"Maybe I don't necessarily want you fighting for me." He whispers, his thumb rubbing circles on the skin of my neck. "Perhaps I have plans for you to fight beside me as my..." He looks as if he's searching for the word to use. "ahh...Queen." He suggests and I study those blue eyes, wondering if he's truly gone mad now.

While raiding York, the sons of Ragnar come across someone they least expect to find and Ivar takes the opportunity to use her to further his own agenda.
"Bite my tongue, bide my time
Wearing a warning sign
Wait 'til the world is mine
Visions I vandalize
Cold in my kingdom size
Fell for these ocean eyes
You Should See Me in a Crown"

- Billie Eilish
You Should See Me in a Crown

___________________________________________

Warnings:
Violence
Explicit language
Explicit topics
Mature Sexual Situations in later chapters

**I do not own Vikings, the storylines, or any of the characters aside from my own.**
A single tear rolls down my cheek at the sight of my father, mother and baby brother being pushed away to the cold water.

Fate is expensive. The price my father had to pay for killing his own newborn child and wife, was more than he could afford.

A warm hand grips mine, and I glance down to my right to see Ivar sitting at my feet. His crippled legs are kept together with leather straps and his ocean blue eyes hold every single shred of pity in the world in them.

Everyone pities me, and I know it very well. The welcoming touches and obligated smiles have been ambushng me all morning.

The only sanity I have is in that of my older brother, Sidka. His stoic stance brings a sense of comfort to me in an odd way. If Sidka doesn't cry over a situation, it's not as devastating as it appears to be and I have yet to see him shed a tear.

He looks at me from where he's standing with Ivar's half-brother, Bjorn Ironside. A pale green eye and a dark brown eye meet with my blues ones and I can't help but wonder if he's truly as okay as he wants people to think.

Although he's keeping himself together, I can tell with the slight sway of his body that he's been drinking this morning. His dark hair isn't even braided back and the matted knots are causing my fingers to twitch slightly.

*He needs to comb his hair*, I complain to myself.

Sidka looks away from me to watch the flaming arrows catch the three boats on fire. I don't dare watch, I just focus on my teeth clenching together and pray to the Gods not to let me cry anymore.

Ivar's hand slips under my dress innocently to calmly run his calloused hand over the skin on the back of my lower thigh.

My leather shoed feet are getting cold from the frozen mud under them and I furrow my brows at the feeling of the rain falling lightly on us.

Thunder rumbles in the clouded distance, causing two ravens to let out a chilling cry before fleeing to the Forrest.

I nudge Ivar with my leg, causing him to look up at me.

My chin jerks slightly over my shoulder before the two of us disappear from the crowd of people.

Though it's the place where I was born and raised for fourteen years, the small hut I call home seems as if it's the most foreign place I've experienced.
There's not the usual stench of whiskey in the air, nor the heat coming from a cooking pot of stew in the corner over a fire.

But most importantly, it's quiet. Silent.

Something me nor my brother are accustom to.

I was either use to my father laughing with one of his drunken friends, or fighting violently with my mother.

Synnøve Youngblood was not an easy target for violence. Lagertha, the ex-wife of Ivar's father, had trained her to be a shield-maiden when she was younger.

Her work paid off because my mother could have my father on his drunk ass faster than anyone aside from Sidka.

My mother always tried to teach me to fight so I could someday be a shield maiden and go with them raiding, but I was never interested in doing so.

My ambitions have always been of myself, not of anything worldly such as conquering lands and raiding.

Ivar and I stand in the door way of the hut, the dark shadowing due to the lack of candles casts an eerie feeling throughout the place.

"I need the rest of my dresses." I mumble, stepping to my bedroom to grab the woven trunk of dresses and other garments.

Ivar waits for me patiently as I name off aloud everything else I need to take with me.

Before long, Sidka and Bjorn are present and standing at the door with Ivar.

"Do you need anything else brother?" I stop my gathering to ask him and he stands straight, causing the cream-colored fur draping his shoulders to shift.

He doesn't say anything to me, pushing past me to reach under my father's chair to grab the last of his whiskey pitchers that are covered by leather.

My heart sinks at the sight, but Sidka doesn't seem to notice.

His broad and towering figure just looms over mine as he turns to face me.

My emotions display on my face, as they always have, and he tightens his jaw.

"I can stop anytime I want to, Issy." He lies to me about his alcoholism for the umpteenth time and I force my lips in to a thin line.

"That's what father always said, Sidka." Is all I can muster before piling a couple of my mother's old baubles, the fur from her chair and the fur from my bed onto the trunk of my clothes before I pick it up and tote it out of the hut with Ivar and his older brother Ubbe, at my heels.

Ubbe must've been waiting with Bjorn for Sidka.

On the way to our destination Ivar is sidetracked by his mother, Aslaug, and tells me and his brother to go ahead and he'll catch up shortly.
The rest of the walk is quiet aside from me denying Ubbe's help when he offers to carry my things.

"You should be easier on your brother." The second oldest Ragnarsson breaks our silence when we enter their large home.

I set my stuff on the giant center table and look at Ubbe.

He's handsome, his brown hair nearly red in certain light. His eyes shares the same color with Ivar, except his are more so crystal instead of ocean. He looks like his father.

"Yes, I should be." I speak in agreement. "But I won't."

"Issy—"

"Ubbe, all of your brothers are alive and well and your mother and father aren't dead..."

"My father might as well be." He interrupts what I was about to say next. "He left us, Iskra. Does having my mother and my brothers help me cope with the absence of my father? Yes. Do you have that same comfort from your mother, no. You don't. I know you don't and I know we are by no means in the same situation, but because you have no more of your family and because Sidka has no more of his family, he needs something else to help him cope because sometimes people aren't enough."

"He's leaning on the same poison that caused my father to neglect my mother for many years. He's nursing his pain with the same thing that caused my father's downfall, Ubbe. I'm bloody sorry if I'm not accepting his new habit."

"And what exactly have you been turning to in order to cope, Issy?" His words hold all-knowing. He knows exactly what, more-so who, I've been doing in order to cope...and it hasn't been Ivar.

"Lower your voice." I state in a hiss and he exhales, seeming to regret throwing my infidelity in my face.

"I'm sorry." He says truthfully. "But your brother has seen and done many things. He's wiser than you and I and he shouldn't have to explain himself to his little sister. You should love him regardless of his flaws, Issy. As we love you regardless of yours."

His rough hand cups my face giving it a single pat before he turns and leaves, walking past Ivar's crawling form.

He hauls himself up to sit at the table and I move my things over so they aren't in his way.

"Are you sure you don't mind staying with us? You don't seem too thrilled about it."

I force myself to smile a little as my fingers touch his jaw.

"I'm very happy to be living with you, Ivar." I lie. "I'm just tired."

"Go to sleep, then." He tells me, waving me off.

"I can't, Ivar. I have many things to do."

"Then tell me what they are and I'll do them while you rest." He argues.

"Ivar—"
"Iskra," His tone is serious and stern, his eyes challenging mine. "Rest."

The fight in me is as dead as my family, and I just nod and listen to him. I grab the furs I got from my home and step to his room, laying them on the bed.

Fluttering lightening scatters across the sky and shortly after, loud thunder booms. The weight of the pouring rain hits the roof, causing an almost peaceful atmosphere.

I let my dress slip off my shoulders and down my hips before I crawl in to the warmth of furs and blow out the candle resting on the wooden table beside the bed, causing the room to darken nearly completely.
I

You Should See Me in a Crown
Chapter One

4 Years Later
Sherborne

Heavy breath packs in to my lungs, my body shaking slightly as nerves overwhelm me.
My eyes close, my lips rub together and my fingers ball together and then relax at my sides.
A breath releases from my lungs, eyes meet eyes and my mouth opens to speak.

"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

"I love you." I gasp out, my body gathering a thin sheen of sweat and my nails dig in to Ivar's back when he curls his warm fingers inside me, leading me to my come apart underneath him.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

"Sidka!" My voice carries across the lake when my brother sneaks up on me to snatch the net I'm holding that carries a fish.

He runs with it, passing it off to Ubbe and I catch up to him and take it back. Before I can get away Ubbe's arm is wrapping around my waist and pulling me over his shoulder as he laughs loudly.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

"I pray everyday that Frigg tells you of how much I love and miss you." I speak softly to the ring of flowers around the tree that marks where Sidka's daughter, Elska, is buried. "Though you probably know that by now." My fingers place on the bark and I hold back a cry.

"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

My legs ache with how fast they're running to the shore. If I'm not quick, I'll be discovered and they'll wonder why I'm leaving in the middle of the night with a boat I plan on stealing.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The sweet voice of the girl around my age has me furrowing my brows because I don't speak her language. It seems as if she realizes this quickly and I'm surprised when she talks again.

"I am Delilah. What is your name?" She asks in my language and I have to think for a moment. Her sun kissed skin, dark hair and foreign accent doesn't make her appear to be from anywhere up north.

