

VIKING RULE



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by
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**Cover art by Kristin Dillon
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**Dedicated to the memory of
my father, JW Wilson, who
always told me to live life to
the fullest! No surrender No
retreat!**

Southeast Brittany 840 A. D.

The sound of the horses' hooves
drummed in Ragnall's ears. The sound
of metal against metal clanged. Pain shot

up Ragnall's arm as he parried the blow of the Saxon sword. The metallic smell of blood was so strong he could taste it. He slammed his arm down again and caught the Saxon's sword and sent it flying. Seeing the opening he had been waiting for, he thrust his sword between the Saxon's ribs and turned to survey the area.

He could taste the fear of the people as they ran for the hills, leaving behind all that they owned. By Odin, this was easier than he had thought it would be. To his left was Randof, his half-brother, dispatching the last of those that defended the Saxon village. His men, lust driven, from the battle fell upon the women. Ragnall didn't bother to keep

his men from their sport. After all, these women were cattle soon to be thralls or dead. The village men that survived were confined in a storage shed chained and guarded until his men had had their fill of the women and the stores of ale.

The captives would be taken to the ships in the morning. For now, blood was hot, and his men would not permanently damage the merchandise. "Ragnall," Randof said as he approached a young boy dangling by the collar, "the Valkyrie have taken three this day: Yan the scared, Tem the timid, and Sav the solid." The boy's eyes glistened with unshed tears the fathomless depths were a mirror to his soul. His expression guarded though

frightened, he looked from one brother to other. Not understanding the words, as they spoke in their native tongue. The boy looked Ragnall in the eyes then his lids dropped to hide the hate that simmered below the surface. Ragnall realized his brother was speaking he shook his head and wondered why it was this boy so distracted him, why did the instinct to protect rise within him.

"The season is too hot and the journey too long to return them to their mothers' hearths, have Erik choose two others to assist him in preparing the funeral pyres for his brother Yan and the others. See that the proper offerings are made to Thor and Odin to see them safely to Valhalla." Ragnall hated to lose his men,

all childhood friends whose families were well known to him. He would see that their widows and mothers were cared for, as was his duty, as the son of Garf the Guarded and as leader of this raid.

He watched his brother walk away dragging the boy behind him, the boy's eyes haunted him, "you haven't turned to boys have you Randof" he teased. Ragnall knew he was asking a foolish question, Randof had two wives and five thrall women to warm his bed. The boy began struggle, kicking Randof in the shins, Randof laughed and cuffed the boy upside the head; the boy's eyes burned hatred but his struggles stopped. What strength and fire this boy had so unlike

his people, Ragnall thought; most of the Saxons had given up without much of a fight.

When he first saw the boy, blood stained from the battle and fighting a man almost twice his size, he had decided the boy would make a good thrall for his youngest brother Marc only ten winters old, who had been disappointed he had not been permitted to come A-Viking. His thoughts were interrupted by a cuff to his left ear his hand going to his sword before he saw Sveinn Eggerson standing to his left a wench under each arm, both with fists flying. "Two? Sveinn why so greedy?" Sveinn laughed and lifted his right arm a little "this one is Randof's? He is dumping the boy in the shed with

the rest of the men, and then it's off to the bushes and a little sport before we relieve Stig and Thorolf for the late watch. How about you Ragnall, are you not in the mood to plow some whores belly this night?" Sveinn knew Ragnall never raped and raved when A-Viking he had no stomach for unwilling women, but he never denied his men their release. "Sveinn you know me better. I would never let the women see me in action I would get no rest and they would stop fighting you and begin fighting each other to get to me." The men shared a laugh as Randof came sauntering back.

“Smallest and weakest boy I ever saw must be at least 13 summers but not a bit

of muscle on him, a lot of fight though. I is really too bad that he is not as strong in body as he is in spirit. The little bastard even bit me."

With that, he grabbed one of the screaming women, winked at Ragnall, "Boy my ass, this root is only for the belly of a woman." Ragnall was still laughing as he approached the storage building they had found to put the men in. Men, they weren't men, they were just boys, the oldest not more than 15 winters and he was a scrawny thing with a face of a girl. Ducking his head as he entered, he surveyed the room scowling. His lips turned to a sneer, children all children he thought. Glancing over the group of children huddled together in the middle

of the room his gaze was caught as he looked into the most arresting pair of jade green eyes he had ever seen. Ragnall visibly shook his head and was glad that none of his men's tastes turn in that direction, he must be getting too old. At 29 winters he had been raiding for over 15 summers. Was he feeling sorry for these boys who sat there staring at him with variations of...what was it he read in those eyes...hatred, sadness, helplessness? Yes. These boys are much too young to hate; however hate they do and I cannot blame them. The blood on the boys spoke volumes to Ragnall...many too young to have been fighting and live they must have been standing next to a loved-one at

the end.

Katherine Eileen La Foret only daughter of Sir Rodger Sherwood La Foret, or Kat as she preferred to be called, looked up into deep sapphire eyes, eyes as blue as ice and twice as cold. He was a giant this Viking, his body so large it filled the entire door way with his blood spattered bronze chest, her gaze moved over him and she trembled visibly when a burning began in her belly. His leather braies were so tight to his form that they could be a second skin, displaying to her more of him than she cared to see. She closed her eyes taking a deep breath praying softly to her Lord and Savior that this beast had not come to rape her, she would never survivor one

so large as he. She remembered having heard him talking to the one that brought her in here. His deep, dulcet and almost musical voice, a beast like that should not have such a voice it went right through her making her toes curl, she hated him. Shivering, her mind whirling in all directions, did he know? Did he suspect she was a woman? She would not cry she would hate and remember. Her people were counting on her. With her father dead...inhaling deeply her dear father that took such good care of his people her fists clenched body taut as she stared daggers at this animal that took what she held dear. She saw father die, but her brother William Wesley, what of him she

had asked when she had first been put in here with what was left of the village's male population. That morning she had been so happy. It was her 17th birthday, and father had planned a contest, the winner would be her husband. She had known as did the town that Hereweald Baldwin would win, he always won. He was the only one in the village who could best her. He was dead now, one of the first to fall.

When the watch had seen the dragon ships appear out of the morning mist there was nowhere to go. Father told her to go hide with the women, but instead she had run to her room to get on her training clothes planning to help the men. She knew how to fight, Robert, her

father, and her older brothers William Wesley and Mathew Marcus, had seen to that. Were they gone now too? Had they fallen? She knew not. She had seen her father fall, a quick death thanks to God, before she had lost consciousness herself. When the two Vikings had come her way she was fighting back to back with Lionel, God rest his soul. The Viking she had been facing was big, bigger than anyone she had ever seen; he was a full head taller than she. He had a large broad chest that was scared from prior battles. The look in his eyes as he attacked her had been most frightening.

He had laughed at her, as if she were a child, she could tell he was taunting her

by his tone even if she knew not the words. She swung her sword and danced around him. Being smaller and faster had its advantages. Just when she thought she could fight no longer he began laughing at her, reaching out placing his hand on her head. That was when she saw her opening and plunged her sword deep in to his chest, she was short enough that she could deliver a death blow from the bottom of his ribcage in one smooth upward thrust into his heart.. Blood was everywhere; the look on his face she would never forget, his eyes opened wide, he stared at her in confusion, then his laughter turned to an ungodly cry, the cry turned to a gurgling sound, and he fell at her feet. In shock she watched him, the

bile rising in her mouth, she ran to the bushes falling to her knees and retched up the entire content of her stomach. She must have fainted because the next thing she remembered, she was being unceremoniously dragged out of the bushes by that big brute who had carried her here. An elbow to her ribs brought her back to reality.

"Kat", it was her little brother Robby, who at eight felt he had to be her protector. Kat looked into the round freckled face of a cherub; his eyes had a look much too old for his years. She reached her arm around him pulling his slight frame to her, thank god he lived. "That Bastard is looking at you Kat; stay

calm we cannot let them know you're a woman or you will suffer the same fate as the others." A shudder passed through Kat as she heard another scream from outside. Robby gave her a little squeeze as she push his thick unruly amber bangs from his eyes chastising herself for allowing his hair to get this long. Swallowing a sob that rose in her throat, she look over Robby's shoulder, goose flesh ran up her arms, the giant was still there and still looking at her.

Ragnall stared deep in to the boys emerald eyes, seeing the horrors of the day reflected in the boys distant gaze brought to the surface the disgust and revulsion he suffered during his own first raid over 15 summers ago. The death all

around the rape and the carnage the bleeding crying girl under him, he had been only 13 winters. His blood lust had been high compounded by his need to prove his manhood to his father and the other men; after all he was the Garf's son. It had sickened him, so much so that he had gone off to the trees and lost the contents of his stomach after he had spent himself on the young virgin his father had given to him.

She hadn't been his first woman, but the others had been thralls, used to rough handling and willing to teach the Garf's son the way of men and women. Until that day he had thought that all women liked it rough and fast like that. When he

returned from the trees there was another between her legs, then another, and on it went, through it all she screamed until her screams were silenced. At first Ragnall thought she had fainted until his father came up behind him and said with no remorse what-so-ever "too bad she was so weak, she was a pretty one and would have brought a good price."

Ragnall became aware suddenly that he was staring at the young boy and two other prisoners huddled close to the boy. For protection...he wondered, which he found funny, since he could remove and kill any of them, if he had the desire to do so. But what was stranger was a desire he had to do just that, "could this boy be trouble?" Even under the blood he could

tell the quality of their clothing, the three in front. "The Lord's sons" he muttered to himself, they would make good gifts to the widows of his newly fallen comrades.

Kat was frightened, having seen desire in the eyes of the village boys before, but what she saw in the giant's eyes was not just desire, which had been quick to pass there was something else, something akin to rage, frustration, or revulsion. She could not turn away: she was mesmerized, until the giant turned and walked out shouting in his heathen tongue. But his image would not leave her mind. He was tall, much taller and broader than any man she had ever seen. She could still see his face, that beautiful face even with the

hard lines of pain etched deep his lips were wide and full, shoulders so large it appeared he had to turn sideways and duck his head to pass through the door of the storage house... another scream roused Kat from her musing. Guiltily she looked around almost sure her neighbors could read her mind. As most likely the last of her father's house, it was up to her to save her people.

"Robby how many are they?"

"At least 75, Kat."

"I tried Robby, I really did but now we have to get out of here."

"You got to be crazy Kat," said Tommy Peterson, the Miller's son. "We're locked up in here and probably will be until they leave taking the women with

them. I wouldn't be surprised if they set fire to the building with us in it."

"I thought he knew you were a woman for sure, Kat" said Raymond, Kat's youngest cousin. At eight and ten Raymond and Robby were more like brothers than cousins. Raymond had come to live in the manor house four years ago after his parents died.

Ragnall had had enough; the men knew they could have as many women as they wanted only that none would be used so badly that they died. "Sveinn, Randof, Kern, start loading the thralls on the long boats. I want to be out of here with the morning tide, and get those whoring bastards moving, we have a long

crossing and many more nights to use these women before we reach the markets

The men did not understand, nor care why Ragnall did not choose to use the women, they all felt he had some misplaced sense of loyalty to his mistress at home. This made little or no sense if they stopped to think about it. Ragnall was always generous with his house thralls and never kept one to himself, which he would surely do if he was staying loyal. Well, whatever the reason they didn't care, it left more women for them and even with his temper he was the best captain to Go-A-Viking with, always bringing back the most thralls and gold.

Tommy's prediction proved wrong; not one hour later three of the blond

giants entered yelling in their strange language, and pulling the occupants of the small building to their feet. Kat was beside herself with worry. Young Robby's lip started to tremble and a few tears fell before he took a deep breath and put on a brave front. By pure instinct alone Kat reached for him and held him close to her breast. They were pushed and prodded until they reached the waterfront where the long boats awaited.

"Stay close", Kat whispered to the rest, being the oldest of the group and the lord's daughter she was the natural leader. A cuff on the side of her head strong enough to knock her to her knees was her reward for speaking. The giant grunted

something at her and pushed her in to the courtyard.

The trek to the waters edge and the boats was long and she looked around the bodies of her people still lying on the ground. She hated not being able to give them a proper burial. Off to the left she saw three funeral pyres. Good, she thought to herself, at least we took some, if only three, too bad, it was not more. They were shoved into the hold of a large ship, when the cover was placed on top they were plunged into darkness. Only then did she give in to her silent tears that had been threatening. She held Robby as he cried, hoping none would see her own tears. She cried for her brothers, for her father, Robert, for all her neighbors, the

women whom she could not help, who's screams continued and most likely would for the entire journey.

They were fed once a day, by the same Viking. She lost track of time how many days, or weeks they traveled. They were taken out of the hold some evenings after dark to stretch their legs. She give most of her food to young Robby, he was so good throughout the crossing never crying again after that first night. There were 25 of them in the ship's hold when they had left home, but upon arriving in Norway there were only a few left, Katharine, Raymond and little Robby as well as the blacksmiths two daughters. They had stopped sometime during the

crossing and all except those five had been taken away. She had no idea where and could only assume they had been sold. Sometimes she couldn't help thinking that they would be better off dead, maybe death was preferable to being a thrall. However, as long as they lived there was a chance to escape.

When she heard the cheering coming from the shore she prayed for strength. How long did she have before she was discovered?

Chapter 2

Ragnall was pleased. They had had a profitable trip. All the thralls had been sold except a select few. His father's longhouse was loud and the tables full. "By Odin, Ragnall, I am pleased with the pieces you brought to me. They still have some fight and I will take pleasure in breaking them." this was shouted by Galf the Guarded as he raised his glass in honor of a successful raid. "I have always wondered if twins were identical in ALL ways, I look forward to finding out!" and he laughed heartily.

Just then a scream was heard as one of the thralls was pulled on to the lap of Wolf the Worrier as she served ale.

Arousing cheers and coarse suggestions were called to Wolf, who did not hesitate to follow them. It was always thus after a successful raid and all knew that Galf was generous with his slaves, as long as they weren't abused. "I still think Erik was right Ragnall, we would have gotten a good price for that scrawny, pretty boy, even with his evil eyes, and the brat that did not let go of him throughout the crossing."

Ragnall knew who Randof spoke of and had he not thought the same thing? But having looked into the boys' eyes he could not sell that boy in the markets. "A good price yes Randof, but well you know what type of man would buy a 'pretty' thrall boy. I will put the boy to work at

my longhouse; I believe I have work for him. I have already offered the boys to each of widow's, none wanted the clinging little child or a boy not good for more than a nurses maid. Gilder and Hanna have sons to help them; however Rena had need of one and chose the taller red hair boy, although smaller in height than the pretty one, he has more bulk. The other two are most likely brothers and since my Gudlaug died in child bed, taking my son with her, those two will come to my longhouse with me when I depart."

