

Chapter 6

“Ellie,” I hear the rumble of the voice of my father, waking me. “Ellie,” I hear again, feeling him run his fingers across my face. That’s odd. I can’t remember my dad ever rubbing my cheek.

I crack my eyes open to find Anders’ stormy blue eyes looking down at me, not the brown eyes of my father. His hand gently cups my cheek, his finger running along so carefully. He smiles at me so sweetly, but my heart hurts that it wasn’t my father.

He releases me, climbing out of our makeshift bed in the hay and stands, grabbing clothes from his stack to the side. At this point, nothing we have is clean, but he walks off around a board and changes anyway as I get up as well, doing the same.

“Anders,” I call once I’m dressed, and he comes back, this time without covering his eyes. He reaches out to take my hand and tugs me towards the ladder before releasing me for us to climb down.

After we descend the ladder, he looks at me, bringing his hand up and trying his best to straighten my messy hair with his fingers before he leans forward and places a soft kiss on the top of my head. He takes my hand in his and leads me to the house at the farm, knocking on the door.

A short, stout lady opens the door while saying something that I don’t understand and leads us inside. Like the large house in the center of the village, there are tables off to the side and a long re down the center, but the tables are only on one side. Off to the other are curtains hanging, breaking the area into rooms.

The woman who let us in returns to the re where she is cooking something that smells delicious. Anders and I had nished the rest of the food he had in his bag yesterday and I have been worried about what we would eat, but with no way to ask. I should have known that he had a plan. He said he would take care of me.

Anders leads me over to a table and we take a seat with a few small children who look up at him with clear curiosity. A little boy says something to him and he replies. “Anders,” he tells him and places his arm around me. “Eleanor.”

The children seem to be telling Anders their names when a woman walks up, placing a baby on my lap and says something as she walks off like she knows me. I look up at Anders with wide eyes and he just smiles at me, gently running his hand down my back. Maybe this is part of the agreement he made for us to stay in their hay loft.

The baby looks to be a few months old. Thankfully, he can hold his head up, but I doubt he can eat any food. What am I supposed to do? He smiles up at me and reaches for my hair, clearly unbothered about being held by a complete stranger. I sit him on the table in front of me, holding him in place with one hand and work my hair out of his chubby little fingers, letting him hold my finger instead. I smile at the little guy. He really is very friendly. He squeezes my hand and pulls it up to his mouth, trying to chew on my finger, causing me to laugh. Anders places his hand on the side of my head, leaning over and kissing my head gently as I play with the baby, his eyes never leaving us, nor the smile on his face.

The baby’s mother returns and takes her son back with a smile, saying something that I don’t understand again. Anders responds and pulls me to him, kissing my head again. Whatever is going on, he seems comfortable with these people.

The older woman brings over food and serves us all breakfast, something I’m very thankful for right now. It’s so delicious and I want to thank her, but I don’t know how to. Still, I take her hand in mine and look into her brown eyes and smile. “Thank you.”

She smiles at me and nods, almost like she understands, as she pulls away and goes back to cook more. Shortly after, a few men and older boys come inside, taking a seat and filling plates with food. Everything is just so warm and comfortable here and I smile at Anders, thankful that he found such a nice place for us to live here.

After everyone has eaten, the men stand, including Anders, and begin to walk off. He turns back to me and offers me his hand, indicating that I’ll be joining them today. We walk outside and head towards the front gate, but I stop and look at him. I reach for his bag and tug, trying to lift it over his head. He complies and gives it to me, but he looks so very confused.

With the bag in my hands, I run back towards the barn, quickly climbing up the ladder. I grab our gross, dirty clothes and toss them into the bag as Anders reaches the top just in time to see me. He nods, helping me down and takes the bag from me, throwing it across him and leads me out.

We walk with the men as they laugh and seem to joke with one another, and I quickly realize that we are going back to the plot of land as I thought. Once there, Anders removes his bag and hands it to me as he walks back over to the wood they were working with the day before, leaving me there alone.

I take the bag and walk down to the rocky shore line, pulling the clothing out and hiding the few remaining treasures he has back in the bag. It takes some time, submerging the clothing and beating it on the rocks, but they finally come clean and I lay the items out on rocks and exposed tree branches to dry. Anders comes up as the sun is overhead and smiles at me, looking over my work and sits down, motioning for me to join him. He pulls some food out of the bag and hands it to me and stays to eat with me before returning to his work.

They’re working quickly, I realize as I look upon them. They cut down trees and cut them to smaller sizes, hauling them away and coming back with boards that have already been cut down. This must have been part of the agreement he made with them and I can’t help but smile.

Perhaps he bought me from the other man just to keep me safe. He took me from my home, but what kind of home was left after that? I sigh, unsure what really is going on, but as I look over at him, working so hard with these men, I am sure that Anders will care for me and keep me safe.