"For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,"

"So your father was a merchant?" I ask Delilah after she tells me how she ended up in England like
I did.

"Yes." She confirms. "We encountered Vikings once before." She adds. "I don't mean any offense, but some of your people are barbaric."

I have to keep from laughing.

"Forever and ever."

"Do you fully believe that Jesus Christ is your God, do you rebuke the praise and worship of demons summoned to confuse you or convince you there is no God?" The Bishop asks me and Delilah both. Her conversion from not believing in any God at all was far easier than Bishop Heahmund convincing me that Odin, Thor and every God and Goddess I've known my whole life was false.

"Yes." We both answer simultaneously.

"Amen."

I finish the prayer for the first time in English, and Bishop Heahmund and Delilah look at me proudly.

"That was it." He informs me and a rush of joy radiates within me.

"It was?" I ask nearly frantically and he gives a single nod, and Delilah's smile grows as wide as it can get before she hugs me tightly.

After arriving in Sherborne, England and meeting Delilah, the both of us encountered the Christian "warrior" Bishop, Heahmund.

Talk came through the town about how he was a ferocious warrior, blessed by the Christian god to defend his people.

I remember thinking of how attractive he was. He had short black hair and a shadow of a beard. His piercing blue eyes had made me think of Ivar but I forced myself to make it a short lived thought.

For someone as Godly as Heahmund, he had multiple women, including myself, thinking thoughts of him so far from holy.

Mine and Delilah's curiosity got the best of us and as we spent more and more time speaking with him, the more interested we became in his God. A year and a half later, we were converting to Christianity and pleading with him to train us to fight the way he could.

So we trained almost daily, and Delilah spent her days teaching me how to read, write and speak in English until I was fluent in it enough to recite the prayer Heahmund had repeated a multitude of times.

"I am so proud of you," Delilah tells me in my ear, pressing a kiss to my temple before she pulls away. "Now, we can move to York."

"York?" Heahmund asks us. "Why would you leave Sherborne?"

To be closer to my home so I could visit if I had the balls to go back to begin with, I want to say.

"You are leaving since King Ecbert's death. There is no reason for Delilah and I to stay when our mentor is here no longer." I say instead and Delilah nods.
Heahmund knows me and Delilah like the back of his hand at this point with how much time he's had to dedicate to us, and he knows I'm lying. He doesn't say anything about it though.

"If we were to go back," Delilah tells me from where she's seated on our bed, putting her curly hair in a single braid. "What would happen to you?"

"We?" I ask her with raised brows, sitting on my side of the bed. "There is no way I am letting you go back with me to Kattegat."

"So you're going to leave me by myself in York?" She's offended by this, her tone sharp and I sigh.

"Delilah, I don't know what would happen to me. But if I were to be imprisoned, you would be enslaved and you do not want to be enslaved to them. The men take full advantage of it."

"Okay, well, I'm not staying in York by myself. We can't just be best friends for almost four years straight together and then leave one another."

I lay down in the bed and stretch, breathing out with closed eyes.

"King Ecbert was killed not long ago. I assure you that The Northmen aren't even out of England yet."

"And?" I ask, raising a brow.

"If we venture off to York, there's a high chance we could run in to them, correct?"

"God will look out for us. Nothing bad, that isn't his will, is to happen."

"But you said—"

"Delilah. Sleep." I mumble, tiredness overcoming me as I drift to sleep.

Over the course of God knows how long, we spend countless weeks trying to get to York...and getting lost more times than I can count.

"So, where exactly are these Viking navigational skills I heard so much about before we left?" Delilah asks me half joking, as we stop our horses to let them rest and drink out of the rocky stream running through tiny clearing in the forested area.

"They don't exist. I was just telling you that so you'd shut up and get on the horse so we could leave." I tell her honestly and she cuts her eyes at me.

"Born and bred Viking, and you can't even read a map!" She exclaims, plucking the map from my hand.

"Are you actually disappointed that I didn't partake in raiding and slaughtering thousands of innocent people?" I ask her and she glares at me. "That's usually when the navigational skills come in handy."

"I just want to know how on Earth you at least don't know how find your way around when you grew up surrounded by explorers."

"Because I wasn't interested in travel. I never asked to be taught how to navigate because I thought I'd never leave Kattegat."
"Well, God sure is laughing at you now, isn't he?" She scoffs rhetorically and I give a closed mouth smile.

"I'm stuck out here in the bloody wilderness with you so, yeah. He is."

She glares at me after I say this, before she sighs out.

"We shouldn't be that far away." She mumbles, glancing at the sun. "Let's just stay here for the night and start back in the morning."

I want to argue, but the fading daylight is warning me not to.

We set up our makeshift "camp", building a small fire to keep us warm and we lay the thick blankets and furs on the ground before finishing off the last of the food we prepared for the trip.

"Well, that's all the food." Delilah tells me calmly. "We'll have to hunt from now on."

I just nod from where I'm laying down and keep my eyes up at the now star-scattered sky.

Silence settles between us for a few minutes, and she turns over to face me where she's laying beside me.

"I wonder what my parents would do if I were to return." She questions aloud and I turn my head to look at her.

"You've never told me much about them. All you've ever told me was that they didn't want you to leave but you did anyway..." I pull my fur tighter around me and she thinks for a moment.

"I've always wanted to live nomadically, the way my father had for many years before he finally came home and made a living off of his travels. He left my mother right after I was born and returned when I was ten. My mother took him back but told him he was to never leave her for so long again. So that's when he decided to be a merchant and only stay gone for a few months at a time before coming back with valuable goods and strong currency. I decided I wanted to start sailing with him when I was thirteen. My mother relented, but my father allowed it. After that, every time he would go away, I would go with him. He got sick and stopped his travels and I realized I did not just want to stay in the same village for the rest of my life, I wanted to leave. Neither of them approved of it, knowing the dangers of this world. I just hope to make them proud." She confesses and I sit up.

"What do you plan to do in your travels, Delilah?" I pull my knees to my chest and she licks her lips in thought.

"I want to help people." She states simply as if it's the easiest thing to do. "I want to deliver people from evil, if they will allow me to. I want to love those who think they're too wicked to be shown compassion and I want to show those who think they are too righteous for pain, that they are not. I want to be able to experience everything from good to bad and be a light for those in the dark. No matter how holy or wicked. I chose the path my parents never wanted for me to choose and I hope that I can return one day and let them know of the good I have done in the world. I hope I can stand face-to-face with my God and be truthful when I say I did not waste a single moment of the incredible life he gave me."

Her words inspire tears, and I blink through the water in my eyes.

I smile softly and exhale.

"I have known you for a few years. And in that time, you have shown me nothing but genuine
kindness and patience. You went out of your way to teach me a new language and helped me immensely in more ways than you could possibly imagine." I admit to her. "I have no idea what God has in store for you or how long you will live...but I do know that in whatever amount of time you have left, you will do unimaginable things."

She looks up at me from where she's laying beside me, and reaches over to grab my hand.

I expect her to say something equally as nice to me, about how I've helped her but it never comes.

"I am definitely getting a reward in heaven for tolerating you." She replies.

"Delilah!" I shove her arm and she laughs, her hands over her face as she takes my gentle hits.
You Should See Me in a Crown
Chapter Two

4 Years Ago
Kattegat

"I love you." I gasp out, my body gathering a thin sheen of sweat and my nails dig in to Ivar's back when he curls his warm fingers inside me, leading me to my come apart underneath him.

My thighs absentmindedly spread wider, greedy for everything he's willing to give me. His lips press to my neck and his teeth tug at the skin, his fingers refusing to relent despite me whimpering from the amount of sensitivity.

He chuckles quietly at my wanton lust and pulls away from my throat to look me in the eyes.

Heat pulses through me once again, his hard-driven fingers merciless in their sinful pursuit to completely break me.

He's successful, causing tears to slip past my closed lids and a loud moan to come from my mouth to let everyone else within earshot know what we're doing. Neither of us care, though. We stopped caring when Ubbe and Hvitserk walked in on us months back and Ivar didn't bother to stop.

He just slowed down and grew impatient when his brothers were too struck with shock to remember what they needed to speak to him about.

Ivar takes his fingers from me, putting them in his mouth to taste me.

Despite how comfortable we are with one another, I still can't help but turn crimson red by his action. Before I have time to shy away from him, he's hooking his muscular arms around my thighs and pulling them over his shoulders.

Every curse word in existence falls from my lips when his tongue laps at me to clean me the way he did his fingers.

When he's had his fill, he wipes his mouth and pulls himself up to kiss me.

I hum, his tongue intertwining with mine and his hand gently grasps my throat.

"I love you, too." He finally replies when he pulls away.
He falls beside me and I turn to rest my arm across his chest.

The warm fur underneath us keeps us from the cold ground and he pulls the another fur, that's halfway down our bodies, up to our shoulders to cover us up.

I'm still catching my breath, trying to regain my energy so I won't be drained when I go back home.