Randof and Galf could not speak for a minute; it had been so long since Ragnall had spoken of Gudlaug. They

knew he had felt deeply for her even though it was an emotion they could not understand. Women were put here by Loki to tempt men and by Odin for them to enjoy. The possibility that the loss of the child bothered Ragnall never entered their minds; weak children were left to die if the father did not accept them. This land was harsh and only the strong survived.

The mood passed quickly however; and festivities continued. The men wrestled, fought in fun, as was normal at these affairs. No one noticed that Ragnall's heart was not in the celebration. Over and over in his mind he heard himself restating his reason for bringing the two boys in to his home.

Now where did that come from, he could not imagine. He had planned to leave them here as companions for Marc if they were not wanted by the widows. By Odin, he sounded like a love sick fool. Loved Gudlaug? Maybe he did once, but that love had died with her. She was beautiful yes, the loveliest women he had ever seen. Blond hair as most from his land, with eyes so blue you could drown, white thighs, smooth to the touch, and lush full breast, but a heart as cold as the Norse winter. Gudlaug, her name meant 'good wife' how ironic.

"What do you care? He was not your son anyway..." "Not your son" she had said and she had laughed... laughed! If

she had not died at that moment he would have killed her. Ragnall shook himself mentally, that was five years ago. His mother's voice broke into his musing "When do you leave us Ragnall?" His mother was still beautiful at the age of 41, but she had been set aside by her husband in favor of the young thrall girl now on his lap. She touched her son's arm briefly, she knew, she had been there that day; she heard the bitter words Gudlaug had spoken to him.

"Two days hence Helga, I have much to do before winter sets in." He saw the pain in her eyes so he smiled at her letting her know he was fine. Gudlaug had had them all fooled. Shaking off his mood he picked his mother up by the waist and

carried her to the dance floor. The celebrating would last well over a week and Ragnall was obligated to stay until it ended.

Chapter 3

The journey to his longhouse took almost a week as he had to move slowly with all the wagons carrying his portion of the take from the raid. Kat pushed Robby's hair out of his eyes as he slept in the back of the wagon. She was very tired as they had been walking for days and she had carried Robby for the majority of the time. Her feet hurt and she knew she had blisters on her blisters but she would not let them see how much she hurt.

One of giants had taken them out of the hold and brought them in front of some women. The woman had pinched Kat's arm and made a face, then she had pulled Robby's hair to see his face. She

said something to the giant and two men had dragged Raymond away. She had almost screamed and began to take a step, but the slight shake, of a very smart Raymond's head made her bite her tongue instead and hold Robby closer. She whispered "God be with you Ray" earning herself quick cuff and grunt in retribution from the giant. Kat was getting very tired of being hit upside the head. She had had her share of black eyes fighting with the village boys and her brothers, but never had someone hit her that didn't get it back one hundred fold. These giants however just laughed at her feeble attempts to fight back, and after all, she still had Robby to look after.

Ragnall lead the caravan in to his

yard. Being the second son, he had received his longhouse as a present from the father of his mother upon the day of his wedding. Glad he was that Ragnall the Ram had not witnessed the shame of his namesake and favorite. The Ram had arranged Ragnall marriage to Gudlaug himself. She had been the granddaughter of the Ram's true love. Ragnall had grown up hearing stories of the feud, and heartbreaking marriages to others. The lovers had endured until their twilight years and widowed status allowed them to resume the love affair of years gone by. An avalanche had taken them to a snowy grave together ten years before. None of them knew Gudlaug would not be happy

with a "second son", no matter that he had his own holding and bright future. She had a lover of her own choosing and swore never to be happy with Ragnall and she made sure that he was not happy either.

When the settlement came in to sight Kat was amazed. It was nothing like the one they just left. There were walls about 20 feet high on three sides with a cliff to the rear. The large building against the cliff she could only assume was the main longhouse. One was definitely a cook house, another was a smoke house and the others were most likely the villager's homes. Was this a small town or a fortress, she wondered.

Women came running out greeting

the men and some looked as if they would couple right on the street. Her disgust of their behavior must have shown on her face because she was surprised to hear a chuckle close to her side. She looked up to see the giant looking down at her with a smile on his face. He looked so different, human, and approachable she almost smiled back as if they shared a private joke. She caught herself in time and scowled at him, her hatred showing in her eyes. He would figure it out soon enough, it was inevitable. He was talking to her again as if she could understand. She just shrugged her shoulders and followed behind him assuming rightly he had told her to follow him.

They were headed toward what she thought was the smoke house. Good maybe he would lock them up again. Ragnall had read the boys shock and found it amusing the boy was disgusted with the greeting the men gave to their women. Some in fact would plow their wives or favorite thrall right away, to show how faithful they had been while away, if only in mind if not in body, or to show their desire. Either way the women could brag to each other later whose man had diddled least while gone, by how often she was taken before the feast.

Ragnall was well aware that the boys did not understand him, but he wanted them to get use to hearing his language

and hopefully begin to understand it. He of course had thralls from their land, who would teach them the words but first they would be clean.

"I can see you used none of the water that was given to you for washing. If need be, I will scrub you myself. We are a clean people even if you are not. The others we took all had to be bathed by force before I sold them. I do hope that is because they were peasants. I can tell you were the lord's sons so I hope you a willing to be clean. I cannot abide the smell of you any longer."

As they entered the building it was obvious to Kat, this was not a smoke house, for there was no smell of smoke or meat. But, what was this place? The

building had two rooms; one small with pegs coming out of the walls, the other room had three tiers of benches built in to the walls.

Kat and Robby looked around, their eyes met, they had learned not to speak when they were within the giants reach for obvious reasons. It was hot, very hot, it felt almost like they were in an oven. Was the giant going to cook them and eat them? Katherine had heard stories from nanny that the Vikings ate the children they stole, but she had never believed it until now. Poor Robby she held him so tight he gave a small squeak and pushed her chest.

"PUT THAT CHILD

DOWN...NOW!" The giant roared something, and Kat and Robby both jumped wishing they knew what he said. Suddenly Robby was snatched from her arms and was being stripped by the giant. Kat decided she had held her tongue long enough, and launched herself at the giant's back wrapping her legs around his waist she began punching his shoulders and head, what ever she could make contact with.

"Leave him alone...you...you...you big ugly brute. Why don't you pick on someone your own size! If you are going to eat us, you will just have to eat our clothes as well! You could at least have the decency to kill and wash us before you cooked us. Disgusting heathen

bastards! I hope I give you dysentery!"

She was on his back punching his head. The giant was making noises that sounded suspiciously like laughter. "Laugh at me will you, I killed one of your kind and I have no fear of killing you either. RUN Robby! RUN! Maybe they will not see you! Those rutting pigs have only one thing on their minds. You will have a better chance outside these walls, hide don't let them eat you Robby, RUN!"

Robby stood shifting from one foot to the other, not wanting to leave Kat but knowing he didn't want to be the giant's dinner either. "I don't want to leave you Kat, Please don't make me. I have to

protect you."

"Robby you must go I'll ... I am not sure how much longer I can hold on he is worse than an unbroken horse. I will try to knock him out and find you. The most important thing is that you get away!" She sighed as Robby ran out the door but just then the giant let out a roar when Kat made contact with his mouth. Kat was very pleased with herself. "The bigger they are the harder they fall. Didn't anyone ever tell you that? Well I might be small but very few can best me." With that statement she reached for the giant's broad sword with her right hand while her left arm was around his neck. "I'll choke you and cut out your black heart you bloody bastard!"

Kat's hand closed around the hilt of the sword and she started to pull, when suddenly she was on her back with the giant was on top of her. A dagger at her throat and the most feral grin she had ever seen.

Ragnall had watched the play of emotion crossing the children's faces. The little one was just curious, but he knew as soon as he saw the mutinous expression cross the elder ones face that he was going to have to force them to bathe. It never ceased to amaze him that some races preferred to sit in their own stench rather than wash. The older one was so upset that he inflicted pain on the child.

Ragnall could not abide the abuse of

a child, having witnessed his wife's cruelty toward the thrall's children and being on the receiving end of his father's temper on more than one occasion.

"PUT THAT CHILD DOWN...NOW"! Two heads turned as one staring at him as if he were Loki's brother. Ragnall was hot, dirty and tired. He had hoped for a bath, a meal and a good roll with one of his thralls maybe two considering how long he had gone without a woman. But this dirty little Saxon was getting on his nerves. He was a good Jarl, never abused or allowed the abuse of his thralls. Hadn't he kept these two together when he noticed their closeness? What more could they ask for, by Odin he should have sold the pretty

one at market. He wouldn't hurt them, but by Odin, they would be clean before he brought them to his longhouse and to table. Maybe his anger caused him to be rougher than he meant to be, but he was tired of seeing the boy coddling and clutching his brother so much, it made him angry.

This was a harsh land and only the strong survived. If the boy was to survive he would have to learn to look out for himself. He reached over and grabbed the younger boy away from his brother. "You will learn that it is good to be clean once you ..." Ragnall never got a chance to finish, all of a sudden a biting spitting cat was on his back.

Ragnall tried not to laugh, he really did, but it couldn't be helped, the thought of this boy besting him was funny. The boy had courage; he had to give him that. What was the boy saying...eat them... this was too much. Ragnall almost told the boy in his own tongue that he was only trying to bathe them. Oh Ragnall knew their language well enough, his old nurse had taught him well, however he just saw no need to speak to any thrall in their language. They would learn the language of their new home. The old life was best left behind.

"Sveinn! Stop that boy, but do not hurt the child he thinks he is this night's feast." Ragnall bellowed as the little one

sprinted out the door. "I'll play your game for awhile young one let see what you've got. By Thor's hammer,... bite my ear off will ye, cut my heart out ...you blood thirsty... little cuss...and with my own sword too...Oh you will make a good Norseman once I put some muscle on you...you have heart though I give you that. I hate to disappoint you, but we are drawing a crowd, I must put a stop to the fun." With that Ragnall flipped the boy over his back and pinned him to the ground. Just to add spice he pulled his dagger to see if the boy would lose his nerve and beg. He hoped not. "Oh I am glad you are still brave in defeat."

"Sveinn, will you look at those eyes, so much anger and fight left and no small

amount of disappointment. He actually thought he had bested ME. Look at the surprise on his face and by Odin what courage. I am well pleased."

"Sorry Kat, I didn't make it ... please don't be mad at me I'm just not as brave or fast as you."

Raghnall waited hoping the boy, Kat (strange name for a boy, even a Saxon, he made a note to change the boy's name), would not reprimand his brother for his failure. He was not disappointed, nor did he miss the mutinous look in the boy's eyes as he answered his brother. The boy expected to get cuffed for speaking, it was the way to teach a new thrall that speaking in foreign tongues where not

tolerated. "It's ok Robby the bastard was just playing with us. I really thought I had him and I'm the one that is sorry, squirt. I probably earned us both a beating before they kill us."

"Will they really eat us like you said Kat?" Robby murmured, "I promise to be ...be... b...b...brave...h...h...honest." Robby finished on a choke but stopped when Kat gave him a look.

"Don't start Robby please," she gulped, "if you cry I may and then they will have won, Robby, they may have our bodies but they will never have our spirit." Then it occurred to Robby the giant was on top of Kat.

"OH GOD Kat. I am so sorry, do they know? Will the giant hurt you like

the others Kat? Oh I wish I was bigger it's not fair!" Robby began to wiggle in Sveinn's grasp who chuckled and held tight.

"Aye Ragnall they are both full of Loki, eat them! By Odin that is too much. But what is it we might know and why hurt the boy?"

"Robby, STOP Robby, they don't know! Robby STOP! They can't win Robby do you hear me they can't win!"

Robby wasn't listening he was fighting Sveinn with a vengeance. He had seen the maid that cared for him raped and her throat cut while he was he was in hiding. He saw it again now as if it was happening to Kat, if he had been older he

could save her. "They hurt Mary, Kat." He was crying in earnest now most of the fight gone. "I couldn't help her, Kat; she was screaming Kat, and praying for God to save her. God didn't save her either Kat. Kat, I'm sorry I didn't save you too."

"It's okay Robby no expects you to be able to fight now, you're too young." Kat couldn't help it; she started to cry now too, tears of frustration ran down her cheeks. Suddenly there was pressure against her thighs that was not there before. She had to master the fear that entered her body the moment she comprehended what that pressure was.

She looked into the giant's eyes; he knew... oh God help her ...he knew. "Oh God, not in front of Robby, lord

don't let him witness it." "You bastard, you will not get me without a fight." she whispered, knowing the giant could not understand her. Louder to Robby, careful to control her voice she spoke swallowing her tears, "Robby remember who you are, stop it now, stop it!"

The tone of her voice broke through to the distraught child. "Sorry Kat I'll try harder."

"I know you will Squirt, I know you will."

"Enough talk you will be silent now!" Their own language spoken with the slight accent startled them both. Ragnall had listen with patience, careful not show any sign that he understood, and was

pleased by the way the older boy consoled his brother. When the conversation took the strange twist, he was amazed that a small child would compare a savage rape to the pinning hold he had on the boy under him. Then as he thought about it, he realized the chest that rose and fell rapidly was rather soft and full for a young boy. Then there was the lack of bulk to the shoulders, the flare of the hips beneath him that fit his like no boys should. "How could I have been so stupid? Sveinn, tell me what am I lying on?"

Sveinn who had not understood much of it, had found it rather strange that Ragnall had allowed so long a conversation to continue. Not to mention

the disgusting display of emotion that no male Norse child would deign display. "scrawny weeping boy that needs to be beat until he can act like a man, Ragnall. A more disgusting display I have never seen."

"Aye Sveinn that is what I had thought too. But oh no... we have been deceived Sveinn. No sniveling young man do I have under me, oh no... this be the bravest little Saxon, male or female, we have yet to meet."

"Ragnall, by Odin have you lost your mind, the boy has tears of fear in his eyes. It matters not that he took you on. Is he not begging mercy? Is he not and praying to that White Christ, that

Christian God?"

"The prayers you heard Sveinn, were on the behalf of the little one you hold. The fear is well advised for under me Sveinn is a young girl and she knows I just discovered that fact, or more to the point, my body has just discovered it is close to a female body. She prayed for her brother not to witness her rape, as if I would couple with one so dirty."

Slowly Ragnall got to his feet pulling Kat up with him. "Release the little one Sveinn; he has witnessed much for one so small. As soon as Robby's feet hit the ground he ran straight to Kat, who held him close never taking her eyes from the giant.

How much of what they said did he

understand, did he only know enough to shut them up? "It's okay Robby..." as she began to speak the giant raise his hand, a silent instruction she well knew by now, telling her his indulgence had ended.

