just had when he asked my name. "Ellie."

"Ellie," he says, returning my smile. Something about the way he says my name makes me feel comforted, like I know he's going to protect me, wherever he's taking me. He turns beside him and reaches in his bag, pulling out a loaf of bread. It's still warm and I realize that while his friends were taking everything of value, he must have decided to grab food.

Did he kill someone for this? Does it even matter if he did? The boat seems to be loaded with many items of value. They couldn't have come just from my small village. How many people did he kill to get this?

Anders holds the bread out to me again and breaks off a piece, attempting to hand that to me instead. Timidly, I reach up and take it, unsure what it means for me. I knew the person who made this, whoever it was, but I need to survive. I take a bite, looking up at his piercing blue eyes.

The wind from being out in the open water causes me to shiver. I've never been on a boat, not really. From time to time, I would go out on a small one to help my father sh, but never really leave the shore. It was small, with barely enough room for the two of us. This boat, though, is huge and there's water for as far as I can see in any direction with no sign of land anywhere.

The deer hide blanket I had grabbed when leaving is pulled back from me and Anders places the old blanket around me, placing the hide back and shoving my belongings behind me. A man yells something and they all move back to the sides of the boat, beginning to row again.

It's been ve days. Five long days on the boat. Five long days since I left my home. I'm not sure what I expected. I have no clue where exactly these Northmen are from, but I didn't think it was this far. How did they even nd my village from som far away? How do they know how to get back?

Most nights Anders sits next to me, leaning his head back to look at the stars above in the clear sky as he would doze off. Tonight, it is much colder and cloudy. Tonight, Anders seems concerned, but I'm not sure why. He's pulled my belongings together and tied them into a dress instead of the blanket. He had me place another dress over the nightgown I've been wearing and wrapped the blankets around me tightly as it has become colder along our voyage. I shiver and he tries his best to tuck me in tightly to the blankets but as my shivers continue, he lifts the deer hide and pulls it over himself, pulling me to his side with his arm around me.

I've never been this close to a man, but he's so warm, and it's so cold, so I relax into his side as he situates the hide over us and leans his head on the top of mine. I know this is improper, but I'm nally warm and he's been so kind to me. No one on the boat seems bothered by his actions. I'm not sure anyone has even noticed. Finally, I lean into him and fall sound asleep to the sound of his heart beating and his raspy voice saying "minn".