
LAND *of* SHINING WATER

THE
Icecutter's
DAUGHTER

TRACIE
PETERSON



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To the ladies
of our Monday morning Bible study

You are a great joy
and inspiration to me.
I'm so blessed that God put us together.
Thank you for your friendship.



Chapter 1



MINNESOTA
DECEMBER 31, 1895

Merrill Krause tucked an errant strand of hair under her knit cap and sighed. There were two things she knew to be completely unpredictable: one was Minnesota winter weather, the other was the foaling of a horse. Glancing into the birthing pen, Merrill noted the mare looked to be no further along than half an hour earlier.

“Poor girl.” The Belgian mare whinnied softly and rolled onto her side. Merrill entered the pen and knelt by the horse’s head. “You can do it, Addie girl.” She stroked the mare’s neck, then stood to check the progress of the foal. Merrill could clearly see the first showing of a hoof as the mare contracted. “You’re such a good girl. Keep pushing, and soon your little one will be here.”

But Merrill knew that might not necessarily be the case. Just last year when Molly, their nine-year-old Belgian, gave birth for the fourth

time, the process stretched for hours after the hooves appeared. Addie had already been in the pen for over two hours, with minimal progress.

Merrill made a face—she knew that just like watched pots hesitated to boil, watched mares seemed to be just as stubborn to deliver. Most mares preferred to give birth without an audience or assistance of humans, but because this impressive stock was an important part of their income, the Krauses tended to keep a close eye on their broodmares.

After one more glance at Addie, Merrill continued with her other chores. Despite it being the last day of December, she couldn't help but whistle a Christmas carol. All morning long she'd had the tune in her head, and when she reached the chorus she began to sing, "Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king." They were the only words she was certain of, so she went back to whistling another stanza. After a mild fall, the winter weather had turned bitter cold, and Merrill found whistling helped her to forget about it.

"Addie doing all right?" Her brother's voice carried across the length of the barn.

Merrill turned toward the sound and leaned on the pitchfork she'd just taken up. "She's taking her time. How about Molly and Pat?" All three of their Belgian broodmares were due to

foal right around the first of the month. Addie had just decided to beat them to it.

“They seem to be fine,” Tobe said, coming into sight. “I’ve got them in the pen closest to the barn, though. No sense havin’ them give birth out in the field. Especially not with these temperatures. Pa said it could snow tonight. Said he feels it in his bones.”

“I feel it in mine, as well,” Merrill muttered. Despite having worn a red flannel union suit under two pairs of trousers, a camisole, blouse, flannel shirt, and coat, the cold still penetrated her body.

He nodded, picked up a couple of metal files, and headed for the door. “We’re getting the cutting blades sharpened. Pa said to tell you we’ll be in for dinner around one.”

Merrill had already gone back to mucking the empty stall but called over her shoulder, “I’ll have a nice hot meal waiting for you.”

With four older brothers, Merrill had been responsible for the house and kitchen since their mother died some ten years earlier. Even so, Merrill had plenty of other responsibilities that tended to rob her of the chance to show her feminine side. Folks spoke highly of Merrill’s baked goods and cooking, but she was also highly regarded for being able to handle a team of draft horses better than most men. She knew horses well, from the tip of their tails

to their velvety muzzles—something her father took great pride in. He loved having his family at work all around him.

The Belgians were her father's pride and joy. They were some of the best stock in the country, and with three good broodmares, he earned a nice bit of money on the side selling the offspring. Merrill spent a sizeable portion of her time with the animals, especially during the winter months. Foaling was something she generally oversaw. She also made sure the geldings were in top-notch shape for the ice harvest and other work they did. Numbering more than twenty, the animals definitely kept the family busy.

Merrill was pushing a full wheelbarrow to the manure pile when she caught the sound of a team approaching. She shielded her eyes and saw it was Granny Lassiter's buggy. No doubt she and Corabeth were coming for a visit.

Frowning at her soiled and frumpy attire, Merrill knew there was no time to change. She hurriedly dumped the manure and returned the wheelbarrow to the barn. With one more quick check on Addie, Merrill felt all right about spending a few moments with her visitors. It was always nice to see Granny and Corabeth. With no other women in her family, Merrill often longed for female companionship.