Ivar notices my struggle of heaving deep breaths and chuckles.

"Not so bad for a cripple, huh?" He mumbles against my forehead, his calloused palm brushing over my bare breast. A shudder runs through me and I have to sever my lip between my teeth to keep quiet.

I roll over, resting on him, my arm against his chest. His hand comes up to massage my scalp and the simple pleasure makes me nearly forget what I was going to say to him.

"What are we going to do about my parents, Ivar?" I ask him finally and he raises his brows.

"We tell them the truth." He says. "That you sneak out of your house at night to meet me anywhere so I can defile you."

I gently hit his chest, trying to keep from laughing too loud.

"My father would kill you." I say after a moment, my voice serious and he shakes his head a little.

"He will be too drunk to truly put up a proper fight." He argues and I would find it humorous...if it weren't all too true.

We're silent for a few minutes, and I try to swallow down the lump in my throat, feeling as if I'm suffocating.

I pull myself into a sitting position, pulling the fur up to cover my chest and his hand runs up and down my back.

"I didn't mean to upset you." He says quietly and I look at him over my shoulder.

"Worse has been said of my father, Ivar. Your words do not affect me like they once would have." I assure him. "My father has not been himself for many years now. My mother's infidelity with my uncle hurt him too deeply to quite recover. I've always felt if he didn't numb himself, that he'd kill her."

Ivar doesn't speak, his hand just skimming across my skin in a soothing manner.

I couldn't imagine hurting Ivar in that way, but I can't help but wonder how he would react. Would he kill the man or simply ignore the fact he's hurting by staying full of mead and whiskey?

"What would you do if I were to do such a thing?"

His hand stills, and I can feel it balling in to a fist. Perhaps he's imagining me under one of his brothers, letting them please me in the one way he can't.

"I will never be able to kill you, Iskra. No matter how angry I become with you." His words hold promise that makes me smile faintly to myself. "But I would never forgive you and a part of me would hate you for it."

I nod understandably and look at him again.
"I will never hurt you like that and neither will any of your brothers. They love you too much to betray you so deeply." My hand grasps his, my lips pressing to the back of it.

He smiles, fingers gently grasping my chin to bring my lips down to his.

"Issy," Delilah gently shakes me from my slumber and my eyes blink open slowly. "It is early morning. We need to continue."

I groan, rubbing my forehead and sitting up.

The sun is barely peaking through the trees and I look at Delilah.

She looks chipper and happy...of course she's a morning person. How convenient being I operate best at night.

"C'mon," She nudges me with her foot. She's already got her things packed and strapped to her horse and I stretch and bring myself to a stand. "It shouldn't be much long before we reach York. When we get everything settled there, you can rest."

"What money are we going to use to buy a thing there?" The thought crosses my mind and her face falls.

"I gave you the coins." She states.

"No, you didn't." I argue with furrowed brows.

"Iskra, yes I did. I gave it to you when we bid goodbye to Heahmund."

"Delilah, no you didn't."

"Iskra, Heahmund gave me the money, I thanked him, told him goodbye and gave the money to you!" She exclaims in frustration, stomping her foot.

"No, you didn't. He gave you the money, you thanked him, told him goodbye and handed it to—"

My face drops at the memory of sitting the money on our table at our home in Sherborne.

I say something I haven't heard since leaving Kattegat. Something I grew up hearing from every man around me when something did not go the way they planned.

"Oh, fuck me!" I complain, groaning loudly in irritation with myself.

"I no longer doubt you being raised by Northmen." She says blankly as she crosses her arms. "And to think you pray to your God with that mouth."

"I've done much worse with my mouth, I assure you, now where did I put that bag?" I say as I dig through my things and she raises her brows at what I just implied.

"What?"

"Nothing, virgin Delilah." I wave my hand at her to dismiss what I said and she cuts her eyes at me.

"I'm repulsed." She informs me and I roll my eyes.

"So was God, Lilah. Now can you help me find this and stop standing there counting all my sins?"
She relents, stepping to me and grabbing my satchel, helping me dig through it.

"Are you not taught to value your own body and save your intimacy for your spouse?"

"Absolutely. Child sacrifice is acceptable but if we sleep with someone before we're married to them, Odin bans us from Valhalla." I say sarcastically and she rolls her jaw.

"Well, I didn't know how far your people consider 'too far'." She argues.

"I've never heard of 'too far' until now, if that tells you anything and I can't find the money." I give up, sighing.

"Yeah, I can't find it either." She rubs her forehead. "So we've moved to a new city with no money to purchase anything."

"We'll see how real this God is that we trust in so much." I state and she looks at me, but doesn't say anything.

_____ It only takes a few hours to reach York, the town thriving through the gap between the trees. We look on from where we came from on the grass covered hill and Delilah smiles brightly.

"We made it." She's relieved and I look at her.

"We have no money." I remind her and she shakes her head.

"We won't need it. God will provide. As he always has."

I just nod a couple times, but still worry as I look at the city.

"Ascension is in a few days." She says calmly. "Surely they won't turn away strangers on a day so close to our faith."

"You clearly have not met a self-righteous Christian." I scoff. "They make pagans look holy."

We just look at York for a minute more, about to make our way down from the hill we're on.

Just as we're about to turn, the smell of fire wafts through the air and the two of us exchange looks.

"What's that smell?" She asks and I furrow my brows slightly, smelling the familiar scent of burning herbs that were used to lace the wood piles when we would make sacrifices to the Gods.

Not just any sacrifices, human sacrifices.

"Oh, hell." I mumble, my eyes widening in the direction the smoke's coming from.

Thumping drums start sounding in the thicket of woods and I'm torn between ignoring what's going on, and going to attempt to save whoever's dying.

I try to pretend nothing's happening, but I swear I feel a scalding burn from the silver cross around my neck that Heahmund gifted to me and I hiss, tugging at the reigns of my horse to get him to turn on the direction of the drums.

I start praying, tucking the cross under the top of my dress to keep it hidden.
"Put your cross away." I tell her between my talking to God and she furrows her brows.

"What?" She's confused, and I exhale, finishing my prayer by crossing my chest. "What's wrong?" She asks me.

"You'll see it clearly." Is all I say before nudging at my horse's sides enough to get him to start running and she follows on her own horse.

The more the drumming gets closer and louder, the more I'm praying in my mind.

"Woah," I pull back on the reigns and come to a halt, sliding off the horse to tie him up to a tree.

Delilah stops and does the same.

We're not that far from the sacrifice, and I make sure she's equipped with at least two weapons before we run the rest of the way.

We get to the small clearing in the woods, hiding behind trees, seeing the woman holding a rusted knife, dancing around the smoking wood as two young boys, two children, are tied to the stack of wood. There's a crowd of warriors, watching with pride and I feel sick.

"Tell me they aren't..." Delilah's horrified, barely able to speak. Tears are thick in her voice and I look at her.

"The Gods demand sacrifice in order to help in battle. It's like a payment." I explain lowly and she tries to take calm breaths.

"What are we planning to do?" She asks and I rub my lips together.

"I don't really have a plan." I admit and she snaps her face to meet mine. "I didn't think I'd have the balls to get this close."

"You're pathetic." She grumbles.

"I've seen first hand what happens to people like us, Delilah. Excuse me for not jumping for joy at the idea of interrupting a sacrifice."

"You're saving someone else's life though."

"I tend to be flight over fight."

"You mean cowardly?"

"I would call it self-preservation."

"I call it selfish." She states with a raised brow.

"It's called surviving, Delilah."

"Why did you want Heahmund to train you if you weren't going to utilize your skill?" She asks sharply and I glare at her.

"I said I run when things get difficult. I never said I wanted to be defenseless."

She doesn't reply, her eyes studying the woman about to perform the sacrifice. She licks the knife, swaying with the drums and the sick feeling grows within me.
Delilah's hand hovers over her axe and I glare at her.

"No, no, what are you doing?" I ask her and she eases closer to the crowd. The woman raises the knife to the first child's throat. "Delilah, don't—"

The body hits the floor of the Forrest, leaving the targeted child alive and the crowd turns to their right to see the origin of the axe that collided with the woman's skull.
Chapter Three

4 Years Ago

Kattegat

Ivar and I catch our breath from where we're laying on his bed in silence. We'd gotten in to an argument and it ended how most of our fights end: me moaning and whimpering underneath him.

I can tell he's about to drift off to sleep and when he does, I nervously pull myself away from him and try not to wake him the best I can.

I just grab his tunic and pull it over my naked body and grab a spare fur from the foot of the bed, wrapping it around me before stepping out of the cozy comfort of his room.

Everyone's asleep, at least I think they are. No one's in the main living area, the fire in the corner dying down after not being brought back to life in a while.

My attention falls on the table, seeing a map spread across it and I rub my lips together before hesitantly making my way it.

I don't know exactly what it's for or whether it's to help target the next voyage or not. Plans stopped being discussed with me since I showed no interest in such. The topic just irritates me more than anything.