"Megan." Ragnall summoned one of his thralls, "bathe and dress these two, I will be right here to ensure there is no more escape attempt. You will speak only of our customs to them; the boy will be dressed as a Norse child, the girl a thrall."

Megan hurried to get the water and cloths prepared. "A Norse boy my god" she muttered as she moved quickly across the court yard.

"As for the rest of you, don't you have something else to do?" He barked

Robby and Kat where watching and listening to the exchange. Although they could not understand the words, the fact that the giant was angry did not escape them. They saw a young girl turn and run to the house after making a quick obedience. Then the giant spoke again, more sternly this time, and every one turned and left in a hurry all shaking their heads.

Ragnall was angry, by Odin he did not know why. Loki was laughing at him for sure. Sending this woman child to him in the guise of a male child the gods did love to mess with the mortals. Not to mention the sexual tension he was feeling now, he had been too long without a

woman when his body responded to one that smelled worse than his horse. "What am I to do with another woman in the house? Sveinn will have told them all by now and they will each want their turn. By Thor's Hammer I hate it when the men are breaking in a new thrall, and new you will be if I don't miss my guess. The boy's clothes did not save you for long did they? I hope you don't cause trouble with my men."

Ragnall did not know why the thought of his men having this one made any difference to him. His thralls were always available to his men. He always had first choice of course, but he never cared one way or the other. Then he felt it, the slight tug at his arm. Ragnall

looked down in time to see the girl, the boy called Kat, grab Robby's hand back and shake her head.

The boy pulled away from her and marched up to Ragnall. "Please sir, don't hurt Kat. Do you understand me sir?" Ragnall was saved from answering by the return of Megan and the girl running forward to ward off any blow that the boy may have earned for speaking. Ragnall just looked at them and turned to Megan, "Clean them!" he ordered and walked over to the bench and sat down.

"My name is Megan and this be the bathing house. I am to see you both bathed, dressed, and I am to explain the Jarls rules to you. I will discuss nothing

else so please don't ask me more then I can say. The first rule is only Norse is spoken in this house, so after this day, you will have to learn Norse, I can help some but not much. Now out of your cloths both of you.

As a mutinous look came to Kat's face, Megan did her best to understand. "My lady, don't even ask, his lordship is here for my protection as much as yours. Now that that randy bunch knows there is an untried piece in the house, none of us will get any rest unit they've all had ye. Now don't look at me like that, who should know better than me. Ye need to understand that ye are now to be a thrall and a whore. Every woman in this house is a whore for the Jarl's men and there

hasn't been a fresh piece in nigh on five...

“ENOUGH MEG!” bellowed the observer.

Kat shivered, "Is that all he can say? I am no man's WHORE and I will thank you not to discuss the slim possibility of it in front of Robby, please. Furthermore; I will not take my clothes off in front of that or any man."

Robby sighed puffed up his chest and said, "He'll turn his back, won't you sir and I will too, I promise not to peek Kat. Oh Kat I know how you always loved to bathe, go ahead know we will ne watch. Now that he knows you are a girl you don't have to stay dirty." While he was speaking, he walked up to Ragnall and

tried to get him to turn around using motions and gestures, Robby even tried to physically turn Ragnall to face the wall.

The boy's antics, to preserve his sister's modesty, touched Ragnall deeply. Not really understanding the reason behind it as all Norse bathed together, male and female alike, he allowed the boy to turn him around. "She better not come at me with anything or I will not be responsible for my actions. If need be, tell her I will take her not only in front of the boy but, I'll make him watch as my men take their turns too. Do I make myself understood Megan?"

"Aye Jarl" she sighed. "My Jarl says that if you do not bathe without incident

the boy will watch as he and his men have their way with ye.” Kat looked at the giants back. “Gods wounds, the bloody bastard would too!” She stripped without further delay. Megan explained the Norse way of bathing as she performed the ritual. ‘The heat brings the body’s sweat to the surface my L...”

“Call me Kat, please; as you said I am no better than you now, just one of the Jarl’s whores right?”

“Thank you M...Kat. As I said the heat makes you sweat, then you sponge the hot soapy water over your body and hair, such lovely hair too, next the hot rinse, then the cold. There now all done my...Kat. Oh there is sure to be a fight in

the hall tonight. I'll just bet the Jarl didn't expect you to clean up so lovely. Here now," Megan handed Kat a plain brown gown much like her own. "There now Jarl, Ragnall, all done."

Having listened to the two women chatter during the bath Ragnall was not sure what to expect, but the vision standing before him was definitely not what he expected. Her sable hair descended passed her shoulders to her thin waist. He decided she was adequately named when he looked into her jade, catlike, eyes. As for the rest, the thrall shift did not hide one delicious bit of her. Her breasts were small and firm, the flare of her hips...he had to stop this line of thought before he disgraced himself.

"Now the boy, Meg!" his anger and frustration making him sound more fierce than he meant to. He had planned to bathe at the same time, so he walked forward and began to strip off his clothing as well. Kat was horrified she turned to face the wall but he would not allow it. "She will bath me Megan, see to it." He stood waiting with his arms crossed.

"The Jarl says you are to perform his bath, Kat. It is an honor, most of the time the thrall so honored to perform the Jarl's evening bath will spend the night on his pallet, first at least. By bathing the Jarl, you will get used to touching him" looking into to Kat's eyes, Megan

whispered, "learn how to please him."

Kat was frightened to bathe the giant, to touch his naked flesh, oh god help her she must strong for Robby's sake. "W...w...what do you mean... first, Megan" Megan chuckled.

"This is a large Settlement Kat, the Jarl has many men, and a small number of female thralls to service them all. Sorry to say this, Kat, but believe me when I say you will get used to it. Some of the men are quite generous, some even see to your pleasure, our Jarl for one is..."

"Megan! Is she going to stand there and stare at me, or will she do as she was bid, and wash me." Ragnall knew he was embarrassing the girl but he knew also that she would share his pallet this night

and the girl had to get used to his body. Megan knew this too and said as much to the girl

He was tall and she had to stand on her toes to wash his shoulders. There was only a thin rag between his large bronze chest and her small hand. She tried not to think of it or look at his body, but she had never seen a man's body before, and she couldn't help but look her fill. His skin was warm to the touch her eyes moved over his ribs to his belly.. tight and flat. She felt knots as her hand move over his steal abs. She glanced down to his large erection laying against his belly. Quickly her hand moved passed that area and down his thighs with slow long

strokes, her breath catching, she moved behind Ragnall and began to working on his shoulders and back hoping he and Megan both would not notice how she avoided that part of him.

"Can he understand us, Megan?" Megan looked at Kat as she scrubbed Ragnall's back. Then with a quick glance at Ragnall's shake of the head.

"No Kat he just knows how to tell us to shut our traps. Why?"

"Are all men...I mean, I'm not stupid, although father never allowed me near the stables at breeding time, I've seen the cats and dogs around the village... but he's so big...will it hurt much? Nurse said it hurts. One more day and I would have been married Megan, then I would not be

so frightened I imagine. Well poor luck, never mind Megan, forget I asked, it matters not.” She tried to stop thinking about it as she stoked Ragnall's broad back, tracing her way down his spine over the many scars that crisscrossed his shoulders.

While her cloth moved over the thick solid muscles of his neck, shoulders and biceps, her body warmed and breath quickened. Closing her eyes and saying a quick prayer to get her through this cursed day she wondered what was wrong with her. She quickly moved to the back of his legs, she tried not to notice how large and well made he was. Kneeling behind him, washing the back of his legs, her eyes

tightly closed she took a deep breath when Ragnall took it upon himself to turn around, deciding the front of his body would never be clean if he waited. Kat was mustering her courage, she knew if she waited too long he might hit her. She took a deep breath and raised her hand back to where she remembered his buttocks to be. When she encountered something that didn't feel like a buttocks, her eyes flew open, and she came face to face with his manhood. This massive thing looked so very threatening jutting out of a thatch of short blond curls.

"I will not faint...I will not faint." she kept murmuring it to herself over and over like a prayer and to her credit she did not. If Ragnall was disappointed his

bath was sped up so much after Kat's first contact with his manhood, to his credit, he never showed it. Kat scrubbed his thighs and lower legs with a vengeance, hot water, cold water towel, cloak.

They walked to the longhouse in silence. As they entered, all men as predicted started placing bets and calling out to Ragnall asking when they could have her. By the look of her they knew Ragnall was first, but who would be second...or third...the wrestling matches began, double disqualification, it would take most of the night, but they had nothing else to do. Some brave soul even offered to wrestle Ragnall for first and suffered a broken arm for his audacity.

Ragnall walked to the head table and took his seat. Robby was seated to Ragnall's left looking like a red haired version of Ragnall dressed in native clothing. Kat was told it was her duty to stand behind Ragnall and Robby and serve their meals. She became confused when she saw that the men and boys serving were dressed in the same short brown shift as women. When Megan had dressed Robby in the clothes similar to Ragnall she had thought that it was the only male attire available.

A female thrall walked though a group of men to fill their horns with ale and was picked up and thrown on her back as the man plunged in to her right

there while the others were eating. Kat was horrified and her eyes met Megan's across the room. Megan's expression saying, 'too few women, too many men.' Finally when Robby was ready to fall asleep in his plate, Ragnall rose, picked up the boy, and summoned Kat with a toss of his head and a look that said I dare you to defy me. It was not the look that made her follow him meekly from the room, it was the fact that he held Robby and the look of the savages in the hall he had said he would allow to use her if she didn't obey.

Megan walked close to Kat and whispered quietly "Try to please the Jarl, Kat, he's a good man and he will be gentle. He may just keep you a while

before they get ye.” She indicated who “they” were with an incline of her head.

Trembling, she followed Ragnall though the main room to the far end where a curtain hung. The room on the other side of the curtain was a large room with a trunk in one corner and a large pile of furs against the other wall. At the far side of the wall there was an opening and Ragnall carried Robby straight through. Kat followed Ragnall into this smaller room, there was a trunk and a pile of furs in this room as well and there was little room for much else. Ragnall laid Robby on the furs and took Kat by the arm leading her back to the larger bedroom.

Kat did not want Robby to awaken to

her scream. She would be brave, if Robby wasn't so close she would fight the giant. While she had been staring at what must be the bed, Ragnall had undressed and come up behind her. She felt him standing close, but she couldn't move... she didn't know what to do. Then she felt the hands on her shoulders, they trailed down to her waist. She went ridged as she felt him gather the material of her shift up, up, then it was off and she was standing naked in front of this man. 'Try to please the Jarl, Kat...' Megan's words where going though her head. "But how... I don't know what to do." She whispered to herself never dreaming he heard much less understood what she said.

Ragnall watched the girl while he undressed. So proud, shoulders straight, he had seen the look in her eyes when she realized the child would be so close to them. He was almost sorry to take her this way, but he had no taste for struggling women, and she would fight, of that he had no doubt. The thought of traumatizing the boy, however; would make her compliant. She had no way of knowing he had had the boy's wine drugged; he would sleep though a raid. She knew not that Ragnall would not have the boy frightened any more than he already was. This boy would be trained to become Ragnall's adopted son. He wanted the boys respect not his fear. The

girl was lovely; he wanted her soft and yielding in his hands. He got as much enjoyment from the pleasure he gave as he did from that which he received. He hoped the girl was not stiff and unyielding or he would be less pleased.

Slowly he walked up behind the woman; he felt her flinch when he touched her shoulders. He moved his hands down over her arms to the hem of the gown. He heard her surprise when with one tug it was over her head. He turned her then and looked in to her eyes, what eyes she had, a fierce power of possessions came over him then and he knew he would kill any that dared to touch her. Her breasts were small, well shaped, and firm. Her nipples were pink

and rosy. Her waist was so small his fingers could meet if he spanned it. Her hips were well shaped and smooth to the touch, her legs were well muscled from hours in the training grounds with the men.

"I wish you would stop inspecting me like a horse and just do it, this waiting is driving me crazy and I may lose my nerve soon. Oh am I glad you can't understand me. If only Robby wasn't so close I would not be just standing here like..." The amusement in Ragnall's eyes was more than she could take right now. "What's so funny you...you...you...VIKING." Ragnall was surprised when her tiny fist made contact with his stomach; a bigger

surprise was the power behind her punch. She was magnificent standing there, her arms akimbo with nothing covering her but her hair. What spirit.

Although Ragnall wanted Kat badly he would not force her, he would make her want him in return however. Ragnall smiled at Kat, he couldn't help himself. She was lovely, her eyes blazing green fire, her lips full and lush. He bent his head and took her lips with his tasting her anger, she fought a bit then she gave in to the feeling and with a sigh she returned his kiss. He was overwhelmed with her response to his kiss obviously untutored but her passion was beyond his dreams. He pressed against her, hard and hot for her, he pressed her against him with his

hands on her buttocks. Rocking his hips against hers, he ran his hands up and down her sides. Then between them and over her breast her nipples harden at his touch.

“By Odin, you drive me mad with wanting you Kat.” he whispered in his Norse tongue. Ragnall could not remember ever wanting a woman this badly. He released her mouth and thought he heard her sigh, as he lowered his head and took one taut nipple in between his lips.

Kat heard him whisper something in his Norse language, but she only knew he was making her forget she was not supposed to enjoy this rape. That is what

it was, even if she didn't fight, it was rape; she allowed his attention only to save Robby. But then Megan's words came back to her 'please him and he may not share you so quickly.' What should she do? She didn't want to be a whore for all his men, but then she didn't want to be any man's whore. Kat's head fell back as the giant licked and suckled her nipples "Oh my" she whispered as a shudder past through her. She felt the heat of his manhood against her as he rocked her against him she trembled with pleasure. Her body would not listen to her mind as she told herself, "Don't feel, think of Robby, and don't let him win." He chuckled, if she didn't know better she would believe she had spoken out loud

and he understood.