She closed the barn door and hurried across

the yard as Granny brought the team to a halt at the back of the house. Merrill took hold of the team and waited for Granny to set the brake.

“You sure picked a cold day for a visit,” Merrill quipped, and the three women chuckled.

With the team secured, Merrill quickly helped Granny and Corabeth from the buggy. Corabeth was all petite delicacy and femininity, even in the cold of winter. Her maroon wool coat was stylishly trimmed in black velvet, and the matching bonnet had been carefully placed so as to do minimal damage to her nicely arranged hair.

“We had to come see you,” Corabeth announced. “Granny made you a new hat.”

Merrill nodded her head and smiled. “Well, let’s get inside and warm up. I’ve been mucking stalls and waiting for Addie to foal. I could use a cup of coffee.”

She led the way in through the back porch, pausing only long enough to cast aside her outer coat and knit cap. Her wild curly hair shot out around her shoulders.

“Mercy child, you should at least braid that mess.” Granny sounded dismayed.

“I usually do, and I will now. This morning I was in a bit of a hurry.” She knew she sounded defensive, even though she didn’t feel it. Life on the farm was different from living in town.

Granny and Corabeth were used to being ready

to receive visitors or go out where they would be seen. Here, Merrill was far more likely to see her brothers and father than any other woman, so her appearance never concerned her that much.

“I do wish you wouldn’t wear those trousers,” Granny continued. “You’re never going to catch a husband looking like a young man.”

Merrill laughed and washed her hands in a basin of water. “I’m not trying to catch a husband. At least not today. Today I’m helping deliver a foal.” She quickly dried her hands and pulled the coffeepot from the stove. “We’ve some coffee left over from breakfast.” She took three mugs down from the cupboard and poured the coffee. After returning the pot to the stove, Merrill turned to find Granny and Corabeth still standing.

“Would you like to sit in the kitchen or in the front room? I’d prefer the kitchen myself as I’m rather muddy. But I can always throw a sheet over a chair.”

“Nonsense,” Granny declared. “We won’t stand on ceremony. The kitchen is nice and warm, and we can have ourselves a good chat.”

“Do you have other visits to make before you head back to town?” Merrill asked, setting the coffee mugs on the table. She hurried to retrieve the cream and sugar, knowing her guests were fond of both.

“We thought we might see a few families on

the way. Given that tomorrow is the first, we wanted to share some treats and good wishes for the new year. We'll finish up by seeing Carl Jorgenson. Poor man has no one but himself."

Merrill smiled. "He's got all of us. I can't imagine the man goes too long between visits. Besides, his furniture business keeps him busy."

"Still, a man his age would be better living with his children—if he had some." Granny gave a *tsking* sound, then put a spoonful of sugar in her coffee. "Seems to me he might at least hire a woman to come do the housework."

"Goodness, I didn't even think to take your coats," Merrill said, looking at the women apologetically.

"No matter," Granny assured. "I'm still a bit chilly. I'm just fine and so is Corabeth. Sit down here with us."

Merrill took a seat at the table and brushed her hair back with her hand. She began to braid the thick, curly mass into order, then tucked the end of the braid into itself and hoped it would hold. It did. At least for the time being.

"So don't you want to see the new hat Granny and I made you?" Corabeth asked. She took up the hat box she'd brought in from the wagon and placed it on the table. "It's a real beauty, if I do say so myself."

Not wanting to seem ungrateful, Merrill nod-

ded, and Corabeth quickly pulled the lid from the box. Without further ado, she lifted out a nicely decorated straw bonnet.

“I found one of my old poke bonnets,” Granny said as if reading Merrill’s thoughts. “You know there are some very similar bonnets being worn these days, although the brims are much narrower. I trimmed this one down a bit, and then we went to work to make it a tad warmer. I lined it with a nice bit of wool that you can remove come spring.”