Stealing other people's land and belongings wasn't a way I wanted to live but no one understood how I could think that and still be the daughter of a warrior and shield maiden who had loved raiding and exploring.

It wasn't until I colorfully expressed my hatred for it that everyone stopped saying a thing to me about it.

Ignorance is bliss after all.

The sound of Sidka speaking drunkenly catches my attention, and he stumbles in from outside with Ubbe helping him to stay standing up.

My older brother stops to look me over. I probably look like sex and I can tell by the faltering of his alcohol induced happiness that it's bothering him to see his baby sister in such a state.

"What the hell are you doing up, huh?" He asks me.

Although Ivar's tunic falls past my knee caps, I still pull the fur tighter around me to cover my legs.

"I could not sleep." I answer him truthfully. His lip curls slightly and he points a shaking finger at me, catching himself off balance for a moment so he stumbles to the side a little.
"Sidka," Ubbe starts.

"Do not be so cheap, Sister, just because you are in pain." Sidka’s words cause my mouth to open a little in shock.

"Sidka," Ubbe repeats.

My brother pays him no attention, growing angrier with me.

"Did father not tell you to stay away from that boy? Did he not tell you to stay out of his bed? I thought after you tried to drown yourself that it would knock some bloody sense in to you. Yet here you are," He motions to me, a look of disgust on his features. "still catering to his every sick need like his little whore."

"Sidka," Ubbe's between me and my brother now and I'm at a loss of words. "You need to rest."

I think Sidka's going to challenge Ubbe but he just gives me one last drunken glare before stumbling in to the bedroom they let him use.

Ubbe looks up at me and I breathe out.

"Where is Hvitserk?" I ask calmly and he shakes his head slightly.

"With a slave." He answers. My shoulders fall a little and he licks his lips. He and my father were close, I guess he was coping as well as the rest of us.

"Are we not going to speak on what happened last night?" I barely hear him ask, but I look up at him.

"I'm fine." I say to him and he shakes his head a little.

"Issy, you went to great lengths to take your own life. You are not fine. And pretending it didn't happen by screwing around with my brother—"

"Ivar is the only one I am doing a thing with, Ubbe." I lie, still fearing that my brother will over hear me

"Is that what you tell yourself to avoid guilt, Issy? You believe your own lie?" Ubbe whispers gruffly and I roll my jaw. "You tell yourself you don't feel anything for m—"

"I am not speaking to you about this." I cut through his words and move to walk past him, but he grabs my arm in a tight grip and stops me, whipping me around to face him.

"You are playing with fire and you are bound to get burned alive by it. That is the last thing I am going to say about the matter." He says warningly and I stare in his eyes.

He looks genuinely worried for me.

"Okay," The word makes no noise leaving my mouth and he lets my arm go, allowing me to slip by him.

I watch in silence as the wax from a burning candle trembles down the rest of the stick, the orange flame smoking and burning.

You are playing with fire and you are bound to get burned alive by it.
Ubbe's words echo in my mind as I glance at Ivar.

I take it that this was my sweltering consequence. One of them, at least.

Sharp leather kisses at the skin of my back as a fiery sting shreds through the place between my shoulder blades.

I scream, my body lurching forward to struggle against the two men restraining me.

"Punishment for treason", is what Ivar labeled this. I was associated with a Christian, interrupted an offering to the Gods...and lastly, I abandoned my people and him. Though the last thing wasn't addressed aloud by him, I know he's getting a sense of satisfaction at the sight of me suffering for doing so.

Tears topple past my lashes and my cracked lips tremble in fear of the next crack of the whip snapping in the air only to strike the same raw flesh it tore once before.

Delilah's passed out on the ground beside me, her bare back hanging out of her dress that's been ripped down the middle to expose her skin for punishment. Her own wounds are deep and precise, concentrated on the spot over her spine and around it.

The crucifix she wears around her neck has been strategically placed in one of the deepest cuts, resting tall against the rugged flesh there.

I pray silently that they don't see the cross around my neck, hidden under the collar of my dress.

The beating is brutal and it doesn't end until Ivar holds up his hand to motion the man to halt.

My ex-lover stares at me in a sick, joyful way that has my skin itching. He crawls to me slowly, getting closer, allowing me to get a good look at him. His hair is longer, reaching his shoulders, he's grown just the slightest bit of facial hair that outlines his pronounced jaw, but nothing drastic. His arms have gotten bigger, the muscle being emphasized through the long sleeves of his blue tunic.

He slithers towards me like a serpent, getting ready to attack its prey and swallow it whole.

I want to say something to him but I can't bring myself to and I instead suck in a breath at the cold air blowing past us and against my aching back.

I didn't get as many lashes as Delilah did. Mainly because they don't know I'm Christian yet but also because I didn't fight them the way she did.

I take another glance at her and see that the tattoo of the lord's laws written in Latin that once rested the whole way down her spine is now marked through and disfigured.

I decide my matching one on the same place of my back looks about the same as hers and I squeeze my already heavy eyes closed.

I know none of them can read Latin, so I don't worry about them understand any of it.

My eyes open once more when I feel Ivar's breath on my face. The warmth of it is great in contrast against the air around us that bites at my wounds.

He's centimeters away, his arms supporting his weight as he watches me for a moment with his jaw clenched.

"Bring her to my tent." He orders the man who whipped me.
This is where I give out, falling on the cold ground, breathing heavier than I ever have as I struggle to breathe through the pain.

"And what about the Christian?" The man motions to Delilah's unconscious form.

Ivar turns and looks at Hvitserk who, like Ubbe, hasn't looked at our punishment not once.

"Give her to my brother." Ivar's offering has me daring to reach out and gently rest my hand over his exposed fingers, causing him to snap his attention to me in an irritated huff of breath.

He wouldn't be irritated if my touch didn't affect him. If it didn't, he'd just laugh in my face at my weak attempt to persuade him.

"Please, don't hurt her anymore than she already is." It's a broken, raspy croak that I don't recognize as my own voice.

"I got her." Hvitserk mumbles to one of the men that reaches for Delilah.

He plucks the cross from her wound and tosses it on to the ground before covering her back with her dress and picking her up.

I realize I won't get anywhere with Ivar by asking him not to hurt Delilah, so my blue eyes meet Hvitserk's hazel ones and he gives me look of pity mixed with anger. Despite his expression, he gives me a tiny nod as if to assure me she won't be hurt anymore, for now, before he walks away with my best friend.

I'm picked up suddenly, too tired to really care who's picking me up, but when I see Ubbe I let out a breath of relief.

I don't know how long it's been since Delilah and I were captured, but being that the sun is starting to fade I take it that it's been hours since.

The children we risked our lives to save were killed anyway and we were forced to watch, leaving faint bruising on our throats from where grimy, rough hands held our chins up.

My eyes feel like weights by the time I'm enveloped in dim light from the tent and my side collides with thick furs that cover the floor, shielding my body from the hard ground.

I hiss in pain when my skin shifts as I turn on my stomach.

Ubbe crouches beside me, pulling at the shredded back of my dress, pulling it off of my shoulders.

I'm about to protest until he calms my already anxious mind.

"Don't worry, I am not hurting you. I do not want you to get an infection from the dirt on your dress. Stay on your stomach and I won't look at you."

His stays true to his word, even when his hands brush the skin of my hips, nostalgically, pulling my dress down my legs, his eyes stay on mine and they don't wander until his hand comes up and pulls a fur over my naked ass. Only my battered back is exposed, and he lays my dress beside me.

When he steps to walk out I grab his ankle and he stops, looking down at me.

I turn to face him fully, tugging the fur up to cover my chest and I sit up with a pathetic whimper.

He crouches again in front of me, his features softening, his hand coming out to brush his knuckles
against my cheek before his palm settles against my jaw.

I lean in to his touch and he brings his forehead to rest against mine.

"I feel as if I am seeing a shadow that I have never known." He admits lowly and I place my hand over his, rubbing my lips together.

We sit there for a moment, eyes closed, trying to grasp this bizarre situation the best we can. When he opens his emerald eyes, he glances at my swollen and busted lips.

I wince a little when he presses his own to mine, knowing Ivar could crawl in at any moment but he doesn't seem to care.

I know he's missed me too much to care.

His left hand falls from my jaw, down my neck, to the center of my breasts.

The cool chain around my neck moves and I open my eyes to see his fingers grasping the small silver cross that now sits against the fur covering my chest.

His face falls and fills with confusion, but it's short lived due to Ivar entering the tent.

Ubbe rips the necklace from my neck and balls it in to his fist.
The candle that burns in the corner of the tent casts orange light over Ivar as he watches me. I'm laying on my stomach, my eyes on him as he sits up and fidgets with a throwing knife.

My back's being treated and covered with the help of a slave, a beautiful one, and I simmer at the sight of Ivar's lingering gaze on the blonde girl as she continues placing clean cloths on my back that's been pasted with a mixture of herbs to calm the swelling.