Ragnall was beside himself, he knew her body was betraying her; he lifted her carrying her to the pallet of furs in the corner. As he laid her down he looked at her sable tresses laying about her face. He was so hot but he would pleasure her first so she would come more willing to him the next time. He enjoyed lovemaking and Ragnall got as much pleasure from giving pleasure as he did from just taking his own. He moved from one taut nipple to the other giving as much attention as he had the first. She sighed, her head thrashing back and forth. Her soft cries almost undid him but he moved down her body licking her navel, kissing her

belly so flat and soft how could he ever have believed she was boy. Remembering having seen her fight with a sword and dagger fired his blood she would have made a wonderful Valkyrie. His mouth moved lower in to her moist curls oh she filled his senses, her musky scent and a taste that was all woman. He kissed her; she jumped trusting her hips up exposing the sweet bud to his lips he played with it listening to her cries. Kat was beside herself when his mouth touched her in such an intimate place. She felt the fire in her body and a scream rose to her lips. Her bottom lip bled as she bit it so hard so she would not scream. She was going to explode she just knew it. "He is killing me...I am dying." Her murmurs drove

him on and fed his passions. “Soon my sweet..... Soon” he said as he felt her stiffen and cry out “OH MY GOD!” Ragnall held her as the shutters shook her. His fingers drove deep inside her and were squeezed by her muscles as she exploded in to a million pieces. When the shutters ceased he rose above her. He kissed her again allowing her to taste her own sweetness from his lips. Ragnall could wait no longer he raised her hips up and took her in one quick motion. Kat felt him filling her, she stiffened as he came in contact with the barrier of her maidenhead and she cried out. She looked into his eyes and saw his raw passion; he stopped allowing her to become

accustomed to the feel of him inside her. She moved her hips, adjusting to the strange fullness inside her “By Odin Kat I will be unmanned if you move.”

She startled and stared at him not sure what he said but his soft tone touched her like no other. She reached up with her hand and stroked his cheek moving her hand to the back of his head she pulled it to her and kissed him. Kat was not sure why, but she needed to please him as he had pleased her. “How do I pleasure you as you just did me? I am your thrall, you could have taken but you gave me pleasure. You stopped because I am in pain. I may not be wise in the ways of man and woman but I know enough to know you have not yet taken

your pleasure. Although this is rape, for I was far from willing, I now find I want to give you pleasure. Is it to save Robby or myself I know not, but I do know I am good for nothing but your whore.” Tears rolled down her cheeks. Ragnall kissed her eyes gently tasting her tears wondering why her words meant so much to him. She felt herself a whore why should that bother him. He had already decided she would be his alone and no others but she didn’t know that. She moved under him then and he all but lost his restraint. He moved inside her pulling himself almost out of her, “Nay don’t leave me” Kat cried, Thinking he was done with her then he pushed back in to

her sheathed to the hilt. Ragnall took Kat again on a journey outside herself with his long slow strokes. She wrapped her feet around his hips as he moved within her, she met him stoke for stoke, kiss for kiss, Ragnall never had such a lover, so new to the game but such a responsive partner. Faster he moved and as he heard her cry out and felt her body contract around him he gave in to his own pleasure, “Odin, help me!” he exclaimed then he lay still on top of her, spent.

Kat lay there for a while wondering what she would do. “Oh my god I killed him.” She whispered. He had not moved for so long she knew he was dead. “They will roast me for sure now for killing

their lord, oh what will I do.” His shoulders began to shake, then and a laugh emerged from deep within him. She thought he was dead, well may hap he had died a little, he could not ever remember such a mating as this, she was a rear find indeed.

“Ah sweet Kat, I am not dead although you have drained me quite well.” She blushed then realizing she understood him, “Oh you lying bas.....” his lips descended before she could finish.

“Your brother Kat” he said against her lips.

She went still, a tear falling unchecked down her cheek. “You understand me. You speak my language.” It was not a

question.

“Aye my old nurse taught me your tongue, she was from your land and my father thought it wise to learn the Brit’s tongue.” Kat was confused, why he would pretend not to understand. Her thought was answered before she could voice it. “I prefer my own language spoken in my longhouse so most of my thralls do not even know I understand them. Why I have chosen to speak to you in your own tongue is that I wish not to wait until you understand me. I would have you know I am well pleased by you as a bed partner and I was pleased you sought to pleasure me.” When she would have spoken he stopped her with a look. “Yes I understand I was not supposed to know

you wished to please me, but I will tell you this, in time you will learn all the ways to please me and how I please you. You will be mine and mine alone, I will not share you with the others, I know that is a worry to you. But, know this little Kat, if you try to leave, or if you decide to fight me, I will follow through on my threat of yon boy. He will watch my men take you one after another. Do you understand?”

Kat was livid she didn't want to like him but she couldn't help it. He promised not to share her that was something, wasn't it? Oh she would protect Robby, she had to. He was all she had left. “Aye Viking, I will obey you and to protect

Robby I will please you and be your whore.”

Ragnall placed his finger and thumb on her chin raising her face to look in her eyes. “Aye you will be my whore little Kat, will you nil you. Now come kiss me Kat for I am hungry for you again.” Three more times that night Ragnall took Kat. Sleeping between times he spoke no more to her that night but each time he reached for her she willingly went to him. For now she would play the whore, but she would get free, some way, somehow, she would leave. Let him think she was content to be his whore. Her father had often told her that to catch a wolf, one oft times had to act like a sheep.

Chapter 4

Kat lay there in Ragnall's arms during the pre dawn hours both happy and sad. She felt so guilty she had let down her people and then fell into the arms of this Viking. What would Robby say when he awoke in the next room. What would he say when he saw Kat in the Viking's Bed. She had enjoyed her time in his bed that was for sure, but she had no right to enjoy his mating. She had to find a way to leave.

She was startled when she realized his eyes were open and he was looking at her so intently. Was he reading her mind? His eyes looked as if he understood her thoughts; he shook his head ever so

slightly as if to say. “You are going nowhere”. When he did speak he said simply, “You are mine Kat from this day forward to do as I will. Don’t forget that.”

Kat shivered, he had read her thoughts. He stroked her cheeks and kissed her eyes, she shivered but not from fear this time. He took her lips then and deepened the kiss plunging his tongue between her lips she met his tongue with her own, he groaned as their tongues touched and dueled, he ran his tongue over her lips tasting her sweetness. His fingers found her moist curls and he was almost undone when he found how ready she was for him already she pushed into his hand. “Easy, easy he whispered, are

you over sore?" It occurred to Kat she might tell him yes she was very sore and see if he would leave her alone. But just as the thought occurred to her, she realized she did not want him to leave her alone, she wanted him to take her to that place only he could. When she didn't answer right off Ragnall stilled and pulled back to look at her. As he watched her face he could almost follow her thoughts. She thought of saying yes, but she realized it would be a lie and realized she wanted this as much as he did. God help her, she wanted him. She reached up to him, pulling his head down to her.

"Aye sir, I am sore." Ragnall's heart stopped. "In sore need of you, Jarl

Ragnall.” His name on her lips almost unmanned him. He realized he was in trouble. He had had her in his bed only one night and like a drug he needed.....nay craved more.

They heard it then, a cry so full of pain they held still. Where did it come from? Ragnall realized the boy he must be waking and having dreams of the raid. Kat tried to go to Robby, hearing his cries in the next room. “Robby, I must see to him. Please let me go to him Jarl.” Ragnall rolled off her and she ran to the room where the boy slept. Ragnall could hear her soft voice as she comforted the boy telling him all was well now. The boy quieted and Kat returned to Ragnall. Unsure of what to do, she stood beside

the bed with her head lowered. Standing naked before this man she was frightened and shy all of a sudden.

Ragnall lay back on the bed looking at her wondering why he wanted to take pity on her, after all she was just a women they are all faithless Jades just as Gudlaug had been. She had come to him making him believe there was no other then she had taken a lover. Who, he didn't know but if he ever found out... the small sound Kat made caused Ragnall to realize he must be looking daggers at her. By Odin, he thought he was over Gudlaug's betrayal. He smiled then and beckoned Kat to come to him. He lifted her on to his manhood and was buried himself to

the hilt in one trust. She sat there atop him looking down unsure what to do next. “Um...Ragnall...My lord...what it is you want of me. I know not.” he smiled, put one hand on each hip and lifted her then let her fall raising an eyebrow he did this over and over soon she soon caught on.

“Yes my little Kat... oh yes that’s it you’ve the right of it now.” he whispered. Ragnall reached out and placed his thumb and finger over the bud of her desire just then she rolled her head back, her sable tresses cascading down her back. By Odin she was beautiful! He caught her nipple in his teeth licking and sucking as she rode him he quickened the pace she followed him, she cried out and squeezed

him so tight he thought he would die. As she screamed his name, he allowed his own release, sighing he pulled her down to him and lay her on his side. Oh Loki had sent her to tempt him that was for sure, he must never let her know the effect she had on him. Laughing he swatted her on the butt “Ok out of my bed wench I have work to be about. Get you dressed and fetch my water for washing, Megan will show you where, now hurry I haven’t got all day.

Kat was more frightened then she had ever been in her life, God save her, he must never know how he affected her. “Get my water...what a bas....”

“None of that my little Kat, don’t

forget I understand you well. Just because I prefer not to speak your language it does not mean I don't understand it and remember I don't want you speaking it either. You will learn the Norse tongue or hold your tongue still unless it is in my mouth or on my body. Now go and hurry!"

Ragnall's laughter followed her to the hall. Kat was shocked he could speak so openly about the mating act. She saw Megan and ran toward her. "Megan, the Jarl requests me to bring water. In what direction do I go for it?" Megan couldn't understand what had prompted the Jarl to send this girl for water this morning. What a strange request, the Jarl never bathed in his room, oh well, who was she

to question. The fact that the girl spent the entire night and most of the morning with the Jarl was noted by all. The thralls never spent an entire night with Ragnall, he always sent them packing in middle of the night when he was done with his sport, and now this one was to bring him wash water too. She knew it would be a long time before she shared the Jarl's bed again. Megan led Kat through the kitchen to the well and assisted her in drawing the water.

Kat entered Ragnall's chamber. "Your water Jarl", Kat growled harshly through clenched teeth. She could not let him know how much it hurt to know that their lovemaking meant not more to him

then a night of sport. Oh well she was a thrall after all, for now anyway. Ragnall saw the mutinous look in her eyes she tried to hide. He smiled, he knew she was used to being a lady with all the privileges associated with it, but if she was to be a thrall, he would have to be hard on her. This was a harsh land, that is why he sold most of the female captives along the trade route and didn't bring them home. He had seen too many of them die when he was a boy and he swore he would not bring any unnecessary females to this land. She was here now only because he and the others had believed her to be a boy, but he would make the best of it. She was tough though had he not seen her fight and mortally wound one of his men,

she had spirit and passion he has tasted both.

“Place it there and wash yourself Kat I will send Megan to get you and take you to the kitchens where you will spend your days. Do you understand?” He did not wait for an answer but walked out leaving her alone with her thoughts. Kat was secretly pleased with the chance to wash and be alone. She washed quickly fearing Megan would enter or he would return soon. As she washed she realized just how sore she was. She then began to pick up the room and fold and place the garments he had discarded the night before on the chest against the far wall.

Noticing she had not heard any

sounds from Robby's room since she had checked on him sometime this morning or had it been sometime during the night she had no idea what time of day it was, she decided to go in and check on him. Setting a false smile on her face, so as not to alarm him, she strode into his room and stopped in her tracks.. He was gone. By all that's holy where was Robby? She ran out in to the hall looking left and right for Megan or Robby, her eyes instead fell on Ragnall at the table breaking his fast. Without thought, she marched up to him hands on hips and shouted "Where is Robby you Viking? What have you done with him?" At her outburst the hall went silent; some of the men got to their feet. A thrall that was

walking though the hall was so frightened by this... someone...daring to accost the Jarl, she dropped her serving tray. Although many did not know what she said they knew the tone well. There was a collective gasp among Ragnall's people. What would he do to the woman?

One eyebrow lifted as Ragnall looked at Kat; he took a deep breath, at the very least he should slap her knocking her to her arse. For her to raise her voice to the Jarl, let alone lay hand on him, she could be beaten, killed, or given to the men, any manner of punishment. Ragnall stood slowly, his gaze boring into hers; he could lose the respect of his people by not addressing this infraction.

Although, on some level he understood and should have foreseen that she would note the boy's absence. Before he explained to her the boy would no longer use the room he did the night before, Ragnall reached out, his large hands wrapped them around her waist pulled her over his lap and spanked her well rounded ass before picking her up, tossing her over his shoulder like a sack of wheat, he carried her from the room. He was so angry! She had no right to talk to him that way. He was Jarl. The boy was safe. How could she doubt him? No doubt she thought boy in the cook house being prepared for the noon meal.

Ragnall strode in to his room absently noting she had cleaned more

than her body, he tossed her on the furs, she came up to her knees and fought him biting and scratching “Robby what have you done to Robby!” Ragnall decided he would be honest, but also evasive. His body pinning her to the furs he grabbed her wrists in one hand and held them over her head his gaze held hers.

”The boy is safe Brianna sees to his needs. This is a harsh land, Kat, he will not be coddled by you any longer. You will learn your place sharing my pallet does not give you the right to speak to me as you did just now. Consider yourself lucky I understand your desire to protect the boy and did not turn you over to my men or have you flogged for your public

display of disrespect.”

He would not tell her that Robby was being groomed and tested to see if he had the courage to become Ragnall's adopted son and had been taken to the blacksmith to have a sword and helmet made. For the next few weeks the boy would be kept from his sister and would train with the men earning his place among them. At the same time, Kat would learn her place as well. She would work in the kitchens during the day and warm his bed at night. With that he walked out.

His people understood his need for a son, and most had already realized what his dressing the boy in the clothes of Norse youth meant. The boy, Robby,

would be under his protection, none would hurt him, he would be trained as a young Norse child and Ragnall's son. He would go a Viking when he was of age. Ragnall was please the way the boy had faced him to protect his sister, he showed himself to be worthy of Ragnall's respect.

They knew he was a careful man, not spreading his seed all over the settlement, but they had hoped he would someday re-marry.

He realized then that deep inside he wished his seed would catch in the spirited Kat. By Odin where did that thought come from. He had taken Kat at least five times the night before and

spilled his seed deep within her each time. Oh Loki must be laughing at him.

She was spirited his, Kat, her sons would have that same spirit. Oh she was well named his Kat, with her jade green eyes and clawing, spiting fiery temper when she was mad or in the throws of passion. But he would be obeyed in his hall; her outburst this day had be addressed. Ragnall had decided right then Kat would be his mistress and serve him and only him in all ways; and if she gave him a son so much the better...Oh by Odin, where did that come from. He had never wanted a thrall to conceive his child, he was always careful not to spill his seed inside them. Oh well he liked the fire in young Kat, she would breed fine

strong Norse sons.

Kat held her tears at bay until Ragnall left the room. As soon as she was sure no one could see her, she collapsed on the fur covered pallet and gave her tears free rein. Oh how she wished she was a man, then maybe she would not be in this mess. Robby was taken away from her; he was to be trained to be a heathen Viking. When he grew to manhood he would be no better than these barbarians without her guidance. Then there was Ragnall, with his high handed orders that she await him in the room. He may have taken her captive, taken her body, but she would fight, he would not take her spirit or her pride.

She sat up, he must not see her tears, she wiped her eyes and sat on the pallet. She knew what she would do; he thought her biddable, did he? Well he had another thing coming that's for sure.