The bonnet was trimmed in dark green ribbon and piping. The color was one of Merrill’s favorites. “It’s really pretty. Thank you—”

“It’ll go well with your plum wool,” Granny cut in. “Be a nice bit of color, and if you trim the neck of the gown with that pretty green scarf Corabeth gave you for Christmas, you’ll see that it matches quite nicely. Match your eyes, too.”

Merrill nodded. Granny and Corabeth were always doing what they could to “pretty her up.” She’d been a tomboy even as a young girl, but after her mother died, Merrill gave up worrying about being very girlish. Her father needed her—her brothers, too. She didn’t have time for frills and flounces.

“Well, aren’t you going to try it on?” Corabeth asked.

“I’m hardly dressed for putting on such a fine hat,” Merrill replied.

“Nonsense,” Granny said. “Give it a try.”

It sounded like an order, so Merrill put down her mug and picked up the bonnet. “I’m sure it’s the nicest I’ve ever had.” She placed it atop her head and snugged it down against her braided hair.

“Here, I’ll tie the ribbon, and then you can go see how nice it looks,” Corabeth announced. She got to her feet before Merrill could protest and quickly fashioned the ribbon into a bow. “There. It’s perfect. You look so pretty.”

Pretty wasn’t a compliment Merrill usually heard. She had been called a handsome woman, but never pretty. That was a word reserved for the smaller, dainty ladies who wore more fashionable gowns and carefully styled their hair.

Merrill got to her feet and went to take a glance in the only mirror they had in the house. A small, simple framed mirror had been hung next to the front door by Merrill’s mother when they’d first built the house. As the story went, Mother wanted to make certain she would look her best when greeting visitors, so she would pause by the mirror, adjust her hair, and recite the words of Hebrews thirteen, verse two: “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Looking in the same mirror, Merrill felt a bit closer to her mother. Her father often said Merrill favored her. But where Merrill was tall like

her father and brothers, Edeline Krause had been small. Her mother had always been a great beauty, or so Granny had often told her. There had been more than one man who'd hoped to marry Edeline Crowther, and the suitors had competed fiercely for a chance to court her. Bogart Krause, however, had captured her heart and won the prize. They'd married when Merrill's mother was only seventeen.

Merrill touched her hand to the bonnet and felt a strange sense of pride. She looked quite smart in the hat. Almost as feminine and stylish as any other woman might. If she didn't look down at the rest of her attire.

I'm almost pretty. She reflected on her image for only a moment longer, then hurried back to the kitchen where Corabeth anxiously awaited the verdict.

"It's very lovely," Merrill declared. "I don't think I've ever had anything so nice."

Granny and Corabeth exchanged satisfied smiles, and Merrill took her seat. "You really shouldn't have gone to so much trouble, though. I know you both worked hard to make all those gifts you handed out at Christmas. Goodness, but everyone at church is still talking about how generous you've been. Making all those scarves and hats . . . oh, and the mittens . . . for those in need. Why, that must have kept you busy most every night."

“It did consume quite a bit of time,” Granny admitted, “but it was the Lord’s work. We were doing it unto Him, and He always has a way of multiplying the time and reducing the effort needed.”

“So you really do like the bonnet?” Corabeth asked. “You aren’t just saying that to make us feel better?”

Merrill looked at her friend and shook her head. “I’ll admit I seldom have time to concern myself about such things, but I will make good use of this bonnet. It’s very pretty, and I feel like a different woman wearing it.”

Corabeth clapped her hands, then wrapped them once again around her mug of coffee. “I’m so glad. You can wear it for the church winter party in February.”

“Maybe if you wear it to services sooner, you’ll have someone ask to escort you to the party,” Granny suggested with a gleam in her eye.

“I think it would take more than a pretty bonnet,” Merrill said. “My brothers have scared off just about any fellow who showed an interest in getting to know me.”

“Well, if a man can’t stand up to those brothers of yours,” Granny replied, “you needn’t even consider him. A man ought to be able to hold his own with his wife’s family. You don’t want any mealymouthed ninnies to come call-

ing.”

“No, for sure I don’t,” Merrill replied. *But it would be nice if someone came calling*, she thought.

“Well, I think Granny is right. You should wear the bonnet for church on Sunday. It makes you look quite lovely.”