"What is your name?" I ask her with shallow breath, Ivar's blue eyes falling from her to me and his jaw tightens.

"Freydis." She says respectfully, as if she's talking to Ivar instead of me.

"Iskra." I tell her my name to try to cover my irritation and she chuckles a little.

"I know very well who you are." She replies softly. "I have heard many stories."

"Have you?" I snap my head to look at her and she jumps slightly at the sudden movement.

"Many people have spoken of you through the years."

I glance at Ivar, the tight smile on his face.

"And what do they say?" It sounds feral, as if I'm going to rip her throat out at any moment.

A look is exchange between Freydis and Ivar and I clench my fists.

"Be truthful with her." Ivar orders in a tone that shows her if I don't like what she says, I won't be able to hurt her...he doesn't expect me to, at least.

"They tell stories of your cowardice. How you never trained to fight, not even to learn to defend yourself. How you set low standards for yourself and your ambitions were far from true Viking...they say you are not your parent's daughter, for you act like neither of them, and it was your downfall when you ran from Kattegat."

I've heard worse.

"And who says these things?" The words come before I can stop them.

Again, she looks at Ivar and he gives her a solid nod to continue.

"I do not wish to cause any trouble between others." She stalls, placing another bandage over my spine.

"She is hurt." Ivar argues. "She is too weak to fight. Not like she knows how to anyway." He mumbles and Freydis hesitates before talking again.
"Recently I heard Arne Stronghold and Daan Reinorson speaking of it." She explains.

"When?" My bloods boiling, sweat itching to the surface of my skin.

"This morning after your capture."

I look at Ivar, my jaw swiveling around and he starts grinning.

"Thank you, Freydis. You may go." I dismiss her roughly, and she leaves quietly.

Ivar nearly looks proud at my anger and it sparks anger in me.

"Did you know these lies are being spread about me?" I ask, my brows raised and blinks.

"They were not lies, Issy. If they were neither of the men would be living right now."

"I asked if you knew they were saying these things?" I snap.

"I've heard whispers of the cowardly Iskra Youngblood, yes." He shrugs. "But they all seemed to be truthful so I did not take action against your accusers."

"You've allowed my name to be slandered—"

"What did you expect, Iskra?!" His sudden screaming has me flinching and pulling back the demon on my shoulder that's encouraging me to go for the mens' throats. "You abandoned us, abandoned me, and then we find you here in association with a Christian who interrupted our sacrifice to the Gods?! Did you expect my people to still kiss your feet? Did you expect us to welcome you back with open arms?!"

I bite my tongue, tears lining my lashes and he shakes his head.

"I thought the world of you, Iskra. I did everything I could for you and how do you repay me? Fleeing in the middle of the night with no goodbye or explanation as to why."

"I needed to get out and you would have stopped me." I argue. "I had no choice, Ivar."

The quiet between us is unsettling and I swallow thickly before starting again.

"If you expect me to stay here, I will not have people spreading information about me surrounding a situation that they know nothing about." I tell him.

"I am not giving you the option of leaving." He informs me roughly. "You and your Christian will serve as slaves to me and my people." He motions to himself.

"Slaves?" My voice cracks. "Ivar, you know the unspeakable things slaves endure from some men. Allowing us to be slaves will give the wrong people many opportunities to take advantage of us."

"If you are strong enough to venture off by yourself and survive, you are strong enough to defend yourself against any attacker." He doesn't seemed bothered by my suggestion and I feel my blood run cold.

"You should be so proud of yourself, Ivar, for practically offering the body of the woman you once loved to countless men and women." I hiss and he snickers.

"Oh, I am very proud of myself, Iskra." He says matter of fact, and I grind my teeth. "Do you want to know why?"
My lungs give out a faint wheeze after I breathe and he releases a single chuckle, his tongue swiping across his bottom row of teeth before he gives me a smug, closed mouth smile, and crawls to me.

"You've no idea how satisfying it is to watch you be afraid for your life. To watch you fear for your survival. To watch you itching to get the fuck away as fast as possible yet not being able to run as you always do. The sacrifice is over and the whipping has stopped, and you endured your punishment." His hand travels under my dress to grab at my thigh painfully and I bite my tongue. "But seeing you so miserable because you can't flee when everything in you is screaming at you to..." he leans closer, his breath against my lips. "...that is the most rewarding thing to me." He whispers. "So, yes, I am proud."

I don't say a thing in response, my teeth clenching my tongue to keep my mouth shut.

I force myself to shift in spite of the ache from my back, and turn to face away from him.

His weight against my bandages has my teeth clattering together and my tongue pressing to the roof of my mouth. He doesn't listen to my nonverbal warnings and wraps his arm around my naked waist, pulling my damaged back flush against him.

My skin stings through the bandages due to the pressure he's applying when he pulls me to him, something I know he purposefully did, and I let out a tiny whimper. I can't bring myself to fight him off of me, though, and being that I'm cold despite the fur over me, I welcome his warmth and try to make myself relax.

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My eyes blink open, the heavy feeling of Ivar's arm hanging loosely over my side is gone and replaced with cold air whooshing against my back. The wounds feel better than they did. Possible infection must have been chased off with the medicated herbs.

Furrowing my brows, I pull myself in a sitting position, keeping the fur above me pulled up to my chin. Raised voices echo from outside, it sounds like everyone's starting to pack up, but to do what exactly is what I don't know.

My torn dress is on the ground beside me, but as I reach my hand out, Freydis comes in bringing more of the pasty herbs with her and a clean dress similar to the one she's wearing.

I tense when I see her and she offers a kind smile.

"Do not be afraid. Prince Ivar has only sent me here to change the dressing of your wounds. I've done so every morning and night since you've been sleeping for the past few days. He also wanted me to give you proper clothing, being your dress was too tattered for you to wear."

My brows pinch together.

"Days?" I ask and she raises her brows, questioning if she can continue with her duty. I just nod a little and glance at the dress I was whipped in. "The dress I was wearing before is fine. The back is only torn but I'll be wearing a fur anyway."

"He said you would say that." She states. "Which is why he wanted me to tell you that he orders you to wear the dress given to you." She motions to the dark green gown in her hands and I'm reminded I have no motivation to fight right now.

"Fine."
She helps me dress, pulling the dress up over my hips before tugging the long sleeves over my arms. When it's on, she smooths out any wrinkles and then her eyes drift to my hair.

"I know it's a mess." I say and pull away from her when her hand extends to run through it.

There's only a select few people I let comb my hair, as odd as that sounds. Aslaug, Sidka, and Delilah.

Growing up, my head was tender and any time my mother would try to comb through it or braid it, it would end with me crying. So, if I didn't do it myself, Sidka would. Despite being stoic in stance and rough around the edges, his hands were always gentle and loving when it came to me. It was comical to see my mother teach him how to braid, though. And even more comical when he attempted to do so the first couple of times.

After his wife and child died, he changed immensely and I never asked him to do much for me because I thought I was being selfish. That was when Aslaug took up the mantel when I was sick and couldn't quite take care of myself like I needed to.

Then when I left, Delilah became my go-to because she could do just about anything with hair. And the braids she could come up with reminded me a lot of how the women back home would do their hair and that comforted me.

"Where is Delilah?" I ask Freydis, stepping back as she tries to touch my hair again.

"Who?"

"The Christian That was captured alongside me." I inch closer and closer to the exit of the tent and she thinks a moment.

"I believe she is with prince Hvitserk."

"And where is he?"

"I think he is still asleep." She replies and I lick my lips, praying Hvitserk didn't hurt her last night.

"Thank you." I mumble before leaving the tent.

Eyes catch on me as I step through the camp, dodging horses and men carrying cargo that's being packed and ready to continue on their journey...wherever they're going.

Ubbe is putting a fire out, nursing a horn of either mead or water, I can't tell.

"Where is Hvitserk?" I ask as I approach him. He motions to a tent in front of us by several strides and I think back to last night, when he discovered my new found faith.

My hands nervously pull the knots from my hair and tug the blonde strands in to a single braid before tying it off with a leather string around my wrist.

"I would prefer if what happened last night does not return to Ivar." I say smoothly, raising a brow and Ubbe glances at me, sizing me up before he steps pulls his axe from his belt to sharpen it.

"Us kissing or you turning your back on the Gods." He replies in the same tone and I gently grasp his bicep and he stops what he's doing.

"Both."
He genuinely smiles at me for the first time since seeing me, his emerald eyes, again, looking me up and down.

"I have participated in the secret-keeping of one of those two things for many years, now, Iskra, and I do not plan to break my already rough relationship with my little brother over a woman." He tells me with raised brows. "The other secret, however..." he trails off, his lips pressing together.

"Ragnar was very close with the Christian monk, Athelstan, Ubbe." I explain. "If they could love each other and accept one another, I see no reason why we should not be able to do the same thing."