Kat was not sure how long she sat there staring at the doorway after Ragnall had left. She sat on the bed and sighed, what was going to happen to Robby. Mama I am so sorry. She had promised mama she would care for Robby always, when poor mama week with childbed fever had asked her young daughter not more than 8 winters old to watch out for the baby. Then mama had turned her head and breathed her last. Robby was so small and helpless, but Kat had seen to his every need. She had to

take care of Robby; Papa couldn't even look at the small boy who had taken the life of his much loved Gillian. She had lost both her mother and her father that day. Oh papa made sure she was well able to defend herself, but he never smiled, never played as he had before. "I will not let you down mama. I will not let them hurt our Robby. I will find a way to save us, somehow. At least for now I am sure the Viking will be kind to Robby as long as I don't fight him."

Megan entered the room and told Kat to follow her. As they walked across the great hall, Kat felt the eyes on her as Megan led her to the kitchens. She made eye contact with one every evil looking

man with scare down the right side of his face she shivered and looking away, saying silent pray Ragnall never followed through on his threat of giving her his men. That man didn't look at friendly.

The cook, a large round woman with grey streaks in her stringy brown hair, looked Kat up and down. "This is Gretta; she will oversee you in the kitchen, Kat. Do you know your way around a kitchen or are you a high and mighty bred get?"

Kats smile was so bright the thralls were amazed. How could they know her best time at home was when she helped cook prepare the meals and dry herbs for medical value. Picking up a knife on the cutting board Kat began to chop the meat for this evening stew, humming a song

under her breath as she worked. Drawing water from the well, carrying fire wood, she was worn-out each evening after she served Ragnall's meal at the head table. Although she had always enjoyed helping cook at home it was never left to her to do as much as she did these kitchens. Each night even though she was sore and exhausted, she fell into his arms and tried her best to please him in every way he had taught her. She looked for Robby every day but never saw him. A few times she dared to ask Ragnall where Robby was, but he would tell her only that the boy was in good health and well cared for. A few times she asked Megan if she had seen Robby and Megan had told her she had

seen the young lordling, however, she was not at liberty to discuss him with Kat and would Kat please not ask again, for she did not wish to be punished.

In the hall the men were enjoying themselves with stories of battle, drinking ale and gaming. “Not sharing the new girl Ragnall?” Gunnar chuckled as he took the seat to the left of Ragnall. Turning to look at Gunner Ragnall’s left eyebrow rose in question. He knew Gunnar was only voicing what all his men were thinking. Ragnall never kept a woman for the entire night let alone every night for the past two weeks. On top of that she was already serving at table, his table... how should he answer this? His men knew him well, Gunnar is really only

teasing him, however this was odd behavior for him.

"No, my friend, she will be mine and mine alone; she is not to be shared." Although out of character for Ragnall it is not unlike many Viking chieftains to have certain thralls he keeps and ones he shares.

"She will bear you fine sons, my friend, full of fire and courage!!!" Sveinn slapped him on the back and raised his glass high as the room filled with many cheers and thumping of drinking horns on the table. Ragnall did not naysay this statement that too was the way of his people. When they kept thralls for their own, they often used them to breed, if not

sharing it is assumed she is a breeder. A Jarl would wish his seed unchallenged. “Ho ho”!!! Gunnar chuckled, “Thor’s Hammer Ragnall! It is indeed past time you had sons!” the men drank and toasted and mock battled late into the night.

They had fallen into a pattern, each day she would rise to get bathing water for them both. Then she would go with Meghan either to the kitchens or to the main hall to help with sewing, and one of the older thralls would come each day to teach her the Norse tongue. Never again did Ragnall speak to her in her own language and she was forbidden to speak it to him.

Each night after his evening meal Ragnall would return to his quarters and

take Kat with such passion that they would be out of breath. She welcomed him each night into her body she was a passionate lover but he could tell she held a part of herself back, he wanted that part and it drove him half mad that she gave her body with such zest, but her heart remained her own. With other woman that had never bothered him, in fact he never wished for their love, if they loved him, they would be jealous when he took another. He took a deep a breath as he lay there listening to her sleep and it hit him. "Oh Loki did send her! When was the last time I took any other but Kat?" shaking his head at himself he pulled on his braies and shirt and left his room. Crossing the

hall to the door, feeling the cool air hit his heated flesh, he paced the yard while deep in thought. They had returned from A-Viking in early August now it is almost harvest; Kat had become more beautiful if that was even possible, he had not had another woman since before he went A-Viking! What was worse was he didn't wish another, Kat was all he needed her passion was unchecked, she had learned well how to give and receive pleasure. When had she become so important to him? When had her happiness become so important to him? Why did the sadness he saw in her eyes bother him? Thor's Hammer she was a thrall!

Kat entered the root cellar to get fresh herbs for cook, placing the candle

on the top of a nearby barrel; she bent at the waist to gather the dried herbs and vegetables. Suddenly, a large hand clamped on her shoulder and she was dragged deeper into the cellar and pressed against cool dirt wall. Her stomach rolled as his sour breath assaulted her when the deep evil voice growled, “finally I find you alone, whore” his hard member was pressed against the thin fabric of her shift. After three weeks in Ragnall’s longhouse, she had come to understand some of his words, but she had yet to master this heathen tongue that he spoke so low and fast, nor could she place the voice. A cry escaped her when he roughly grabbed her by the throat, fingers

gripping her jaw so she could not turn her head back to see his face. His other hand moved and tore the short thin homespun shift exposing her breasts. The hand on her jaw moved to cover her mouth to mute her cries. "Don't even think about it, bitch" his large hand squeezed her right breast harshly. She began to kicking her legs back trying to move between his to unman him. He pinned her to the wall rocking his erection against her butt. Biting down on his hand she tasted blood then dropping her right arm, as her brother William had taught her, she swung her elbow back as hard as she could driving it hard and fast into his gut. Braking way, she turned to run up the stairs when she was caught

around the middle and a large fist cracked her on the side of the head, she was sent flying against the wall like a sack of grain. Dazed she heard sounds from upstairs. Had they heard her? She crawled up the stairs before she collapsed at the top falling through the door at Ragnall's feet. One look in his eyes and she trembled before fainting dead away.

Ragnall hated that his thoughts strayed to Kat so many times during the day as he went about his chores. He could close his eyes and taste her, see her, feel her in his arms, shaking his head he was acting like a love sick fool.

“Hold your guard up boy, that's right, use your shield! Keep your eyes on your

opponents' eyes, boy, don't be distracted that's it, Gunnar, take over." Ragnall called, putting his arm around the boy's shoulder. "Very good job today boy. Brianna, take the boy for his lessons." Heading over to the stables, Ragnall thought, perhaps a ride would clear his head. He had to stop day dreaming about Kat, she was just a thrall, here to pleasure him and keep him warm at night. No, if he were to be honest with himself, he was beginning to care for the little vixen. His people had nothing but good things to say about her as well. A natural leader, she had just about assumed all responsibility of the kitchens. Oh she deferred to the cook, but he knew Kat was teaching them how to dry herbs for

the medicine that is used in her land. The entire staff, including many of his men, looked to Kat when they had need of something. In the short time she has been here, she has made herself invaluable to me and my staff. Perhaps I need to be scarce from her bed, she is making me soft. Or she is playing with me, aye that is a woman's way, just as Gudlaug had done, lying to him, using him, aye, he would do well remember that.

Just then a scream rent the air, none of his thralls ever screamed when the mer took them and besides his men were all on the practice field. Running into the hall he heard a commotion in the kitchen. Kat was lying on the floor at the top of

the stairs from the root cellar, her dress torn, large hand size bruises on her arms and exposed right breast, and there was blood on the floor next to her head.

“What happened here?” Ragnall thundered. The staff all began speaking at once, ‘I don’t know Jarl, she was only gone moments, Jarl, we heard a scream and there she was Jarl’. “SILENCE!” Ragnall barked and he bent down picking Kat up and cradling her in his arms, the instinct to protect her at war with the need for vengeance. For some time, he held her breathing deeply to clear the red haze that filled his mind, his fists clenching as he saw the bruises on her naked breast. He looked over his shoulder and saw Gunnar across the room; next to

the root cellar door he spied Erik.

“Gunnar, Erik, go look in the cellar and see if anyone is down there. Megan, bring water and attend me!” carrying Kat to his chamber he laid her on the bed wiping her face and chest he stripped off what was left of her dress. Dreading that he may find another man’s seed on her thighs, then what would he do, for any issue she bares, may not be his. “Kat, did he? Were you?” the marks on her breast where red and angry looking. Just then Gunner and Erik came through the door.

“Ragnall, we saw no one and cook said Kat was gone no more the 5 minutes.” With a low growl Ragnall flipped the furs over Kats nakedness and

stood.

“Who would dare to touch what is mine in my own house! The marks on her breast were clearly made by hands much larger then her own, so don’t you dare to tell me she is playing some game to get out of work”. Then turning to the visibly shaken thrall, “Kat, did you see the man that attacked you?”

“No it was dark and he was behind me, I am sorry I saw nothing, but I bit him, Ragnall he should be easy to find.”

Shaking his head and laughing, Ragnall followed Erik and Gunner out the door, leaving Megan to care for Kat. He instructed them to return to the practice field, but keep an eye out for any strangers, or for anyone with bite marks

on his hand, in the area. “I just cannot imagine any of my men attacking Kat. They know she is not to be shared.”

Quickly sliding his injured hand into the sack he picked up from the floor, Erik laughed with Gunnar and Ragnall “I will go check the cellars and tunnel again Ragnall to be sure.” as he walked off his chuckle turned quickly to a low growl, “LITTLE BITCH.” Clinching his fist around the sack he thought, it was a good thing both Ragnall and Gunnar had been too distracted to notice that he had retrieved the discarded sack and wrapped it around his hand. Descending the stairs he looked around for something sharp. He could not use his knife or sword to

hide the teeth marks that may be spotted. A loud bark and growl echoed down the tunnel and an evil smile came across his face. The dogs, Thor take it; this girl will pay for causing him even more grief.

Following the tunnel to the kennels and biting down on his lip, he approached Kira, the meanest bitch in the pack. Kira had just birthed a fresh litter so there would be no touching her. Carefully he approached the mutt and reached with his right hand for one of the young pups and sure enough the bitch latched on to his hand. Biting his lip, Erik jerked his hand back making sure the dog had torn into the skin close enough to Kat's bite. This caused the bite to be much worse, but it would serve his

purpose, masking the bite of Ragnall's other bitch. Cupping his hand, "Ho Gunnar," he called as he crossed the yard toward him. "I thought I heard movement in the tunnel and followed it right in to Kira's kennel."

Gunnar grabbed Erik's hand to look at it. "By Thor Erik your sword hand as well. To the kitchens with you to see if Megan can find herbs to keep it from swelling."

Pleased with his attempt to cover up his indiscretion, he made his way to the kitchens. "You girl," he growled, "see to this hand will you, there's a good girl." he said patting Megan on her moon shaped ass. Megan took one look at the bite and

ran for Kat to ask what herbs she should use to keep a dog bite from getting infected. Kat was on the other side of the kitchen, already back to work, telling Megan her head didn't hurt much anymore and she just couldn't lay a bed with so much to be done.

Seeing Erik's wound, Kat quickly mixed a poultice using hound's tongue named thus because its leaves have the texture of a dog's tongue. It also has mild antiseptic properties and is an effective treatment for animal bites of any kind. While Kat cleaned and wrapped Erik's hand with the help of Megan, Erik told Ragnall how he followed the tunnel from the cellar to the kennels. Kat shivered softly listening to his voice, it

couldn't be, but the voice did sound familiar, she must have just heard him around the house. No, the man's voice that attacked her had a lower growl to it and an almost evil hint to it. She knew Erik didn't like her, she had seen him on more than one occasion looking at her with hatred, but he was next only to Gunner in the men Ragnall trusted. It must just be the pain compounded with whatever caused him to dislike her she heard in his voice.

Erik was beside himself with anger that he has been brought to this bitch to bandage his hand, not only did he have to worry that she might notice her bite under the dog bite, but what if she

figured out it had been him. He continued to weave a tale of seeing footprints past the kennels so he had not been paying attention when he stepped on the tail of a new born pup thus pissing off the bitch that had just whelped it, jerking on his hand as the girl dug into the cut. "Must she dig in it so?!" His exclamation causing Ragnall and Gunnar to burst out laughing as they both went in the direction of the kennels and see if they could find the trail.

Planning his revenge, Erik thought, now not only does this bitch have to pay for killing his brother, but he now looks like a fool having been bit by the bitch the entire holding knows not to go near, especially when she has just whelped a

new litter. It was all her fault, the Saxon witch, with her herbs and smiles she has the entire holding including Ragnall under her spell. He would have to get rid of her Ragnall would thank him when he was shown she was not a breeder but a bitch.

Breaking into a wide grin Erik realized what to do, it is so easy, why had he not thought of it earlier. She is an herbalist and a witch; he need only use her skills against her. When she turned her back crossing the room to retrieve more clothes, he reached into her basket and took two small vials. One he knew was a potion for sleep; he had seen it used on one of the men when he was fevered.

The other was to assist in expelling ones stomach, too much and it would cause harm, but just enough and it would cause one an uncomfortable night in the outhouse. After his hand was wrapped, he left the kitchens his mind working on his plan.

Chapter 5

The next few weeks passed rather quickly the household fell back into its normal rhythm and there seemed to be no more attacks on Kat or any other woman. Every chance he got Erik would carefully, and matter-of-factly, bring up the point that no attacker was found and he wondered if the girl had ever been attacked to begin with. The first week Ragnall would remind him and Gunnar both about the bruises, but as the weeks passed, he too began to doubt if she had really been attacked, but to what purpose would she manifest an attack.

Although Ragnall had begun to doubt the attack, he would like to believe

she perhaps had slipped and bumped her head imagining an attack. He prayed she was not like Gudlaug, who was just a manipulative female. Each night they made love there was desperation in her passion, did it stem from her fear of being seen as his mistress, or was she trying to keep him well pleased with her so he didn't toss her to the hall and his men. As much as he tried to see her in the same evil light as Gudlaug, he could not. Kat's actions were so honest she even took him to task, although she had learned not to do it in the hall before his men. She had learned quickly how to please him too. Thor's hammer, just thoughts of Kat made his body harden with need. She did not understand, that in this land, in his

home being his mistress was a decidedly desired position in the hierarchy among the thralls.