Merrill touched the rim of the hat. “I suppose I might,” she said.

“Merrill! Merrill Jean, where are you?”

Merrill hurried to the back door just as her brother Zadoc came bounding through. She barely managed to sidestep his advancing bulk. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s Addie. The baby looks to be stuck. Leg’s bent. You’re gonna have to help me. I had just come back for a vise and . . . well . . . come see for yourself.”

Merrill didn’t even bother to take up her coat as she ran across the back porch. They couldn’t afford to lose either mother or baby. She raced for the barn, easily keeping stride with Zadoc.

In the birthing stall, she saw the trouble immediately. Addie was lying on her side, panting in misery. One of the foal’s legs appeared to be bent back. Instead of a hoof presenting, Merrill found the bend of a knee. “We’ll have to push it back in and try to maneuver the leg straight. Secure Addie’s head, and I’ll do what I can.”

Zadoc didn’t hesitate. He immediately went to the panting mare and took hold of her bridle.

Merrill, meanwhile, rolled up her sleeves as best she could. “Now when she rests between contractions, I’ll go to work. She won’t like it, but hold her fast and keep her down.”

Her chance came within moments, and with a quick twist and shove, Merrill pushed the foal back into Addie with all her might. She could tell the leg was still bent, though. Merrill felt the horse contract against her, the pressure numbing her arm and hand. It was almost impossible to move her fingers.

Addie was most unhappy with the situation. “I’m sorry, girl.” Merrill felt the birth canal relax a bit and hurried to do what she could to help the horse. After a few more contractions, during which she managed to twist the unborn foal into a different position, Merrill felt the leg straighten at last. “I’ve got it.” She pulled away from the mare just as another contraction started.

“No wonder she’s been at this for so long,” Merrill said, rubbing her hand to get the blood flowing again.

“Things ought to go a sight faster now.”

Merrill nodded and watched the progress with a practiced eye. Addie labored to expel the baby from her body. After a time, both legs appeared as well as a hint of muzzle. Addie panted and fought against the pain. Without warning she scrambled to her feet, nearly knocking Zador backward.

“Watch out!” Merrill said, knowing that a horse in the pains of birth could be quite unpredictable.

Zadoc didn’t seem to mind, however. He took hold of Addie’s bridle and spoke in a soothing manner. Meanwhile, the mare continued to contract.

Addie was progressing, but the time dragged on, and Merrill could see that the mare was tired. Poor horse had been laboring hard for hours due to the bent leg. “I’m going to help her,” Merrill declared. “You hold her tight. I’ll try to pull a bit. Maybe we can get this baby born.”

The little legs were slick from fluid, making it hard for her to get a good grasp. Merrill’s leather gloves were in her coat pocket on the back of the porch, however, and there was no time to retrieve them. She saw the horse bear down, while at the same time trying to move away from the pain. Unfortunately for Addie, there was no way to distance herself from the labor.

Merrill pulled on the legs just enough to help ease the head from the birth canal. She pulled back the birthing sack and could see a lovely white blaze down the baby’s nose. “Gonna be a beauty, Addie girl. Just keep pushing.”

Zadoc continued to murmur in the mare’s ear while Merrill worked to help the baby. Be-

fore Merrill knew what was happening, the mare gave one more heave, and the foal slid out quickly. Merrill took the foal in her arms but lost her balance and fell backward against the wall of the stall. The warm, wet horse lay perfectly still in her arms, and Merrill wasted no time. She ran her hand into the baby's mouth to expel the mucus and fluid, then began to rub it furiously to stimulate it to breathe. It was only a moment before the tiny animal responded.

"Looks like we got us a little girl," Zadoc said, coming to help Merrill. "Probably a good thing, too."

"Why's that?" Merrill asked, struggling to ease the foal onto the straw so that Addie could tend her. Merrill got to her feet with the help of her brother and looked at him with a frown. "Why is it such a good thing it's a girl?"

"Well, what with your pretty bonnet and all, I think a boy might take offense."

Merrill had forgotten all about the new bonnet. "Is it ruined?" she asked, not wanting to touch it with her slimy hands.