"I see many reasons." Ubbe snaps, throwing his axe to the dirt in irritation, the blade sinking in to the soil at my feet and his hands rake over his face and down to his beard. "I see the Gods, shaking their heads at me and laughing at my weakness for tolerating it. I see them speaking of how they abandoned my father because he drifted away from them due to the Christian God. I see Ivar staring you in the face as he nails you and your friend to a tree for all of us to see before lighting it on fire. I see him laughing and rejoicing at your death and feeling no guilt or shame because you turned your back on him with no remorse so why shouldn't he turn his back on you with any?"

I don't speak, I just listen, hearing his valid points.

"I see many reasons for not being able to accept what you have brought upon yourself, Iskra." He calms, grabbing his axe off the ground.

I stay quiet, thinking of the possible consequences of my actions. Delilah wouldn't be afraid. She isn't afraid. Heahmund had rubbed off on her completely when it came to having no problem proclaiming her loyalty to God.

I, on the other hand, fear Ivar more than I fear God at the moment.

"The necklace," He tells me lowly, referring to the cross he snatched from my neck last night. "I gave it to the other girl." I open my mouth to speak but he stops me. "I do not need an explanation. As long as you know the outcome of your actions if anyone else, especially Ivar, is to find out. I will pretend I do not know anything about it. If you are caught, do not throw my name out of your mouth. Do you understand me?" The darker side of Ubbe I've only seen a select few times comes to life and I nod gently. Although he's assured me he won't tell anyone, he doesn't hide his obvious disappointment as he pushes past me to go to his crippled brother.

I take advantage of his dismissal and go to find Delilah and Hvitserk.

When I get to Hvitserk's tent, he's awake, gathering his things as Delilah sits on the pallet of furs and prays under her breath.

Hvitserk notices me, but doesn't say anything at first.

When Delilah's finished, she looks up at me and smiles at me.

"How are you feeling?" She asks me in English and I scoff.

"I'm great. I love the feeling of having barely any skin left on my back." I reply and Hvitserk looks at us.

"He doesn't know half of what we're saying." Delilah tells me. "I had to pray in your language last night because he wanted to know what I was telling God about them."

I just raise a brow and look at Hvitserk.
"Why hasn't anyone bothered to wake me?" I ask him and he shrugs.

"We tried. You nor the Christian would wake." He motions to Delilah.

"Her name's Delilah." I speak sharply with crossed arms and he stops what he's doing and faces me.

"She calls me 'Northman' and 'savage'. Calling her 'Christian' is better than what I should call her." He argues with me.

"Well, Perhaps you frighten her." I suggest and Delilah struggles to hold back a laugh. "Where are we going?" I ask to change the subject and he sighs.

"We are invading York." He explains and Delilah and I exchange looks. "They are celebrating Ascension so they'll all either be drunk or in church. They won't be expecting us and they won't be able to defend themselves."

"That's not fair." Delilah pipes harshly, her brows arched and he licks at his bottom lip in thought.

"We do not play fair. We do what is needed to accomplish our vision." He informs her. "It is not like you will be helping us conquer the city, Christian." He takes note of her broken-hearted expression. "If they are true believers in your god, they will enter the Christian heaven. Will they not?" He asks her and she doesn't reply, she just stares at him. "Or do you doubt it even exists in the first place?"

Her expression turns to anger and she goes to take a step forward to him but I gently grab her arm and stop her.

She had no chance against him if she were to start a fight...not in her condition, at least.

Instead, she pushes past me to leave the tent and I follow after her.

Hvitserk comes with us, looking as if he's eager to see what earful Delilah gives Ivar.

We're approaching the canopy that Ivar, Ubbe, and a few others are under, more than likely discussing attack tactics and Ivar looks up at us.

His attention isn't long lived when he looks back to his older brother as he makes a suggestion. It isn't until Delilah demands his attention that he looks at us again.

"Heathen!" She shouts, her steps gaining momentum and I tense up, snapping my face to glare at her.

This gets his notice, and he sits up straight as she gets in front of him.

"Saint!" He pipes sarcastically and she sneers.

"Who the bloody hell do you think you are?" She hisses to him and one of the men next to Ivar makes a move to her but Ivar holds his hand up, stopping him as he focuses on Delilah's words. "Let me explain to you the importance of Ascension in a way your closed, barbaric, pagan mind can comprehend. Christ was crucified, three days later he arose, and on the fortieth day of being alive once more, he ascended back in to Heaven where he now watches over and guides his people. His Christian people. And on the day his Christian people are to give thanks for that ascension, you plan to take advantage of their church-going and celebration—the time they least expect to fight an enemy—by attacking, slaughtering, and pillaging their town." She's getting closer and closer to him until their noses are nearly touching. "You are cowardly."
"I see an opportunity to take charge of a town with little resistance due to their pre-occupation." He explains to her calmly. "That is not cowardly." He grabs his pick from his belt and gently taps it against Delilah's temple. "That is smart."

"Is it really? Are you not afraid of the hellfire God with bring upon you if you continue to harm his people?"

"Are you not afraid of the hellfire I will bring upon you if you continue to question me?" He asks her darkly. "Your God is afraid. He runs from our gods and maybe that is why you are so worried for your people because you know your god will flee from us and leave them to fight for themselves."

"Oh, he does not run from anything. Especially not drunken Vikings." The words sound like rocks grinding together as they leave her lips roughly.

Ivar's jaw tenses for a moment as he keeps his focus on Delilah.

"We attack at noon." He orders to his men without looking away from her. "Say a precious prayer for your people, Saint. They will need all the help they can get."

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York.

The town that was supposed to be a positive change for me and Delilah.

"I always pictured it differently." I mumble to her as we listen outside the city walls at the screaming and shouting.

The both of us are shackled together and sitting on a horse that's pulling both of our own horses behind him.

The male that has the honor of watching the two of us gives out a demonic chuckle at the sound of the town's downfall.

"Pathetic Christians." He refers to the screaming people loud enough for the both of us to hear.

A hand squeezes mine as Delilah fights back the urge to attack him.

*She's a like a wild bull in the company of these Vikings, wanting them to give her an excuse to skewer them on her horns.*

After what seems like forever, Ubbe comes to collect us, leading our horse in to the town.

I keep my eyes on Delilah's back, ignoring the sad sight around us of dead bodies and the stink of released innards.

We stop in front of a church, the doors wide open as the aftermath of the attack is thick in the air. The sound of women silently whimpering, sounds of warriors plucking valuable jewelry off the dead bodies and what remains of the survivors, but the sound that has Delilah struggling the most is that of a baby crying.

She moves to get off the horse but I grab her.

"Delilah," I say lowly in warning.

None of these people have a reason to keep her alive. Any sudden movements could have her and I
both killed.

"I have been captured, taunted, whipped, taunted some more and bossed around enough by bloody Vikings to last me three lifetimes. If this life ends due to me helping an infant then I assure you, Iskra, I have plenty of fight left over for the next one." She slides off the horse and due to us being strung together, I follow.

She practically drags me behind her as she marches past Ubbe and in to the church to where the screaming child is seated.

He's chubby, fat from healthy eating, and his face is red from crying so loudly.

She leans down and picks him up from the cluttered mess of dead people around him, so she can bounce him gently to calm him.

Ivar's at the front of the church near the alter, on the ground with what sounds like a struggling man. I crane my neck to see it's a Bishop whose robes have been ripped off of him. Another man is helping Ivar hold him to the ground, and I furrow my brows in confusion as to what they're doing. A horse is backed in to the church doors, catching Delilah's eyes as she follows where he goes.

She now sees what I've seen and I see her visibly shake in anger.

She won't go for anyone's throat as long as there's a child in her arms, I tell myself.

"Ivar," I say cautiously, watching as two more men bring in a metal basket that's set aflame on the inside. Taking another step, I try to piece together what's happening.

I quickly realize what's going on when Ivar takes his sharp pick and a knife and holds the Bishop's mouth open as a man lifts a pot over the victim's face.

Molten gold slivers out of a pot and in to the wailing Bishop's mouth.

The baby is harshly handed over to me as loud screeching in a foreign tongue from Delilah wrecks my ears, and I nearly bust my ass when she charges at Ivar with every intent of killing him.

Hvitserk's close by and holds her back, covering her mouth with his crimson stained hand as she shouts curses at Ivar in her native language. Fiery tears roll down her cheeks and I can feel the hatred coming off of her like waves crashing in to a shore.

Ivar's watching her with a blank expression, his eyes daring his brother to release her.

He wants to see what this Christian is capable of.

Little does he know she's capable of making the ground rattle beneath her feet with the right motivation behind her strife and even more capable of wrenching someone's heart from their chest with a single glide of a blade.

She's more Viking than most of these warriors.

She stops screaming after several moments. Her breathing is deep and labored, her eyes are red from crying and her body is trembling with loathing.