He knew too, she missed seeing her brother she asked about him every few days and Ragnall would tell her it was no concern of hers, the boy was well tended. He hoped tonight at the feast she would be pleased when she saw her brother again. The boy had learned well and fast and Ragnall would be very proud to call the boy his son. He had taken her three times that morning before he had gone to Robby's chamber and presented him with the three bands to wear on his upper arm just like his. Robby had been so excited; he had

worked very hard to learn all Ragnall had taught him. It was wonderful to know he pleased Ragnall, he never felt that way at home. He sorely missed Kat but was always told she was fine and healthy. “Will Kat sup with us this eve, Jarl?” Robby asked excitedly.

“No boy. Kat, who you have always seen as your sister, is a thrall, a servant, she will not eat at table with us, it is not done. However, if you wish, I will have her serve us at table tonight so you can see her and she can share in the joy of your becoming my son and a warrior of my house. Would that suit boy”? Ragnall went on to explain that even though he would see Kat tonight, he must not treat her as his sister. That here

in this home, Kat was a thrall, a servant. Perhaps in time Ragnall would give him time alone to visit with Kat, but she had to prove she could be trusted first. Ragnall had also told Robby that tonight he would become Ragnall's son, therefore, as such he could not show emotion at the feast when he saw Kat, many would watch and it was a matter of respect and acceptance for him to maintain a distance from her. At first he was unsure that the boy would agree to be his son. Ragnall looked at the boy, he knew it was confusing for him but he must learn.

The boy wanted his sister taken care of and Ragnall had promised she would

come to no harm. Kat would serve him and he would be his son, Robby understood that, although at just 8 winters he was very confused. This man wanted to be his new father and told him he would be given a new name tonight too, Rowyn, the name sounded odd to his ears.

Robby thought of the big man that was Lord of his keep in Brittany his father, Sir Rodger. He was always afraid of him; the man didn't smile at him as the big Viking did. Ragnall was his name and he was now to be Robby's father...no his name would not be Robby anymore he was to be called Rowyn. He knew they had traveled far his home and Ragnall had taken care of him and taught so many

things and most of all Ragnall had told him that he would take care of Kat too.

When Ragnall left his chambers that morning Kat dove for the chamber pail in the corner of the room, muttering one of Ragnall's favorite cusses about Thor and his hammer, she shivered what should she do. She knew now for sure her flux had not come for two passes of the full moon and she couldn't wait for him to leave each morn so she could expel her stomach. As an herbalist, she knew she could rid herself of this child, but although she was thrall, she loved Ragnall and could never destroy his child. Loved him? Where had that come from, Kat shook her head, she was just a

thrall to him. She knew that, but what of their child, from what she had seen around the longhouse the children of thralls were also thralls. What if she had a lovely little girl would Ragnall allow her to be used by the men in his home as he did his other thralls. Every night she feared he would be done with her and send her out to service his men. God help her, what was she to do? She would be heartbroken if he gave her to his men or if he made her take herbs to miscarry the child.

Kat's steps were very slow when she met Megan in the kitchens, although she had come to understand most of what was spoken in the Norse tongue, today all the thralls and free servants were abuzz

with something she just couldn't make out. "What is it they are all worked up and excited about today, Megan? It sounds like something about a celebration? What does Frelsis-ol feast mean?"

"Tis the 'free-neck-ale' or 'Freedom Feast,' Kat, this night the Jarl will free one of the thralls what a lovely feast it is too."

Kat's heart stopped and a small smile dance on her lips. Ragnall was going free someone could that someone be her, oh joyous day!!

"Megan, who will the Jarl free, do you know?"

Megan shook her head. "It's not for

us to discuss Kat, there is much to do. Now get you started on the grain mash.” All day Kat smiled and hummed under her breath, she just knew it was she. He had to care for her, maybe he knew about the babe although she had not told him. Yes that must be it.

The hall tables were all arranged with the large head table filled to overflowing more food then she had seen placed out at any other evening meal. Seated at the center of the head table were Ragnall and some of the other Vikings. Some she had not seen before, some she thought she recognized. Her gaze met Erik’s at the table in front of the head table and she shivered, a cold chill moving down her spine when she saw pure unveiled

hatred in his eyes. Now why would he hate her? Did she not just bind his hand days back? If any should hate, it should be her. After all she was the one who had been taken from her home to this land so far away, she was the one had been attacked in the cellars and all thought she lied or imagined it.

Megan had explained to Kat that she was to stand behind Ragnall and serve him and the boy during the evening meal. “The boy, I see no boy Meg...” the words died on her tongue as he came into view. Robby was dressed just like Ragnall, in a sleeveless tunic, tight braies, tall boots, made of the hide of some animal, with a fur cuff, a large bone knife handle sticking

out the top of his boot. He wore three bracelets on his upper right arm, his hair once kept neat, was hanging to the middle of his shoulder blades with a two braids cutting a path down the left hand side. At first Kat was so happy to see Robby her heart flipped over then it stopped as her eyes took in just what she looking at. Under her breath she growled one of Ragnall's favor phrases about Thor and His hammer then just for good measure she said a prayer to her own deity. "My god he looks as savage as the rest of them" she breathed. Robby strode to the table, his shoulders back, head held high, Kat thought she would faint dead away as he bowed to Ragnall and seated himself at Ragnall's right. Kat was pleased he

looked healthy, as she had not seen him since that first night and had worried, but Ragnall had assured her Robby was fine and she had to believe he was well cared for. But now he was no longer the little boy she once knew, he was a little man. Was it the way he carried himself, or had grown three inches? There was a confidence about him she had never seen before. Pride in Robby warred with a sadness that she was not part of whatever brought about this change in him.

With a cry she started to step forward, the need to hold him burning deep in her heart. Megan put her hand out to stop her. “Don’t touch him Kat, he is seated at the right of the Jarl and you are to treat

him with all rights and respect due the son of the Jarl. You are a thrall, albeit a well treated one with privileges that many don't possess, you will remember your place tonight of all nights, do not embarrass the Jarl or the boy, now go serve at table."

Taking a deep breath and reminding herself she often had to be aware of her behavior in her father's home, so would she be wary here, she slowly walked up and stood behind Ragnall's seat prepared to serve him when the trenches were brought out. As Kat moved to the table Robby's eyes lit up and he began to get to his feet, partly because it was what one did when a lady came to table, but mostly because he was so happy to see his

sister, he came close to acting like a child and falling into her arms. Scooting his seat back he was surprised to feel Ragnall's hand on his arm staying him, Ragnall lifted his left eyebrow and quietly, so none could hear, reminded Robby about the discussion they had earlier in the day.

After the meal was served and all the drinking horns were filled, Ragnall rose too his feet, grasping Robby's arm to join him. He reached down and pulled the large bone handled knife from his boot and raising the knife over his head chanting the words of an Old Norse ritual and listing his ancestors, he placed the blade against the ball of his left palm.

and made long slash from his thumb to the edge of his hand. Looking Robby in the eye and nodding his head he handed his knife to him. A small cry escaped Kat's lips, but Megan shook her head and placed her hand on Kat's shoulder in a silent warning not to interfere. Robby looked at the knife then at Ragnall's palm. Ragnall had told him this afternoon what he was to do. Taking the knife from Ragnall, and holding it in his right hand, he pounded his chest right above his heart three times and recited the pledge Ragnall had taught him. Raising his left hand he made an identical slash, as he had been instructed. Then extending his hand and placing his palm in Ragnall's large hand, allowing the

blood to flow freely. The room erupted in to a mass of shouts. Over the noise Ragnall began to speak. “The boy who stands before you is now my son. My blood now flows through his veins. He will from this day forward be known as Rowyn, it means the little red one.” Again the room filled with cheers, of Ragnall and Rowyn, the men pounded on the tables with their fists and mugs. Ragnall looked at his new son, proud of the courage he displayed.

Kat was amazed at what she was seeing. The men and women all seemed so happy that Ragnall would take her brother to be his son. There were cheers, she didn't understand all the words but

the names of Ragnall, and Rowyn were raised as ale was consumed. Then her gaze fell on Erik the scar on his cheek made him look evil when he frowned that way. “Guess not everyone is happy about this so called adoption” she thought.

Across the room Erik was fuming, how could Ragnall take the bitch that had killed his brother as his whore, his breeder? When Erik had thought her a boy, he tried to convince Ragnall to sell the pretty boy at market to the house that catered to men that had no use for women but Ragnall had wanted to give the boy to his brother's widow, Godiva, but she had four sons, what did she want with a skinny weak pretty boy? Erik told her to take the boy and together they

would make the boy pay for the death of Yan. The bitch would not listen to him; she had felt the boy would be just another mouth to feed. Growling under his breath as he watched, he couldn't believe what he was witnessing. This woman must be a witch, not only had his brother had been felled by her, but Ragnall had allowed her to serve at table. She should be serving in the hall where he could take her repeatedly, perhaps even making her suffer. He did not begrudge Ragnall a son but that whore should suffer. He had tried to take her that day in the cellars but Loki had seen to it he did not get his revenge. He will, by Odin, he will have his revenge. Taking a long drink of his ale

he decided he would wait, soon Ragnall would tire of the slut and turn her over to his men as he did all his thralls, then Erik would make her suffer, aye, revenge was a dish best served cold after all. He would have her and perhaps he would buy her from Ragnall and bring her to the markets selling her to a whore house that was less clean than most. An evil leer spread over Erik's face and he lifted his horn with a toast, shouting and cheering in celebration of the Jarl's new son.

When the meal was over Ragnall called Brianna over to take young Rowyn to his room. Kat watched as Robby was led away, her bottom lip quivered. This was the first time in over two months she has been allowed to even set eyes on him,

but she was not allowed to touch or hug him. Now he was being led away, she noted that they continued past the room that she and Ragnall stayed in and went further down the hall. When she would have said something to him, Ragnall turned to her. “Do not speak Kat. The boy needs more time away from you to get used to his new life. I saw the way you coddled him that first night and a Norse child cannot be coddled. He will need to be strong to be a Norse warrior, this is a harsh land.”

Kat was so angry she could spit. She should be happy for Robby, he was the freed thrall. Part of her was very disappointed, she had gotten her hopes

up that Ragnall would free her. Not only did he not free her, but he held Robby out for her see and not touch, how cruel he was, she wanted to be the one with Robby now, binding his hand and putting him to bed. Taking a deep breath, she would not cry, she would not let him see how hurt she was. Ragnall saw her eyes flash with green fire, so very much like the cat she was named after. Shivering with her anger her eyes flashed daggers at Ragnall as she bit out. "Aye Jarl"

Ragnall stayed in the hall with his men until late, he had no desire to go in and fight with Kat. Oh Kat was angry or that there was no doubt, he saw it in the way she moved as she marched from the hall, read it in her eyes before she turned.

He would let her have a good cry, and later he would join her and pleasure them both. He knew he was good lover, he always ensured his bedmate was well pleased by the end of the night, he chuckled to himself softly. For the past three moons he had Kat warm and willing in his bed and tonight he had a son, he was well pleased indeed. His men had been surprised that he kept Kat all night, every night to himself, it was not like him but he liked having her next to him. They were further surprised that from the beginning she was serving his meal, that was a high position among the thralls and not often given a new thrall. New thralls would often be given the

hardest chores to get them accustomed to their new life of servitude.

Ragnall stepped over the sleeping bodies of his men as he finally worked his way back to his rooms. Dismissing the guard at the door he entered the room. Pulling his clothing off as he crossed to his furs and settled down and pulled Kat into his arms. He did not miss the fact that her cheeks were moist from her tears. He knew she didn't understand why he treated her as he had. "It's a harsh land" he reminded himself "she must adjust. beside women are faithless unless I keep her distant how can I be sure she will not welcome my men". Ragnall saw the way the men watched her, only the fact that his actions made it clear she was not for

the taking did they allow her to leave the hall unmolested this or any night. She sighed softly as he pulled her into his arms curling her small frame against him. “Odin help me” he muttered “Why do I wish to protect her from all, even myself?”

Chapter 6

Preparations for the Yule tide celebrations saw the hall a flurry of excitement with thralls and free servants scurrying around throughout the hall and kitchens. Ragnall and Gunnar took Rowyn out to the forest in search of a Yule log for the hall. While they waded through the snow pulling a small sled behind them Ragnall placed his arm around Rowan's shoulder, "Rowyn, my son, let me tell you of this celebration we are preparing for. It is called the Winter Solstice and the Yule tide celebration. At this time of the year when the days grow longer and the sun begins to return, it is surely cause for celebration, the

Midwinter Feast will last twelve days. We will sacrifice a wild boar to Frey, our God of fertility and farming to assure a good growing season in the coming year. The boar will then be cooked for the feast. On the eve of the second day we will burn a giant Sunwheel, setting it on fire it will be rolled down a hill by the south lawn to entice the sun to return.”

“Aye a truly glorious sight young Rowyn,” Gunner’s deep voice joined in.

Stopping beside a large oak tree, Ragnall slapped the bark. “Ah, a wonderful solid oak tree, is it not Gunnar? This will do nicely. Now Rowyn, sit you there while we fell this tree.”

“But Ragnall, I can help” Rowyn bent both elbows and turned his fists to

the sky to show his muscles, the men both squeezed his biceps and murmured appropriate praise about the how large his arms were indeed.

“Aye you grow very strong my son; however, we will need your help once the tree is on the ground, take a seat on the bank and I will tell of the Yule log this tree will make us.” Gunnar and Ragnall took turns swinging their axes to bring the tree down as Ragnall continued. “Another tradition we have is the Yule log, it is a large oak log decorated with sprigs of fir, holly or yew. We will carve runes on it, asking the Gods to protect us from misfortune. A piece of the log will be saved to protect the home during the

coming year and that will be the kindling to light next year's fire. The ashes will be placed under our beds for good luck in the following year.” With one final swing the tree crashed into the soft snow. Ragnall and Gunner began to trim and chopped the tree into workable pieces that would fit on the sleigh to cart back to the hall.

“This is a fine tree indeed, Rowyn; it will not only serve as our Yule log for the main longhouse, but serve as Yule log for our settlements homes as well. We will leave a stack in the practice yard for the men to bring to their homes. Now take up your axe, you will assist in trimming the branches and stacking the logs on the sleigh for travel.”

