

## Chapter 4

The sun peeking through the cracks of the barn pulls me from my sleep. It's chilly, but Anders is holding me tight to him, keeping me warm. I glance up at the man, the man who saved me, but took me from my home. Now that he's sleeping and relaxed, I realize that he does look young. His long, blonde hair is loose, messy around him. Timidly, I reach up and push a strand back from his face. His hand is immediately on my arm, squeezing as his eyes shoot open, revealing the beautiful blue color. His grip on my wrist is so tight, punishing.

"I'm sorry," I say to him softly. I didn't mean to wake him or scare him, but I have no way to tell him that. His grip on my wrist relaxes as he gently brings my arm to his mouth, placing a kiss on it as he smiles at me. We can't understand each other's words, but we seem to be understanding each other's actions, most of the time. He's apologizing, I'm sure of it. He never meant to hurt me.

He brings my hand back to his hair, leaving it there, almost as if he's telling me that it's OK to touch. It feels wrong now, though, as he stares at me with an intensity I can't place, and I slowly withdraw my hand. He brings his hand to my face, slowly running the backs of his fingers down my cheek carefully, a small smile on his own face as he does.

The way he smiles at me is so comforting, like I'm important to him. Almost like he cares. I look back at him with a smile of my own, hoping that he knows how thankful I am to him for saving me, that I know what he's done for me.

His hand forms around my cheek so gently, cupping it as his deep blue eyes bore into me and he slowly moves towards me. His lips are just barely away from my own, like he's waiting for me to close the space between us. I start to lean up towards him when a loud knock at the door to the barn followed by a voice startles me, causing me to jump.

Anders releases me, though reluctantly, as he climbs out of the hay and makes his way to the door. He cracks it, and I can see Jarl standing outside as the men speak. Eventually, Anders turns back to me, closing the door. He bends down and moves through my things before handing a dress to me. He reaches into his bag and pulls out some clothes for himself before moving behind a large pile of hay.

Quickly, I slide the dress I'm wearing off of my body, the cold air hitting my skin and causing goosebumps all over as my nipples harden. I look back up, but Anders has not returned, so I dress quickly in the cleanest items I have, though at this point, nothing is what I'd consider to be clean. Once dressed, I sit and pull on warm socks and boots, waiting for Anders to return.

I wait, but realize that, perhaps, he's trying to give me privacy to get dressed myself. "Anders..." I call out timidly to him. "Anders," I say again, and he reappears with his hand over his eyes. I can't help but smile at how kind he is as I stand and walk over to him. I gently reach up and pull his hand from his eyes, smiling up at him.

He smiles at me and I swear, my heart skips a beat as he does. He moves to put on his boots quickly and then places all our clothing into his bag and throws the blankets over his shoulder before coming back to me, frowning slightly. He takes my hand and kisses the back of it before grabbing my upper arm and pulling me out of the barn.

Jarl smiles at me, but Anders places himself between us as they talk. He leads us down a path, stopping at an empty piece of land. Anders looks upset, and their words become aggressive before Jarl walks off, leaving us standing there alone.

Once Jarl leaves us he releases my arm and gently rubs his hand where it was squeezing. He sighs deeply, looking around the area. The terrain is fairly rocky, but there's a plot to the side with grass growing on it. He places our items on the ground and lifts a large ax that someone had left by a rock. I cross the land, the soothing sound of the waves crashing into the nearby shore but when I reach Anders, he gently takes my shoulders and pushes me to sit on a large rock.

I do as he wishes, watching him walk off towards the large trees behind us and he begins to chop at the base of one. He doesn't seem to want my help, so I stay still trying to stay out of his way as he chops and chops until, finally, the tree gives way and comes crashing down to the earth.

Anders grabs the trunk of the tree and pulls at it, trying his best to move it, but it's so heavy. I stand and walk over, placing my hands next to his and he looks up, shaking his head ever so slightly, but he makes no move to stop me as we pull together. It moves, but just slightly. With a deep sigh, he goes back to his bag, taking our clothes out and dumping out the items within on the ground.

There are many jewels inside, silver and gold items... and shining brightest among it all, my mother's golden candlestick. He lifts it and pauses, looking at it, and then back to the contents on the ground. Finally, he takes one of my dresses and wraps it around the candlestick, handing it to me.

He places our clothes in the bag first, lifting a bit of food that's wrapped up and placing it on top before putting the treasures on top as he takes my hand, intertwining his fingers with mine, and he leads me back to the village. We stop at a barn where it appears a blacksmith is working.

Anders releases my hand, indicating for me to stay outside as he steps under the awning and speaks with the man working. He reaches in his bag, showing the man the valuable items as they continue to speak. The stranger calls out and a man from the building next door joins them. After speaking the new man calls out, and yet another man joins.