Ivar's once expressionless face is amused by her attempt. A wide grin spreads across his features as a laugh overcomes him. The sharp point of his pick scratches at the side of his bloodied head as if he's thinking of a way to break the God-fearing woman in front of him that's got one thing on her mind:
belligerence.
You Should See Me in a Crown

Chapter Five

My wrists are rubbed raw by the time I give up on trying to get out of the shackles placed on me and Delilah.

We're locked in the church, as everyone starts moving their belongings in to the town, due to Delilah's temper tantrum earlier.

I long to speak to Ivar about the arrangement of us becoming slaves and what his agenda is for conquering York, but he has yet to give me the time of day. His own question of "what now" has taken his time and attention.

The five feet of space that the heavy chain between me and Delilah allows isn't enough for either of us to feel as if we have our own space to breathe, and I think as Delilah prays.

"This is bullshit." I mumble, pacing the allowed distance of the church floor splattered with blood and corpses.

"I am trying to speak to God and you're cursing in his house." She grumbles with her eyes closed and her hands folded.

"Ask him what exactly we did to piss him off because he's thrown us to the wolves." I snap and she opens her eyes, rolls them, and looks up.

"Forgive her, Father. Heathen blood runs through her veins. She knows not what she does. Amen." With this, she finishes and looks at me.

"I need to speak with Ivar." I tell her. "But he does not seem interested in saying a word to me."

"What could you possibly say to him to change his mind? He's stubborn and has his mind made up, Iskra. Any further attempts at persuasion will only anger him and make things worse." She's the voice of reason in this shit storm.

A thought crosses my mind and my brow raises slightly.

"Ivar is not the only leader of the army." I point out. "Ubbe and Hvitserk also have the power to free us if they wished to do so."

"How would we get them to, though?" She asks next, facing me completely.

"Ubbe and Hvitserk are pushovers when it comes to beautiful women. I'm pretty sure Ubbe is already wrapped around my finger, you just need to be nice to Hvitserk."

Her face twists repulsively at the suggestion, realizing what all I mean by "nice", and she curls her lip.

"I'd rather die if my freedom depends on giving my body to any of these vermin." She snaps.

"Delilah," I crouch in front of her where she sits, grabbing her chin and making her look at me. "Us surviving is dependent on our freedom. If we remain slaves we are bound to endure cruel things."
"This has nothing to do with our survival, Iskr—"

"This has everything to do with our survival!" I shout, my grip on her chin tightening and she grasps my wrist harshly and shoves me away from her.

"Do you not trust your god to deliver us? Where is your faith?!" She lashes out at me.

"Where is your resilience?!!" I shoot back in the same tone.

"My resilience is more intact than yours!" She throws her arms up. "You want to lay here and give up and not fight against the fact that we are both enslaved! Instead of being a woman about it and fighting your way out, or die trying, you'd rather lie on your back, having your feet in the air with a sweaty barbarian between your legs in order to gain favor with them!"

"I'm not saying we cooperate. I'm saying we fight, but use our minds." The tip of my fingers tap lightly on her forehead. "Not our fists. Think smartly and slyly, not aggressively and violently. You said you wanted to be compassionate towards those who are wicked and this is your opportunity."

"That was before I saw how evil they truly are." She states coldly. "And I want meaning behind my kindness. I don't want my kindness to have manipulative intent."

"Then try to be genuinely kind if you want to, Delilah, I don't care. But you can't lash out like an angry bull every time one of them says or does something you don't like. They believe differently than you do. They were raised differently and have morals that are opposite of yours. You must understand that."

She doesn't say anything, she just stares at me as if she's thinking.

"What do you propose we do?" She finally speaks calmly.

"For starters, learn to keep your mouth shut more often. My tongue has blisters from how often I've had to bite it since being around them, but I've stayed out of trouble for the most part. Aside from what trouble I do get in to from being associated with you."

She breathes out and shakes her head a little before closing her eyes.

It's as if a switch flips in her mind and she opens her eyes, her angry expression softening.

———

I cross my arms and wait for Ubbe and Hvitserk to speak, their eyes wandering over Delilah and I.

"People will be celebrating our victory tonight." Ubbe finally says, crossing his arms over his chest. "We would like for you two to make sure everyone is content. Keep their horns full of drink and retrieve them food if they are hungry."

Delilah doesn't even show a sign of distaste, she just listens as he talks and I furrow my brows slightly. I'm shocked she's doing what I suggested and not arguing with them.

"Ivar wanted us to tell you that if you refuse," Hvitserk starts, looking at Delilah.

"We aren't refusing." She assures them before Hvitserk can finish.

The two brothers exchange looks as if they're waiting for her to start laughing, tell them she's bullshitting them and then commence to try to go for their throats.
"I will say this, though," She adds, looking down at herself and then at me. We're both lightly covered in dirt and blood from the events of today and she breathes out. "We need proper baths before doing anything else."

"I agree." I say, too, realizing how gross we look.

Again, the two glance at each other before nodding.

"Alright." Ubbe mumbles with a single nod before he unlocks Delilah and me from our chain.

I immediately rub my irritated wrist, thanking God for the new found freedom and I see Delilah's relief is evident as well.

"Christian," Hvitserk says to Delilah and she looks at him with raised brows as if that were her actual name. "Come help me." He nods to the doors of the church and I'm assuming he means help him gather the supplies we need in order to clean up decently. She doesn't argue or make a face of frustration. She just does as asked, even offering a smidgen of a smile to Ubbe as she passes by him.

His gaze follows after her and when Hvitserk and her are gone, I scoff.

"What?" Ubbe asks me and I roll my eyes.

"I know what you're thinking." I scold him.

"I am thinking she is beautiful. What is so wrong with that?"

"Thinking she is beautiful is fine. Imagining her on your prick, is not." I retort sharply.

"I wasn't thinking that. She seems worthy of respect. I said she was beautiful, that doesn't mean I'm going to try to sleep with her. And even if I were to try, it is none of your business." He argues.

"She is like my sister. Her business is my business, and my business is hers."

"Ah, so you have told her of your relationship with Ivar?" His brows furrow as he asks me this and I open my mouth and close it again.

"Ivar and I do not have a relationship anymore, Ubbe." I deflect the question.

"Mm." He breathes out, the corners of his mouth twitching amusedly. "Have you told her of our relationship?"

My eyes are so sharply cut I could slice him open with them if it were possible.

I step closer to him slowly, making sure my steps hold a clear point as I approach him.

"There is no relationship between us. There never was a relationship. We just used each other and that's that. Don't insult me by comparing that to what Ivar and I once had." I can tell my words effect him, lines on his forehead further deepen as he takes one step closer to me.

"You speak as if what you found in my brother was everything you wanted and much more. Yet, as I recall, you came crawling to my bed multiple times to have the one thing he could never give you." He sounds entertained by this banter of ours and I dig my teeth in to my tongue.

"I came crawling to your bed for a distraction. Nothing more. Ivar satisfied my needs plenty. That is not why I started sleeping with you." I tell him the truth and he rubs his jaw.
Before he can say whatever smart ass comment I know he wants to say, the doors of the church are opened again and Hvitserk and Delilah enter with two buckets of water and two bathing cloths.

"Our wounds." Delilah says suddenly and I breathe out. I forgot about my damaged back. The herbs the healer prepared for the slashes worked to numb and alleviate the pain so the thought hasn't crossed my mind since Freydis had changed my dressing earlier in the morning.

We can't get them wet, though.

"We will need Freydis to dress our wounds again." I explain to them. "Will you go find her?"

"She is with Ivar." Hvitserk tells me and my blood feels as if it's boiling.

"Oh." I try to hide the evident disappointment and Ubbe frowns a little.

"You wouldn't be jealous, would you?" Hvitserk asks and I glare at him.

"I left his ass behind, remember?" I raise a brow as my question cuts through the air aggressively. "I prepared for him to move on when I left. No, I am not jealous."

They know I'm lying, their faces showing the evident disbelief of my words, but they keep their mouths shut and don't say a word.

"I'm going to find the slave." I mumble, pushing past them.

It doesn't take long for me to see the gorgeous blonde sitting beside Ivar as he speaks to her. Whatever he's saying must be pretty interesting because he's speaking with enthusiasm and she's eating every bit of it up.

Neither of them notice me until I'm standing in front of them, looking down at where they are seated on the ground, leaning against one of the small buildings within the city.

Ivar looks up at me and his face falls, the broad smile fades, his brows that were once raised in excitement now go close to his eye lids in an unamused irritation at the sight of me.

Good, the feeling's mutual.

"Freydis, Delilah and I are going to bathe and then we need our bandages cleaned." I tell her in a tone that isn't too snappy, but strict enough for her to get the point and she looks at Ivar as if asking his permission.

He doesn't bother to look at her, his ocean eyes on me, lip curling over teeth in distaste. He looks as if he wouldn't mind peeling the nails off of my fingers.

She's about to stand up, but he puts a hand out and stops her, still focused on me.

"Tend to the Christian." He orders her. "I will take care of Iskra."

Oh, Dear god.