Once all the logs were loaded on the sleigh they headed back toward the longhouse. “Now Rowyn, we will also decorate evergreen trees with pieces of food and clothes, small statues of the Gods, and carved runes, we do this to entice the tree spirits to come back in the spring. Mistletoe will be hung around the hall as well; it is believed it can resurrect the dead. This belief is based on the legend about the resurrection of Balder, God of Light and Goodness, who was killed by a mistletoe arrow but resurrected when tears of his mother, Frigga, turned the red mistletoe berries white. I will tell you that story at another time. For you young Rowyn, I think the

most fun will be The Yule Goat, for he is the bringer of gifts, it is said our Thunder God, Thor rides the sky in a wagon pulled by two goats. It is our custom that the young people, including you my son will dress up in goat skins and go from house to house and sing and perform simple plays. The folk that live in the homes will reward you with food and drink. On the final night, we will be visited by Old Man Winter,” when Rowyn’s eyes got so big and he almost fell, both Ragnall and Gunner shared a laughed; “he will be welcomed into the hall to join the festivities.” Placing his finger over the boy’s lips when he would speak, Ragnall continued, “You will know him by how he is dressed, in a

hooded fur coat with a long white beard, he will either travel by foot or on a giant white horse. Now don't be alarmed, the part of Old Man Winter will be played by Gunnar. Now as soon as we get back you will go see Brianna and she will have help you make your Yule goat outfit.

Erik had watched Ragnall, Gunnar and that whelp Ragnall called a son, coming back in the yard with a sleigh loaded with Yule logs, his fists clenched in anger as he watches the men gather around to pick logs for their homes. The single men that lived in the longhouse grabbed the large one to carry into the hall. So much had changed since they returned from A Viking last summer. For

the past four cycles of the moon he had watched Ragnall become further and further be spelled by that bitch and this whelp he called a son The final breaking point was to see that they had turned Ragnall against him, was this not the first year in more than he could remember, that he had not been included in the search for a Yule log? It had always been Gunner, Ragnall and him, but this whelp has replaced him. Between that bitch in the kitchens and this boy, his life had changed for the worse.

Growling under his breath, he spun around he headed into the hall. Sending a thrall to get him a horn of ale, he sat and watched the thralls setting up for the feasts. Taking a long drink, his gaze

narrowed as he watched that bitch instructing the thralls, and by Thor, a few of the free servants as well, this had to stop. She was becoming a plague on the longhouse, they all seemed to love her thinking she was sweet, but he knew better, yes he knew better.

Every day for the past four moons he had seen the changes in this home how dare she, a thrall, a whore, carry herself like the lady of the manor! Even the men deferred to her, a thrall! She was the Jarl's whore not his wife. Some treated her better than they did their own wives, the village wives treated her as an equal when she they sat with her in the hall doing their needle work. She is evil it is the only

way she could have defeated his brother, Yan, in the battle that day they had taken her and the others.

When it was thought she was a young boy he had wanted blood, but he saw the wisdom in waiting and perhaps selling the sweet faced boy to the lechers that buy young boys for all manner of nefarious reasons. What was worse, he could see that Ragnall was falling deeply under her spell. She is not made to work as other thralls, she is allowed to spend her days on stitching, cooking and even held the sacred place of herbalist in the longhouse. The whore had Ragnall so be spelled he even allowed her to stay in his rooms all night. Given the chance, he would teach her, he would take her to his home, and

put her to work in the stables both for horses and whores. She should be beat every night for weeks, and then killed for having murdered his brother. He had followed the code; he had waited until none would suspect his revenge. Was it not said 'A thrall takes revenge at once, a fool never takes revenge. A good man, however, simply waited. He left his victim alone for a long time, up to several years in some cases. Then, just as retaliation seemed to be forgotten, one day he would suddenly attack his enemy with a masterful stroke hard and inexorably.' Aye he would have his revenge!

Chapter 7

On the fifth night the of Yule celebration, Erik decided this was the time to put his plan in place. He never would have considered it, but since the girl had obviously used witchcraft to best Yan, then she should suffer all manner of things. Ragnall was surely and completely be spelled by his bitch; he had even taken her brother to his heart as his son. Rising from his spot among the men he went to over Gretta, one of the thralls that had been ejected from Ragnall's bed. Aye she was one of many, but he had made sure that over the past moons he stoked the fire of her anger against Kat. Gretta was convinced Kat had bewitched

the Jarl and turned him against her, therefore Gretta made a willing ally to Erik's plan. Pressing his body to her back and biting softly on her neck his right hand snaked around her body to cup her breast. His thumb teased her hardening nipple as he whispered to her that it was time to dose Ragnall's drinking horn. Pulling the vial containing the Narcissus jonquil potion from within his vest, he placed it in her left hand. Erik knew she would comply, he had had taken her every night keeping her from the others, for that she was thankful. She also though he would buy her from Ragnall, he never told her yea or nay, but it was good she felt loyal to him and no longer to Ragnall. When he witnessed Gretta

bring Ragnall the drugged drinking horn, Erik slid up beside Ragnall and shouted over the noise in the hall. “A toast my Jarl! My congratulations and best wishes to you Ragnall, may Frigga smile upon your new son this night, his first Yule as a warrior of this longhouse.” The assembled men all knocked their drinking horns on the table in agreement. More toasts were made and on it and went late into the night.

Ragnall started to feel warm and dizzy. His bowels began to feel irritated, he had no idea why. He really had not drunk much ale. What was wrong with him? Was the boar bad? No one else seemed to be ill. He rose to his feet,

deciding to make his way to the outhouse since his meal was begging to make an appearance. Gripping the table he fell back down into his chair, he vision was blurring and the room seemed to be spinning... “Loki take it” he growled under his breath, “what is wrong with me I feel weak as a woman”.

Ragnall woke and pain assaulted his body, head and eyes. Slowly he opened his eyes and quickly closed them. He felt like he was staring into the sun. One more time he opened his eyes when he felt a wet cloth moving over his neck and bare chest, a soft woman’s voice was speaking, turning his head he was stunned to see Megan’s face was in his vision. Why was Megan bathing him and why was he in

such pain, was he injured... had there been a battle?

Lifting his head and trying to shake the pain to clear his vision he looked down his body. Thor's hammer, he had no bandages, in fact he had nothing covering him, no clothes or furs. "By Thor, what goes on here woman...where is Kat...why do I lay naked in bed...what has happened? "

"Easy Jarl lay still." Megan put her hand on his chest, pressing him back on the furs and sent Brianna for Gunnar with a toss of her head.

Ragnall was still dizzy and confused his mouth dry and belly cramped in retribution for him trying to sit up. "How

long Meghan?”

“Seven days Jarl we thought we were going to lose you for sure. Tis glad I am to see you awake now. Please lay still Brianna goes for Gunnar now.”

When Gunnar came to Ragnall's chamber, he took a seat and began to explain to his Jarl just what had transpired over the last seven days, and what had taken place at the Feast before Ragnall got ill. He was sure Ragnall would not be happy with the news he had to impart. “Jarl this may not be easy to hear, but please hear me out. First, let me tell you it has been determined you were poisoned; you were given Narcissus jonquil potion. In a smaller amount it would have just kept you in the outhouse

for the night, however, you were given more than a few drops and it almost killed you. Megan has not left your side for that last 5 days.”

“Megan has not left my side...what of Kat... why does she not tend me? She has much more knowledge of herbs than Meg.” The look in Gunnar’s eyes caused Ragnall to stop speaking. “No Gunnar, by Thor tell me it’s not so...it was not Kat?”

”Aye Ragnall, the vial containing Narcissus jonquil potion was found in here under your furs. She was pulled from the duty of seeing to your care and placed in the wood shed until you either recovered and could pass sentence or died

at which time she would join your funeral pyre.” Gunnar placed his hand on his friend’s chest when Ragnall tried to get up. “There is more Ragnall, she is gone and though it greaves me to say, it appears Erik has taken her away, he is also gone.” Pressing his fist over his heart he continued. “They have been gone only four days Jarl and they headed in the directions of Erik’s holdings; therefore I saw no need to follow yet.”

Gunnar’s voice dropped low, “Before we knew you were drugged, Jarl we thought you were just through with her, when Kat saw you in your cups, she came to assist you, but Gretta the very buxom wench from the kitchens, was on your lap and you told Kat to leave you be and had

Erik take her from the hall. Aye Ragnall, I knew had wanted her for a breeder but thought maybe you had changed your mind; however, I told Erik she was hands off until you said otherwise, and he was to just secure her in the thrall quarters. When you took ill, Megan and Gretta said she was the best to care for you, so she was brought to you. By Thor, I had not known just how well spoke to Norse until she, using many of your favorite oaths, made it clear she had no desire to help you. However, when she laid eyes on you, you were so pale, Ragnall, she directed her oaths as me for waiting so long to send for her. I thought she had a cure for you but then Gretta brought me a vial

and said she saw Kat putting it in the water she feeding you. Gretta was concerned and told me it was not the correct right herb to cure you. I took the vial to Megan and she confirmed, it was as good as poison in your condition.

“No Gunnar! No, poison is not Kat’s way. I am sure if I was sitting in the hall with Gretta’s fine bosom in my face, Kat would take a knife to my throat, but she would not poison me. Tell me, where did Gretta find this vial?” Ragnall pushed himself to sit up uttering an oath as his head began to spin, he swung his legs over the side of his furs to place his feet on the floor. “By Thor I am as weak as new born get, Gunnar send for Gretta and bring her to the hall while I dress.”

Ragnall allowed Megan to assist him dressing and rising to his feet and taking a deep breath, he walked into the hall.

Chapter 8

Erik moved through the yard careful to stay in the shadows, it was working out better than he had hoped, but that stupid bitch Gretta had almost killed Ragnall. Murder of the Jarl was not what he had had in mind, making him ill and having that Saxon bitch blamed, aye. Well he insured Gunnar thought it was Kat that had put the poison in the Jarl's ale by having Gretta sit on his lap while he was almost passed out. Erik made it look like Ragnall had sent Kat from the hall. He had not counted on them wanting the Kat to assist in healing Ragnall. He had made sure that it was Gretta and not Megan that assisted Kat to care for

Ragnall and had told Gretta to accuse her of putting that poison in Ragnall's drink. That way she would be taken away from the hall and isolated, then could take her to his holdings with none the wiser. Unlocking the woodshed door he strode inside, quietly crossing the room to where the girl lay unconscious from the potion that Gretta put in her evening meal. By Thor, that stupid whore better have gotten the dose right this time, he told her he wanted to kill this slut slowly. Pulling a grain sack over her and tying the top he carried her out of the woodshed and relocked the door. Tossing her over the back of his brother's horse he walked the horses out of the settlement unobserved, he waited until he was in the

tree line before mounting and heading over the mountain trail.

Head throbbing, stomach rolling Kat opened her eyes unsure of her surroundings. She tried to turn her head to see where she was and the entire content of her stomach spilled out on the ground and Erik's boots.

“Loki take it woman!” halting the horse he pulled Kat to her feet, tying a rope around her neck, he spun on his heels and stormed over to the river letting the water wash his soiled boots before turning to remount his horse.

Kat dropped to her knees and half crawled to the bank of the river, dipping her face into the icy stream to clean her

head and rinse her mouth. She gasps as Erik jerked on the rope not allowing her a drink. Dragging her to her feet and using the rope around her neck to bind her hands as well he growled “You will walk behind my horse instead of riding on his back since you cannot respect him.” wrapping the end of the rope around his waist he mounted his horse and kicked its sides.

Too proud to complain or cry Kat did as she was told walking in the wake of the horses for the next two days. Kat had no idea where they were going. It felt as if they went in circles and she had no idea how much time past before she saw what appeared to be a hunting cottage. When they entered the cottage she saw it was

indeed a small one room hunting cottage. Erik had kept her tied to him the entire journey, not giving her any privacy, even for her most delicate needs. Kat had very few sick days in the last few weeks; however, with the stress of the last few days she had been sick each time he allowed her to eat. She was very concerned, she wished she knew what herb Erik drugged her with. There were many that could affect her this way, she just hoped this was not one that would harm the child.

Although her pride suffered when he continued to call her a weakling, and that she would not get a good price if she was sickly, she hoped he thought she was too

sick to sell. She was terrified he would touch her as Ragnall had, she did not want to share such intimacies with anyone other than Ragnall. Oh my, could it be, did she love Ragnall? No! He killed her people, her father, Hereweald...she couldn't remember Hereweald's face... when she closed her eyes it was Ragnall's smile she saw and the look he got before he would take her in his arms. The kindness she saw in his eyes the few times she happened to glimpse him with her brother, his son, Robby, not Rowyn, he would always be Robby to her. Ragnall treated her brother better than his own father had and he had been good to her, aye, she did love him. She couldn't remember when he had not been a part of

her life, what was wrong with her, she could barely remember her life at all before Ragnall.

Kat didn't see the fist coming at her so deep in thought was she "Lazy worthless Female!! Witch!! I told you to get the fire started." Erik commanded. Watching the girl sitting on the floor where he left her, he was beginning to wonder if she was daft. Was that why Ragnall didn't share her? Was she crazy? No, he had seen her kill his brother, Yan, who was an expert swordsman. No daft girl could have bested him.

No, she had bewitched Ragnall, Erik had heard the talk. They said Ragnall had used no other thrall since he had

brought this witch to his longhouse. He didn't drink and gamble with the men, he retired to his furs and his whore every night. The witch's cries of pleasure could be heard throughout the longhouse until well into the night. She had bewitched the entire longhouse; they would praise her bravery and her beauty, her knowledge of herbs and willingness to teach the women of the settlement the ways her people have learned to use them. They celebrated, thinking Ragnall would marry his Saxon whore. Aye, she was a witch, and she had be spelled the entire settlement! Well he would see to it her beauty would tempt no man again. A feral smile on his lips, he pulled his knife from his belt and walked toward Kat.

Kat was shaken. The crazy look in Erik's eyes scared her, so she rushed to start the fire hoping to distract him, but continued to watch him out of the corner of her eye. The play of emotions on his face frightened her as no other. Confusion, rage, hate...hate so deep she wondered what she had done to inspire such a deep abiding hatred.

Sensing his movement Kat turned to face him, shaking her head "No, please no, oh god not that." she whimpered as she backed away.

Erik moved forward his eyes glazed with hatred and lust grabbing Kat by the arm he held the knife to her throat. With a flick of his wrist he cut the shoulder

straps at neck of her shift and the rough fabric fell to the floor leaving her naked flesh visible. Licking his lips, his gaze moved down her body, “WHORE!” he growled, “WITCH! I had planned to kill you, or sell you to the dirtiest pimps on the coast, but you have bewitched me it seems! Loki take it! I want you!”

Pulling on the end of rope that was still around her neck drawing her to him he moved to take her mouth with his. Pulling his face back quickly when she bit his tongue he spat out the blood and cuffed her across the face knocking her to her knees.

Dizzy from his slap, Kat closed her eyes, no not now she prayed, she refused to cry. He pulled her back to her feet and

his hands moved over her body touching her where only Ragnall had ever touched her. She drifted in a pool of memories refusing to react to Erik's touch. Tears fell unchecked down her cheeks. "Oh Ragnall" she whispered softly not realizing she had said it out loud. Her head jerked as the back of Erik's hand made contact with her face once more.

