

## Demas

The arrow was notched on the bowstring ready for Demas to shoot as soon as his prey appeared. He stood motionless in the shadows of the trees looking out at a small meadow where Woodland caribou were often found. The cool morning breeze coming from the ocean blew gently across the island carrying his scent away from the meadow. He had been watching the meadow for over an hour, but no caribou had appeared. A strange, heavy dew was settling on the ground around him. The total silence of the woods gave him a sense of unease.

Demas decided to move closer to the stream that wound its way across the meadow. Sometimes the herd gathered by the water's edge. He made his way silently through the woods, always on alert. He noticed a branch hanging at an odd angle from a scrub oak which indicated something big had pushed through the brush. As he headed toward the bush, scanning the ground, he saw the familiar hoof prints indicating a large number of the herd had been there. He was surprised to also find a larger print, that of a man wearing leather foot coverings. The footprints were at an odd angle, as if the man were backing away from the animals toward the bush. Demas moved closer and pulled the branch aside to look more closely. Beyond the bush, a large rock had broken away leaving a sheer drop several feet down to a shallow ledge below. On the ledge lay a large man who wasn't moving.

Demas looked down trying to determine how badly the man was injured. There was no visible blood and all of the man's limbs were in a relatively normal position after such a fall, so hopefully he had no severe cuts or broken bones. Demas wanted to get closer and confirm the man was still alive. He looked down the cliff-side where the man had fallen. There were not any good hand or foot holes for him to reach, and even if he were to climb down that way, he might knock more rocks loose to fall on top of the man. He scanned the area for a way to reach the man, but accessing the small ledge seemed to be impossible. He feared the man could roll off before awakening and realizing the danger. Demas wanted to call out, but he wasn't sure the man would be able to understand him. The man appeared as if from a distant land.

People of his village were very strong with broad shoulders, but were of medium height. Their dark hair was long and straight. The men did not have much facial hair, so they looked generally beardless. The tribe believed the color red symbolized strength of life, and it was common for many to have red painted faces and bodies, to wear red clothing, and to decorate structures with red designs. They wore loin cloths over their lower body, and robes made of several skins sewn together were thrown over the shoulders, wrapped around the body, and held in place by a belt. Their feet were protected by wrapping supple leather around them and tying them on with strings of sinew.

In contrast, the man Demas looked down upon was extremely tall. His skin was a pale, spotty color. His hair the color of flames. The lower half of the man's face was covered in a thick mustache and beard that hung past his chin. His hair was long, with unruly locks that he had tied with a leather thong at the nape of his neck. He wore a thigh length tunic made of supple leather over strange leggings of unfamiliar material. His boots were leather and leather thongs wrapped around his calves to hold them in place. He wore a wide leather belt covered with many additional leather straps and thongs which held a knife and other hunting weapons.

“Hello,” Demas finally called down to the man thinking a greeting would be generally understood. The man did not stir. Demas decided to run back to his village and bring the healer along with some strong men to help retrieve the man from the narrow rock shelf.

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## Obee

Obee was awakened by a rustling noise. He lay quietly listening and opened his eyes. His sight adjusted to the thin morning light seeping through the holes in the birch bark that covered their cone-shaped wooden house. Today was the big harvest and the villagers had a plan to divide the work. Some would go hunting to prepare for the feast at the end of the day. He could see his brother, Demas, packing his hunting gear and slipping out the door. Obee would be part of the team that worked in the field digging up the root vegetables. Dithit was another strong man that would be helping on that team. Shawna, Dithit's wife, would be with most of the women cleaning and preparing the root vegetables to store for the winter months.

Obee's mother had been friends with Shawna before she and his father had disappeared while out hunting one day. Shawna and Dithit had no children of their own and took Obee and Demas into their home and loved them as if they were their own children. Although Obee sometimes wished he could remember his real parents better, he loved Shawna and Dithit like they were his own mother and father.

Obee looked across the hut and could see Shawna and Dithit stirring in their bed preparing to rise for the big day. He had slept in his loin cloth as usual and he got up, threw his cloak over his head, and wrapped a belt around his waist. When they were all out of bed, he and Dithit grabbed the long sticks they had set aside to use as digging tools, and set out for the fields. Shawna met the women and began preparing a large fire with several pots to boil water.

The men were working in the field when suddenly they heard grunting and screaming. Obee looked back toward the village and saw smoke rising in the air as a huge shadow passed above him. Before he had time to run, he was grabbed by a huge creature and lifted into the air. He looked up to see large wings which shone in various colors as the light reflected off their sheen, and as they were caught by the wind they were hurled forward at an alarming speed. Whether out of sheer fright of the creature, or the mind-blowing speed, Obee panicked and started screaming and thrashing around. The creature was flying over the village when it lost its grip on Obee and he plummeted toward the nearest hut.

