

Chapter 9

Catherine shows up at the hut, ready to walk me home as she had previously. After the bleeding had stopped, they helped me bathe again, and I combed through my hair with the gift from Anders. The women had all smiled a knowing smile at me as I did, probably all realizing how precious the comb is to me. No one has ever really given me anything, aside from my father. I know he doesn't have much here, but he traded what he had for it. It was a sacrifice he made, and he made it for me.

"Anders has come by and asked me about how women are treated where we're from," she says as we walk down the path back to the farm. It's a beautiful day, with a bright blue sky and the sun shining so brightly, kissing my skin with its warmth. "He's quite upset. I suspect you should live a very nice life."

I giggle at that. "He is very kind, isn't he?"

"Very," she agrees. "Even more than the men here. It's better than back home, but nothing like that. I'm still just property, but it's because I'm a slave. I wish someone would look at me the way that he looks at you. He's been worried about you. The midwife wouldn't let him back in to see you. She only let him in then because you were so scared."

"I didn't realize," I tell her, looking at the ovens that are opening up as the weather gets warmer. "It's so beautiful here."

She nods, looking around. "It is," she agrees as we reach the fence around the farm.

"Do you know what happened to your family?" she asks me softly, and I pause, not wanting to talk about it in front of Anders.

"My Father was killed," I tell her, swallowing down the pain of seeing him on the oor. "He was all that I had. It was so quiet when we left. I hoped that everyone had run, maybe hid, but I'm sure they are all dead."

She nods, looking down at the ground. "When they attacked my village they were with another group. My sister was taken by the others. It's hard to not know how she is."

"I'm really sorry," I tell her, pulling her into a hug.

I lead her down the path to the barn, unsure if he will be here, but I'm pleasantly surprised to find him helping move planks of wood in the bottom of the barn with the men. It's warmer than it has been, and he's working with his shirt off, sweat glistening on his skin.

I bite my lip, slightly uncomfortable to see him like this, but unwilling to turn away from him. "Anders," I call softly, and he immediately turns to me, a huge smile on his face. He says something to the men and walks out past us.

We follow him as he moves towards the pen where a cow stands, chewing on some grass, and he leans against the fence, looking at the creature. The muscles of his back ex as he leans forward, the sweat shimmering in the spring sun. He turns and looks at Catherine, who is doing her best to look anywhere but at his strong chest, and says something to her. She looks surprised and after a few moments of conversation, she nods and turns to me.

"He was separated from his village during a storm at sea," she begins. "He doesn't know if anyone made it, but he has left messages where he went with my village for them to find him here. If they show up looking for him while he is away, he wants you to go with them."

"I can't go without him," I tell her, shaking my head.

"He said you must," she tells me. "He said the Norns have brought you together once, and if you go with them, he will find you again."

I shake my head, but before I can respond, she speaks up. "He wants me to teach you the language and, in exchange, I can come to his village when they come for him. He says I won't be a slave there."

"Do you want to come with us?" I ask her and she shrugs, but I can see in her eyes that she very much does.

"I wouldn't be a slave," she says softly and I realize just how much this means to her. She's trusting him as much as I am because if he's lying, she's teaching me for free.

"How will they know that I'm with him?" I ask, seeing many flaws in his plan.

He grabs the band on his wrist, running his finger along it carefully. "He'll leave his band. He says they will recognize it and know that it belongs to him. His village carries a blue flag with a wolf."

A nod. I had noticed the flags here, but I did not realize each village had its own. A blue flag with a wolf, and he will leave his band with me. I sigh, feeling uneasy at the thought of leaving with strange men without him with me.

Anders says something else to her and she nods, looking back at me. "He wants you to work with the midwife and learn everything that you can if you want to. He said his village needs someone to help mothers."

"I want to," I tell him. She tells him what I've said and he smiles and nods, placing his hand on my arm and says something to me.

"He wants to marry you when he returns if you're agreeable," Catherine tells me.

I look up at his hopeful, blue eyes and smile. He truly does care, even if we can't understand what the other says, we understand each other enough. "Why can't we marry before?"

She smiles and tells him what I've said, but his eyes never leave mine. "He says he can't afford a wedding."

"What is a wedding like here?" I ask, not caring which of them gives me an answer.

"It's a feast, with both families," she tells me. "Gifts are exchanged between the families."

I smile up at him, placing my hand on his chest. "We don't have families here," I tell him. "And I don't need a gift. I just want you."