I look around the village, taking in everything around me. There is a wagon loaded with straw that's hooked to a horse across the path from me and a girl that looks around my age stands at it, unhooking it.

Timidly, I walk over, wanting to get a better look at the gorgeous white horse. She looks up at me and I hold my hand out, trying my best to ask if it's ok.

I'm shocked as she smirks at me and says something that I can actually understand. "You can touch him. He's friendly."

## Chapter 5

"I..you..." I stutter, shocked to find someone here who speaks my language. "I can understand you."

She smiles up at me. "Where did they bring you from?"

"A village near Wessex," I tell her. "What about you?"

"Northumbria," she says with a shrug, rubbing a brush down the majestic beasts back. "They brought me as a slave. I wasn't as lucky as you."

I furrow my brow, not exactly sure how I'm lucky. "I don't understand," I admit. "I don't understand anything."

"The one who brought you," she says, tilting her head back towards Anders, who I can see watching me carefully from under the awning. "He convinced the Jarl to let you both stay. He said he bought you from Harald, so you're his property now. Wouldn't call you a slave, but the way he held your hand today... I think he has other plans for you."

I blink at her, surprised that he said he bought me. "He's been nice to me," I tell her, looking a bit embarrassed. "I can't understand what he says to me, though."

She nods, tossing the brush aside. "He's not from here. Said he was raiding with people from his village and got caught in a storm. He paid the Jarl for some land here."

That would explain why he didn't seem as excited as everyone else when we first saw land. This isn't his home either.

"I remember how hard it was when I first arrived," she tells me. "I'm Catherine."

"Eleanor," I tell her. "Can you tell me what he's doing? He was cutting down a tree, but it was hard to move, and then he came here."

She nods, leading the horse into a barn and motions for me to follow. I turn back to see Anders still watching me, but he makes no move to stop me as I begin to enter the building. "I could overhear some. He's trying to hire men to help him build a house for the two of you."

The two of us? "So I'm staying with him?"

She smiles at me and laughs. "He joked with the Jarl last night about you having his children, so I think it's safe to say you will be."

Children? I swallow, terrified of what she's saying to me. He's seemed nice, but I thought he would make me work for him, not have his children.

"The men here aren't very patient, so if he wanted you, he would have already had you," she tells me with a shrug. "Cooperate with him. He seems like he wants to care for you."

I turn around to find Anders standing in the doorway to the barn watching me, his face not giving anything away. I walk towards him, and he takes my hand in his. Catherine calls out something as we walk off, and he quickly turns to her, saying something back. After a short conversation, she smiles.

"He wants me to tell you that you're safe," she tells me.

I smile up at him. "Will you tell him that I already knew that?"

She says something to him and he squeezes my hand. He leads me out and back to the land that I now know is his, with two of the men he was speaking with following us. They speak some, but the walk back is relatively quiet. Upon return, they pull out some tools and get to work, moving rocks around and splitting the tree that Anders had cut down previously.

After some time, a few more men appear carrying some wooden boards and disappear. I assume to get more. They work so hard, moving many things around and cut down quite a few trees, splitting them into smaller pieces.

After some time, Anders wipes his brow with his arm and looks up at me, nodding once. Walking over, he takes my hand in his, lifting his back and hooking it around himself as we walk off, following one of the men.

He leads us down a path and we come to a fence surrounding what seems to be a fairly large farm. I can see horses, cows, and goats in a field and there are plants growing towards the house. There's a large house towards the center of the area and a few children are running around outside as smoke billows out of the roof.

Anders squeezes my hand gently, and I look up at him, giving him a smile that he returns as we continue to follow the man inside the fence. He leads us up to the house, leaning his head inside to say something, and then motions for us to follow him around to a barn. It's dark inside, but I can see straw about and what appears to be stalls for the horses. He speaks with Anders for a bit, both men seemingly relaxed and he finally leaves us.

Anders climbs up a ladder to the loft of the barn, motioning for me to follow him. He looks around, hands on his hips as he looks looks everything over and around. He moves some straw around into a pile in a corner and stacks some wood up like a table before he takes his bag off and sits it down on the ground, reaching in and finding the dress that's wrapped around my mother's candlestick.

Gently, he unwraps it and places it on his makeshift table and reaches back in his bag, pulling out a candle that I'm sure wasn't there earlier. He places the candle in the holder and stands, walking back to me. He wraps an arm around me and pulls me to his side as he looks at the area, a proud look on his face. He doesn't say anything, but I don't need him to. I understand clearly that this is our home now and I happily relax into his side, smiling at the sight of the candlestick inside of it.