Many of the village women and children were hiding in the hut. Obee fell through the thatch roof and onto a large shelf unit, his breath knocked out of him. Out of half-opened eyes, he watched as a creature tore the bark off the side of the structure and seemed to consume the women and children all in one bite. Obee swallowed a gasp of horror as he fell unconscious and was buried by a pile of baskets and clay pots that had been on the shelves.

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## Odin vs. Brynhild and Erik Thorvald

Many years before, a king within the Viking tribes, Svein Forkbeard, had been corrupted by greed and enjoyed inflicting pain on people. He led invasions of England and Ireland, maiming, killing, or enslaving men, women, and children. Odin, being bored by the normal activities in his hall of the slain, enjoyed watching the antics of this violent man. However during one battle, a Valkyrie, named Brynhild, defied

Odin and took King Forkbeard to Valhalla thus ending his reign of terror. Odin was so enraged, he banished Brynhild, forced her to marry a mortal, and live a mortal life.

Odin thought Erik Thorvald was unappealing due to his spotted skin and flaming red hair, and thus the perfect choice for Brynhild to marry as a further punishment. Brynhild was so determined that Odin would not get the best of her, she convinced herself that Erik's sharp features, and vibrant hair were the most alluring features in a man. She embraced the opportunity to be out from under Odin's control. She began calling herself, Dagny, which signified starting life anew. She was determined to keep her past a secret and to make a difference in her future.

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## The Vikings and the Valkyries

Thin, steamy clouds roiled overhead. The men and women lowered and stored the sails of the long-ship, taking position at the oars. With forty people, oars could push the craft through water at fast, efficient speed without tiring any of them too severely. An uneasiness rippled through the ranks. The sea was calm and very little wind flitted through the air. Moisture settled on their skin and covered the deck, not normal rain but more like dew. Many furtive glances were stolen toward the carvings of fierce monsters and spiraling serpents that engraved the prow and stem-post of the ship, there to protect the ship and crew by warding off terrible sea monsters. The quiet hum of prayers to Thor asking for strength, might, and protection from danger, as well as pleading Freya to look after families that were left behind.

Initially, twenty-four boats of explorers left their home in Europe in search of a new land that promised fertile farming, enough wildlife for feeding their growing tribe – and escape from the Valkyries. The Valkyries were thirteen tall, beautiful women who answered only to Odin. In normal times, they flew their winged horses over battles and escorted the fallen to the hall of the slain. However, Odin had become a lethargic God who ignored his realm of the afterlife and the hall of the slain in Valhalla. Unguided by Odin, the Valkyries limited their focus to only the strongest, bravest, and physically perfect. They no longer waited for the fallen, but scoured the land from the backs of their winged steeds choosing who would die and be taken with them to become their lovers and heroes. Their winged horses were known to be black as ravens, and to have manes that drip dew. To the Vikings, morning dew was no longer a sign of the start of a fresh day, but an omen of impending attack.

Upon leaving Europe, the crews of ten ships were taken by the Valkyries. Fourteen of the twenty-four boats escaped and found new land. Many parts of the new land were covered in ice, but they established a colony in a fjord-like area between the glaciers and the sea. Maybe wishfully thinking, they called it Greenland. For a time, they lived in peace and were able to set up farms similar to those they had in Europe.

Due to past attacks, they maintained constant vigilance. On the coastal side of the village, a stone wall was built as protection from strong ocean winds. Lookout towers were manned at all times to inform traders of incoming ships, or to sound the alarm for any threats. Four days ago, there was barely time to sound the alarm before the Valkyries swept through the village. Men looked for their wives. Women looked for their children. Everyone pushed toward the boats and further escape.

Two of the tower guards, Bjarni Herlsson and Felman Fisk, shuttled their families to the closest boat and took positions in the stern and prow of the ship. From the stern, Bjarni kept watch for other boats, but it was difficult to see through the misty steam of the clouds. There was no way to tell if others had escaped the assault and could simply not be seen, or if everyone else had been taken by the Valkyries.

The dewy feeling on their skin kept them alert and on the lookout for another attack. Without speaking to one another, each oar was stroked as quietly and powerfully as possible. On the forward prow, Felman held up one hand in a motion to draw attention. With the other hand, he pointed toward his right. The others looked closely, and with silent elation, they could see the hilly, rugged outline of land. As they drew closer, they found several bays and then directed the ship down a larger fjord.

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