"It looks right nice," Zadoc replied. "But maybe a little fancy to wear to birth a foal."

Chapter 2



“What do you mean, you’re leaving for Minnesota?”

Rurik Jorgenson looked down at the small blond-haired woman and tried to offer a sympathetic smile. “Just what I said, Svea. Uncle Carl needs my help. He’s been sickly of late and asked if I could come and lend a hand. Since he and my *Farfar* Jorgenson taught me to make furniture, it seems only right that I do what I can.”

“But I’m sure Grandfather Jorgenson meant for you to use those skills here, not in Minnesota. That’s so far away. What about me? Everyone expects us to marry.”

Svea’s pout made her look rather childish, but she didn’t seem to care. For Rurik, it only confirmed his decision. She was much too young to marry. He had wanted to talk to Svea about delaying their engagement for a long time, but this wasn’t the place. Not here in the middle of town with her brother Nils standing beside her.

“I shouldn’t be gone too long,” Rurik said. “Maybe just a few months. It will give you time . . .” He let the words trail off. He’d very nearly spoken of her immaturity, suggesting she needed time to grow up. “Besides,” he began again, “I need to learn all I can before Nils and I open our own furniture business. I know a great deal about making furniture, but very little about keeping the books and dealing with customers.”

“I have plenty of experience in that area,” Nils offered quickly. “You forget I keep the books for my father’s dairy. I can teach you all you need to know. There’s no need for you to go—”

“The need is Carl’s.” Rurik shook his head. “He hasn’t been well, and he has specifically asked me to come. I don’t feel I can say no.”

“You just want to get away from our engagement,” Svea said, folding her gloved hands together. “And after all that our fathers did to work out this arrangement.”

“That’s . . . partly the problem,” Rurik said. “Our fathers decided it would be good for us to marry. You and I have had very little to say about it. I think the time apart will do us good.”

“See?” Svea said, her eyes tearing up. She turned to Nils. “He wants to put an end to our engagement.”

“That’s not what I said,” Rurik protested. He

looked at Nils. “I don’t think this is the best time and place to discuss the matter.”

“Why not?” Svea said, her voice rising. She waved her hands in both directions. “Why not let all of Lindsborg, Kansas, know that you no longer care for me.”

“Because that isn’t true,” Rurik countered. “I didn’t say I was breaking our betrothal. I only think it would do us good to have some time apart to think on it.”

“But I don’t want time apart.” This time she truly did sound like a little girl.

Rurik looked to his best friend, hoping for support. “Nils, would you please help her to understand I’m not deserting her? I’m merely going to help my uncle, and in turn it will help us.”

Nils fixed Rurik with a hard gaze. “I think she’s right. You two should marry, and we should start up our own business—just like we’ve always planned. Svea’s a woman full grown, and there doesn’t need to be any delay in you two marrying. Your uncle can hire someone to help him. Doesn’t he already have a group of men who work for him?”

“He does, but—”

“But nothing. There’s the answer. Those men know what he needs—after all, they’ve been working with him all this time. He and your grandfather might have taught you to

build furniture, but you don't know anything about the business he's running now. Besides, Minnesota is a really cold place to go."

"What does the cold have to do with it?" Rurik asked. "It's cold in Kansas, too." He was starting to think that neither of the Ols-son siblings had any sense at all. If they did, they certainly weren't allowing it to guide their reasoning.

Nils shook his head. "You wouldn't be doing this if your father were still alive."

"Look, why don't I come out to the farm, and we can sit and talk about this away from all these folks." He motioned toward a number of the local gossips coming their way. The last thing he wanted to do was create a scene. "I'll even explain it to your mother and father."

"This shouldn't be that big of a problem," Nils argued. "You know as well as I do that the betrothal should be honored. Our plans should be honored, as well. I've been counting on it."

"Rurik doesn't care about honoring promises," Svea said with a toss of her head. "I'm going to the dressmaker. You try to talk sense into him." She turned on her heel and headed off down the boardwalk, plowing right through the gaggle of women. Several gasped their astonishment, but Svea didn't appear to care. She scowled at the women, causing them to hurry on their way. Without another word or

look, she disappeared into the dressmaker's establishment.