"Look at me whore, look and know who owns you!" Erik laughed "Ragnall oh ... oh... Ragnall... (Erik mocked in falsetto). Kat's eyes met his, Erik smiled "Yes little witch you are mine, Ragnall sold you to me, how else do you think I left his settlement unmolested with you.

Did you not see him with Gretta the night of the feast, aye Ragnall has tired of you whore, and you are now mine!’ Grabbing Kat’s hand Erik pulled her small fist to his manhood, she recoiled in fear, closing her hand pulling back as much as could but he was too strong for her.

Just then an Idea struck, if she pretended to give in, she may be able to get away. Pushing away her anger and nausea she leaned into Erik rubbing her body against his, she mewed softly, “oooh yesss, Erik please!”

The door crashed open slamming against the wall. Screaming, Kat tried to pull from Erik’s grip, her gaze falling on the large man in the doorway, crying out

as Erik tightened his grip on the rope around her neck and pressed his knife just under it. He pulled the rope tightly wrapping it around the hand that held the knife choking her and other cupped her naked breast turning her back to his chest, facing the door. The bright sun around the large shadowed figure was blinding but Kat knew who it was, and so did Erik.

“Ragnall!” the rope so tight her words came out as a choke, “please, oh God please, tell me you changed your mind!!” Growling loudly when he spied the lovers he stood there taking in the scene. Kat his Kat was begging Erik to take her, By Thor, that cut deeply and his

body, traitor that it is, responded to her pleas, for his body had a good memory of how prettily had she begged him many nights. He had been riding day and night to find them, not sure if Kat had left of her own free will, or if she had been taken from him. Now seeing her in the arms of her lover begging to be taken, the pain of betrayal almost crippled him. No one takes what is his and lives.

She was no better then Gudlaug, running off with her love, how could he have been so blind. Shaking his head to dull the rage he took a deep breath, not his Kat something was a miss here. Aye, something is a miss. The girl, Gretta, was so angry that Erik had left her behind she had told Ragnall and Gunnar

everything before she was executed for betraying her Jarl.

Erik had convinced her that he would purchase her freedom if she drugged Ragnall's drink during the Yule feast. When she had measured incorrectly and almost killed him, they had decided to blame the poisoning on Kat so she would be isolated and he could take her away and sell her at the markets. That night he had promised to take Gretta as well, but when she came to the shed ready to leave, Erik had slapped her and called her a stupid whore. She knew she should go to Gunnar right then but she was afraid her life would be forfeit for her part in the poisoning of the Jarl, if not the theft and

possible murder of his now pregnant breeding thrall.

Ragnall had been shocked buy her revelation that Kat was expecting, but it was confirmed by Megan and some of the kitchen staff; they had all noticed the changes in Kat. Her sickness in the mornings had not been missed by the thrall that cleaned the chamber pots and the special tea she had been brewing for herself to keep her stomach from being irritated. Why had she not told him? Why had none of them said anything? That had been answered by Megan. They thought he must know since he had made it clear she was to be his and his alone. He had been elated to learn Kat was increasing then panic set in. What had Gretta given

to her, would it hurt his child? They had ridden night and day following the days old trail. Ragnall had never been so concerned for another in his life. His Kat, his spitting clawing Kat, he prayed to Odin, to Thor and even her White Christ, that Kat did not do anything to anger Erik enough to hurt her or their child. I love her, by Thor. When had that happened, when had Kat become more important to him then his own life?

Now here she stood in the arms of another man begging to be taken to a place Ragnall so loved to take her. Schooling his features, he took in the situation before him. Drawing his sword and stalking into the room he growled

low; “How long Erik? How long have you betrayed me? Had you wanted her, you need only to have asked, but by taking her without my approval you must face judgment.”

“Judgment!!” Erik gasped, “Where is my judgment eh?? She killed Yan! I saw her drive the sword through his heart; she is a witch, Ragnall! She must be, to have killed Yan and bewitched you into not burning her for the witch she is!”

Ragnall stopped, his head tilted to one side in thought, he looked from one to the other, aye there is more here than it seemed when he entered. “Erik, if you hate Kat, why is she here with you? Did you wish me to think you seduced her into leaving with you? Or perhaps, did

you think I would not be concerned that my property was stolen, or that your whore poisoned me by your order, or by the looks of it, that my property was abused and perhaps damaged? Aye, Erik you have much to answer for.”

A quick glance was all Ragnall needed to see Kat’s puffy eye, the dark circles under her eyes from lack of sleep and the bruising on her cheek and breast. Any further abuse he wished not to think about at this time. She was naked, in Erik’s arms; however, Ragnall did not miss the knife at her throat, rope around her neck, rope burns on her wrists, or her flushed complexion. He smiled; she had not gone willingly with Erik. She had

been poorly treated, but Erik had not raped her yet. His gaze reached Kat's eyes, she started to open her mouth but his look stopped her as quickly as his words. "Not one word Kat! I will deal with your treachery later!" The hurt in her eyes almost unmanned him, but he needed to keep Erik off balance, as long as Erik thought Ragnall believed Kat had joined him willingly they may get through this with Kat still alive.

Erik was in a panic as Ragnall stalked him. His hand holding the knife at Kats throat trembled. If he killed her Ragnall would kill him, but at least he would have revenge on his brother's killer before he died. Maybe he could save himself. "She bewitched me too,

Ragnall, she put a spell on me to take her from the longhouse.”

Shaking his head at this Ragnall called to Gunnar to come in and take Erik out to the horses. “Go with Gunnar Erik, I have no wish to kill you this day but you will be tried for taking my property.”

As Gunnar entered Erik’s arm started to move as if he were going to slice Kat’s throat. His arm barely moved before Erik fell back, blood pouring from the wound in his neck, Ragnall’s knife jutting out of his throat.

Kat ran into Ragnall’s arms he picked her up cradling her to him. She was babbling about him selling her and

how scared she was and how he had better never ever sell her again. Ragnall pulled her face back to look into her eyes and said to her first in Norse then in Saxon in case she did not understand. "Kat, my little Kat. I did not sell you, I will never sell you. Kat wrapped her arms and legs around Ragnall and knew she was home. He saved her, and he was going to keep her, she would gladly live under the Vikings Rule. Ragnall mounted his horse with Kat still in his arms refusing to let her go even when Gunnar offered to hold her as he mounted. He wrapped his fur around her to cover and nakedness and keep her dry, she felt his chest rise under her cheek the beating of his heart steady and strong

lulling her to sleep. Leaning down to kiss her forehead Ragnall whispered softly “Sleep my sweet Kat you are safe and you will never leave my side again”

Nuzzling into his chest Kat mewed sleepily “Never my Jarl, never leave you Ragnall, I love you.”

“And I you my little Kat, you are mine always”.

Epilogue

Sitting before the fire in the hall sewing a new shirt for Ragnall, Kat was startled from her thoughts as a young sable haired girl child came screaming into the hall and hid behind her chair, her angelic face peeking up at Kat as she cried. “Mamma mine!” On her heels a young boy of about five winters with sapphire eyes and long golden lock, challenged the girl, his bearing and tone so much like his father’s, Kat had to bite her lip to keep from laughing.

Stopping before Kat’s chair placing a hand on each hip he demanded, “Aileen you will give me back my sword now!”

“MINE!” the two-year old cried.

“You’re a girl, you cannot have a sword, you are not a warrior!” across the hall a pair of ice blue eyes meet Kats, she raised one eyebrow and struggled to stand, her belly round with her next child, causing her actions to be a bit ungainly.

“And just who has said a girl cannot use a sword Ulfr?” his mother chided. Standing before his mother the boy began to shuffle his feet and lower his gaze, when he felt a large hand on his shoulder, he turned to look at his father.

“You best run out and play Ulfr, you cannot win this battle with your mother. Aileen, give your brother back his sword, I will make you one of your own tomorrow. Now go find Brianna, tell her

I said you may have a snack and let your mother rest, both of you.”

As the two ran from the hall calling for Brianna, Ragnall pulled Kat against his chest wrapping his arms around her and placing both his large hands over her rounded belly, nipping her neck he whispered softly against her ear, “I thank Odin the day I met you my sweet Kat.”

Soft jade eyes meet his as Kat turned her head over her shoulder whispering against his waiting lips, “and I husband, and I!”

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About the Author

Shimma J David lives north of Boston with her Husband, and two cats aptly

named Thor and Loki.

Coming Soon Nizhoni promis

Chapter 1

2641 Plant of Xanadu Orion Sector

Nizhoni could not believe he was gone. Patrek Neal Kapanui had been gone six months, and it still felt like it was yesterday. “At least he didn’t suffer but, I wish I could have reached his son for him as he asked me too.” He was more like a father to her then her own had been. He had taken her in and given her a job when her own parents had died. For fifteen years she had worked for him. These last five had been hard for Pat, ever since the minor stroke that had put him in the wheel chair. Nizhoni had begun to run the club for him then. She had written

numerous letters to his son Jessie (Jessie Patrek Kapanui). asking him to come home to see his father. But Jessie never answered the letters. Now Pat had died without ever reconciling with his beloved son, a son who had left 20 years before, when his parents had divorced.

“Find him for me Nizhoni, promise me, find my boy, tell him I loved him I never stopped. Take care of Ohana house you are the only one I can trust. Don’t let it turn into one of the seedy places. Promise me girl...” Nizhoni could hear him saying it again as he always had. Ever since that first attack not a night went by that as she was dressing him and putting him in bed for the night, he would ask her to promise to find Jessie for him.

A small-time crook by the name of Buzz Spartenelli had been leaning on him since his first heart attack trying to make him sell Ohana House, but Pat would not sell. “It is all I have to leave my son I will not see it turned into a Mafia laundry.

“I promise Pat I will find him and Ohana House will stay just the way you loved it,” she whispered. The graveyard was empty now as the sun disappeared behind the mountains. Nizhoni felt a chill run up her back as she stood there alone talking to Pat, she had come here every day in the six months since his death. “They have come by every night pat, every night, I am frightened but I will not let you down. I will hold Ohana House if

it kills me.”

Nizhoni knelt on the grass tears falling unchecked down her cheeks, she was so lost in her misery she didn't hear him moving up behind her. She had promised Pat she would take care of it and she would, she had loved him like a father and she owed him for her very life. “It will be all right.” she said out loud with more confidence then she felt. “I know it will be.”

“Well if it isn't the grieving widow.” said a sarcastic voice from behind her. Startled Nizhoni jumped, and turned facing him My God he was huge he was well over six feet, and drop dead gorgeous, his features were so perfect, dark and ruggedly handsome face that

was so familiar to her. A muscle clenched along his jaw and his full lips thinned with a cynical twist. He was as dark as Nizhoni was fair. He had to be Patrek's son, he looked just like him. Although Patrek had been well into his 60's when he had died he had still been a very handsome man. He and Nizhoni had often speculated that if she didn't love him as a daughter and he didn't love her like a father they may have had a real marriage. But, that was not the case. When Patrek had suffered the first attack that crippled him he became worried about what would happen to Nizhoni and Ohana House if he died so he had asked Nizhoni to marry him. She had at first

refused telling him she would take care of him and the restaurant without marriage. “Without marriage they can take it from you Nizhoni and god only knows if you will ever find my son or if he is still alive. I want you well taken care of.” Nizhoni offered for it to be a real marriage even though he was more father and friend than lover. But the attack had also made sex impossible for her dear friend. So Nizhoni cared for him and gave him all her love until he died. Now standing before her was a younger version of her husband snarling at her. That is one difference she thought, Patrek always smiled, except when he thought of his son, then a deep sadness would come over him and he would sit alone for

hours.

Nizhoni knew what people thought. They thought she had married Patrek for his money, for the restaurant, but she had married him because he needed someone to care for him and because she both loved him dearly and owed him everything. He would not allow her to move in and take care of him unless they married and she would not allow anyone but herself to care for him.

“Jessie! My God is it you? Oh this is wonderful we have searched for so very long. Your father wished so badly to see you before he died. I do wish you had come sooner”

Jessie stiffened visibly he had no

desire to hear that his father had cared. He knew better, he was only here to sell the restaurant, and then he would return to his home on the Mars colony. “Oh sure you searched for me well my fathers lawyers found me, I am only here to sell the restaurant and return home.

Sell the restaurant he was going to sell it oh no he cant. “You can’t sell it Patrek loved Ohanna House!” She was on her feet like a shot, anger replacing her sadness she faced him. God he was tall she shivered, rolling her shoulders back and her small fists clenched in anger as she rose to her full height and still she came to just below his chest. Taking a deep breath she mustered her courage. She would not let him intimidate her. “I

won't let you sell it, you can't."

"Oh and you are going to stop me, how do you suppose you can do that?" the smile on his full lips turned to sneer as a thought came to him. "Oh I see he left that dump in part to you, didn't he? Well, my lawyers will take care of that. You married him after the attack that took his legs and perhaps his mind, we can prove he didn't know what he was doing. A slut like you will not stop me from selling that broken down excuse for a restaurant." He turned on his heels and strode away. His long legged pace so quick Nizhoni had to run to catch up to him.

"I can not believe you waited until after he died to come, and then you

march over here without even a flower or prayer for him and tell me you are going sell Ohana House. It was Patrek's dream he built it for you please reconsider." her voice broke and she began to cry again poor Pat he had loved his son, had prayed daily he son would come to visit him.

Jessie quickened his pace across the graveyard. His back and shoulders stiff and his fists clenching with anger as he hit the remote to start the engine. He took a deep breath to control the rage that threatened to consume him. Why he had come to the graveyard he did not know. Maybe it was so he could say good bye to the man who had been his father. But she was there, how dare she be here, carrying on like she cared, saying his

father loved him what did she know. He had not expected to see her, nor had he expected her to be so young. Damn she was younger then he, she looked to be about twenty five or so, and she had married his father. It had to have been for the money, why else would she have married the old man, after his heart attack she probably didn't expect him to live as long as he had. Jessie already had his lawyers working on discovering the terms of the will. He would contest it if the restaurant had not be left solely to him.

He had received an offer in the mail for the sale of the restaurant a week ago. What a way to find out your father had died. A letter offering to buy your

inheritance, one you had no idea even existed. It was said that half of it belonged to his father's widow; he had thought they meant his mother until he arrived and learned his father had married again.

God what nonsense was she spouting about his father missing him and him being cruel to have stayed away. She hadn't even had the decency to contact him when his father died. She probably had hoped he would never find out so she could run the place and steal all the profit for herself. I

As she watched him drive away Nizhoni stomped her foot "of all the ungrateful, arrogant, he didn't even say a prayer" and with that she began to cry again poor dear Pat his son was and evil

cruel man. Perhaps it was best Pat had not been here it would have broken his heart.