Rurik felt utterly confused and dismayed with the encounter. He hadn't thought this would be an issue when the letter arrived from his uncle two days earlier. "You are closer to her than anyone, Nils. Try to help her understand. I never meant to hurt her."

"I'll talk to her, Rurik, but you have to stay. I need to get away from the dairy," Nils said, now sounding desperate. "You know I don't fit in there. My brothers may have a passion for dairy farming, but not me. I only do the office work because it keeps me out of the milking barns. I've been looking forward to this for a long time, you know, that we'd open our furniture business."

"I have to go, Nils," Rurik said, shaking his head. "My uncle needs me. Look, I'm still planning to have my own shop. The fact of the matter is, we can't open that shop until Svea and I marry and I come into my marriage money. I've not made any plans to do that right away, so I guess I'm kind of puzzled as to why you are talking like this."

Nils shook his head. "I figured the way Svea talked, you and she would be marrying this year."

"Well, this year has barely begun. Look, your sister is a sweet young woman, but I've had

misgivings about this arrangement for some time. Neither of us have ever had any say in the matter. I know my mother wasn't all that keen on arranged marriages."

"But our fathers were."

"And mine is dead now. My mother also. For me, that kind of changes things," Rurik answered.

"But it shouldn't." Nils's voice had sounded almost frantic. "It was our fathers' will that you two marry. They saw it as a good business arrangement. Your family farms, and mine has the dairy. The two can help each other greatly."

"*Ja*, I know all that," the tall Swede replied. "But we're not talking about two farms getting married, are we? There's no reason our families can't continue to help one another. That is the Christian way."

"Don't bring God and religion into this," Nils spat out.

Rurik frowned. "Why not? God is at the center of all I do. In fact, He's the reason I feel it's important to go to Minnesota."

"Oh, don't go blaming this on the Almighty. If you plan to back out of your promises, you need to take the responsibility of it yourself. I won't have you breaking your engagement to my sister and telling everyone that God made you do it."

"But I haven't broken the engagement." He

looked at Nils and tried not to sound as angry as he was feeling. “I haven’t broken anything. I still plan to work with you and for us to have a business. I will honor my father’s desire for me to marry Svea—that is, if after this separation we can both agree it is the right thing to do. The fact is, though, I would kind of like to be in love with the woman I plan to marry.”

“But you love Svea. You always have.”

“I love her like a sister. I love her as I love you—like a brother.” Rurik stepped closer and pulled Nils into the alley with him. “But the truth is, I’m not in love with Svea.”

“But that will come. You and I both know that marriage has very little to do with love. Marriages are made for the advantage of the families.”

“That might have been the old way—the Swedish way, even—but it’s not my way. I will not marry anyone unless I love the woman with all my heart. I cannot in good faith allow your sweet sister to marry a man who isn’t worthy of her—and that would happen if my feelings don’t change. Added to that, she’s still very young.”

“Bah! You’re just using that as an excuse,” Nils shot back. “I ought to deck you for this. Folks will talk, and her reputation will be ruined.”

“Her reputation will be just fine. The people

of Lindsborg know we have never courted without you at our side. She has never been unescorted even in church. Frankly, I wouldn't have it any other way. I want her reputation upheld. A woman's virtue is as important as a man's name."

"Then why would you risk both by going away? She obviously loves you, and since that's so important to you, that should be enough."

For a moment Rurik considered his friend's words. "No, actually I don't think she does love me. I think she's accepted that our marriage will be, but I don't believe she loves me or really understands what love is about."

"Of course she does. Our mother has trained her to know what's expected of a wife."

Rurik shook his head. "That's not what I'm talking about. Svea is but a girl."

It was Nils's turn to shake his head. "She's seventeen. That's old enough by some folks' standards."

"She's led a very sheltered life and has never had a chance to explore whether another man might better suit her desires."

"This is ridiculous, Rurik. You and Svea have plenty in common. But more important, folks around here know what's expected of you two. You should try to remember that."

Two women passed the opening of the alley and glanced over at Rurik and Nils. The men

tipped their hats to the women. Once they were out of sight, Nils took hold of Rurik's shoulders.

"You have to change your mind about this. I think you and Svea should marry right away so that you and I can get on with our business. My father is pressuring me to take a bigger part in the dairy, and I have no interest. If I have another opportunity elsewhere . . . a means to make money and support myself . . . I won't have to worry about refusing his offer and hurting him."

"Nils, you're my best friend, but I cannot lie for you. I cannot pledge myself in marriage before God and this town and not know that I truly love her—that it's God's will for my life."

"There you go again. Don't try to put all the responsibility on God and make it sound like some sort of divine assignment."

"But I feel that marriage *is* a divine assignment," Rurik said. "I'm rather surprised that you can speak with so little feeling in regard to your sister's happiness. I've never known two siblings to be more devoted to the happiness of each other. I thought you loved her."

"I do. My love for her has never been in question. It's yours that seems to be a problem."

The whistle sounding from an arriving train signaled to Rurik that he'd let too much time slip away. "I need to go. You should get back to Svea."

“I know how to take care of her. You’re the one who’s failing in that area.”

“Nils, I care deeply for her. Look . . . I . . . I’ll go help my uncle, and when I return we can decide this matter once and for all.”

Rurik left Nils standing in the alley and made his way to the railroad depot. He wanted to check on the schedule and see what kind of arrangements he could make for tickets to Minnesota. The damp cold of the day made him draw his coat up closer to his neck as he trudged through the snow. He had always loved this town—especially during the holiday season. Swedes had a wonderful way of celebrating Christmas, or *Julotta*, as they called it. There were all sorts of festivities and food, parties and pageantry. The Lutheran church was always full on Advent Sundays, and Rurik had a great fondness for Christmas music. The only thing he really missed was his *mor* singing beside him during services. Nellie Jorgenson had been beloved by most of the Lindsborg residents. Rurik was certain there had never been a more generous and loving woman. His *mor* sewed and knit for the poor, made food baskets for the sick, and gave platters of freshly baked goodies to all of the local bachelors. When she passed on, the entire town had attended her funeral. But, he had to admit, they did that for most everyone.

The people of the town were good folks, and Lindsborg had thrived quite nicely while managing to maintain its Swedish heritage. He liked that about the place. He was proud to be of Swedish descent. His father was a second-generation American, but he could converse in Swedish as easily as English. He'd seen to it that his children could do the same.

“Hello, Rurik.”

Smiling, Rurik nodded to the older man. “It’s good to see you, Mr. Lindquist.”

“I tink a little more snow is comin’ our vay, ja? I comed to town before de snow. How is your *bror* Aron?”

“My brother is doing well. The farm kept him busy this year.”

“Ja, *det var ett bra ar*,” the older man said, switching to Swedish.

“Yes, it was a good year.”

“So vat are you doin’ in town today?” Mr. Linquist was back to English in a singsong cadence typical of the older Swedish residents.

“Checking on the train schedule. I’m going to Minnesota to help Uncle Carl. He’s been sick.”

“Oh, dat’s too bad.”

“Ja, it is, but I’m hopeful it’s nothing serious.” Rurik saw that the depot traffic had lessened. He didn’t want to be rude, but he needed to attend to business. “If you’ll excuse me now, I need to talk to the depot master.”

“Ja, you go now. I tink I go buy my supplies. I want to get home before de snow.” The old man smiled and struggled from the boardwalk to cross the street.

Rurik would have offered to assist the man through the snow, but he knew Mr. Lindquist to be quite proud. It would no doubt have insulted him to suggest he was anything but capable of conducting business on his own. Nevertheless, Rurik watched until the octogenarian was safely across the street before hurrying on his way.

After a quick visit with the depot master, Rurik settled on leaving the day after tomorrow. He paid for his passage and placed the ticket securely in his coat pocket before heading back to his tethered horse.

Rurik gave the animal a quick pat on the neck, then took up the reins to mount. It was then that he spied Nils and Svea coming out of the dressmaker’s shop. His hand drifted to his pocket, and he fingered the ticket within. Should he try to speak to Svea again?

Rurik paused a moment, then turned and headed for home.