"Yes, my prince." She's so sweet and obedient towards him...playing the same game I am except her goal is to get underneath him while my goal is to walk away still breathing.

I watch after her, hoping she feels my eyes burning in to her back.

"I am repulsed." I don't bite my tongue any longer and Ivar smirks.
"She is very attentive." He tells me smugly and I'm tempted to kick him, but decide against it despite the innuendo he's used.

It makes me gag.

"I need to bathe. Are you cleaning my wounds or not?" Change of subject has him scowling again and he huffs out a breath.

"Can't you just keep the bandages you already have on?"

"Mmm, no. Higher risk of infection, my prince." I mock the way Freydis refers to him and he rolls his eyes. "Which I'm sure you wouldn't mind me suffering, would you?"

He avoids answering, motioning for me to follow him.

_____

"Gods, Ivar!" I hiss in pain, the sharp stinging of a forming scab on one of the lashes being tampered with radiating through my body and I swear I can hear the smile in his voice. I've already scrubbed dirt and grime off of me, now I needed my back tended to.

"Sorry." He mumbles, dabbing at the now bleeding wound.

"Do you even know what you're doing?" I look over my shoulder at him and he grins.

"It is common sense, Issy." He shrugs.

We're in someone's home, I'm laying on my stomach while he sits beside me, his legs out in front of him while he cleans up my bare back.

"What are these words on your back?" He asks me, fingers brushing over the scarred commandments and I lick my lips nervously. "I noticed your Christian friend has one like it."

"They are the commandments of her God." I can't bring myself to lie to him, knowing he'll find out the truth anyway and he stops moving suddenly.

He's quiet, not saying a word, not moving, not doing anything except thinking on what I just said.

"Why do you have such foolishness marked on your body permanently?" When he speaks again, it's a gruesome tone and I force myself to sit up and face him, not caring about my bare chest out on display. He's already seen every inch of my body. I'm not going to play modest now that I'm Christian.

"Delilah's faith means everything to her. Delilah means everything to me. I don't think it's foolish to have something on my body where, every time I look at it, it reminds me of her. If we are to ever part, I want to be able to know that we are still with one another."

He stays silent, I feel his anger radiating off of him and I dare to reach out and gently grasp his hand in mine.

He doesn't pull away, but I can tell he isn't welcoming the touch either.
"I owe you many explanations as to what I've done the past several years. Even before I abandoned you, I was doing things I should not have been doing. I am sorry for leaving you, Ivar. I do not expect forgiveness but I need you to try to understand where I was coming from. It was dangerous for me to continue on as if nothing happened. I felt smothered and I needed to get out."

"Well, I assure you, Issy, you will no longer feel smothered by me." He promises darkly, crumpling the dirty bandages in his hands. "I will go get Freydis to doctor you. I feel the need to give you your space all of the sudden."

"Ivar, you know that is not what I meant." I argue.

"I know what you meant, Iskra. Once again you are blaming everyone but yourself for your issues. You drowned yourself because you were lonely because no one paid enough attention to you and you left because everyone was paying too much attention to you and you felt smothered!" He exclaims.

Rage gets the best of me and I roll my jaw, raising a brow.

"Where is Sigurd?" The words topple from my mouth before I can stop them and the color drains from his face.

_Months Ago_
_Sherborne, England_

_Crisp air around me was brutal. Coldness weighs down on me and I feel myself stumbling barefoot slightly across the ground, my mind foggy in my state of near sleep._

_I ignore the patch of brayers that catch in the end of my nightgown and prick at my feet, my eyes focused on the river. Cool water rushes over my ankles, my feet becoming submerged when I step further and further in to the channel of water._

_I take heavy breaths, my waist down completely engorged in icy cold water._

_My eyes blink slowly, hearing barely a whisper of my name._

_I turn cautiously to face the shore, seeing a dark figure standing there, the shadows of Ravens flying around him. I only see what details of the figure that the light of the bright moon allows me to, but I know very well who this is._

_Odin._

_My father once told me the all father sometimes decides to tell us when we've lost someone important to us if we are not there with them to know of their death. Ivar crosses my mind. Perhaps his condition got the best of him and he died of natural causes...or maybe there was an enemy that attacked Kattegat and he fell victim to an opposing army._

_Something is slithering up my arm and my eyes fall on a thick serpent. Its slimy, limp whiskers slice through my skin shallowly. White eyes, the color of the moon, look up at me. I've seen this before, when I tried to end my ow life years ago. This one is smaller, though, the one I saw once before was the length of three ships and as wide as a ship as well._

_My brows furrow when I look back up at Odin._

_"Why are you here?" I ask him, trying to pull the creature off of me, but he's loosely around my neck now._
"I bare bad news, Iskra Youngblood." He tells me what I already know and I roll my jaw.

I would be honored years ago, that Odin would take the time to come visit me. But this god is nothing to me anymore, only a nuisance.

"Ragnar Lothbrok is dead." He tells me and I breathe out in relief.

"So I have been told." I retort, stepping from the water.

I have a better view of his grey, shoulder length hair, his missing eye and his grave demeanor.

"His sons have also taken their revenge on King Ecbert, haven't they?" I ask based off of what I've heard and he gives a single nod. "And what has become of his sons?"

He doesn't say anything to me, his expression remaining solemn.

"What has become of his sons?" I repeat sternly, taking another step forward as the worst case scenario slips through my mind.

"Prince Sigurd Snake-in-the-Eye reigns from Valhalla, with his father and his mother, Queen Aslaug."

My heart sinks to my stomach.

"How?" A lump forms in my throat and Odin doesn't blink before telling me what I have asked.

"Lagertha Lothbrok takes responsibility for the death of Queen Aslaug, while Sigurd's fate was met at the hands of his brother."

Ivar, I think in my mind before the God before me tells me.

"Ivar the Boneless." He echoes my thoughts.

"Why have you told me this?" I ask him when he goes to walk away. "I have renounced my belief in you as a God so why would you go out of your way to speak to me?"

He stops his heavy walking, turning to look at me. I've realized I was following him, now completely out of the river and well onto the shore.

"You may have renounced your faith, but you have yet to stop believing I exist." He explains to me. "You believe your fallen parents, your other family and friends who have passed before you, are in Valhalla feasting, drinking and fighting amongst I and the others. Do you not?"

"Yes." I answer honestly.

"Then I am still able to relay messages to you."

Again, he tries to leave but I stop him.

"My parents," I start. "Have they spoken of me or my brother Sidka?"

"Not since they learned they will not be seeing you again due to you going to the Christian Heaven when you die. It hurts them to think they will not see you again."

My expression saddens even more.
"Ragnar, on the other hand," I think the look he gives me is the closest thing to a smile he's made since appearing to me. "He is proud of you and wishes for you to tell Athelstan of how much he misses him when you meet your final breath, Iskra Youngblood."

He's gone like a vapor, the cold sliminess of the serpent around me is no more and my nightgown is dry.

I nod at his words, tears swelling in my eyes.

"I will. Tell him that I will." I whisper, knowing Odin can still hear me although he isn't here.


Ivar's jaw is stiff, locked tightly together as he focuses on me.

He can tell by the look in my eye that I know very well what happened to his older brother.

"Who told you?" It's a hushed whisper from him, one I barely hear and I lick my lips.

"Odin came to me after it happened to tell me that Ragnar, Aslaug and Sigurd had died." I say lowly.

"He was spreading rumors about me, lies--"

"What was he saying?" I interrupt him and he doesn't look at me.

"He was telling people that I was not a real man because I could not have sex." His words bring back the memory of the first time we tried to.

It was painful for the both of us, physically and emotionally, and he was afraid I was going to leave him afterward.

"You want children one day and I will never be able to give that to you" is what he had told me after we gave up and laid beside each other on his bed.

I thought it was ridiculous of him to assume such things about me.

"I do want children, but I want you more. This doesn't change how I feel about you, Ivar. This does not effect who I see you as" is what I had told him in response. Then of course he was scared I was going to tell people he wasn't able to get hard. Again, that was ridiculous for him to assume so badly of me.

"How did he know that?" I ask him and he seems to get back in to his smug facial expression.

"I bed a slave girl and she told him I was not able to satisfy a woman." He states.

"You tried to fuck someone else?" The temper in my voice only fuels his cockiness and he raises a brow, his finger tips brushing along to skin of my exposed side.

"You didn't expect to be the only woman I bed in my life after you left, did you?" He asks me and I lick my lips.

"It's weird to imagine you with anyone else, Ivar." It's a confession I've been holding on to since seeing him again and his hand falls from my flesh.

"Mmm." He scoffs a little, studying me for a moment before speaking. "And have you been with anyone else?"
Guilt seeps in to my skin.

The vivid memory of me on top of Ubbe, crying out in ecstasy, coming to life in my mind. No, I hadn't been with anyone else after leaving Kattegat, but I had been with someone else.

"No, Ivar." It's a lie straight from hell. But I know if I would have told him the truth, he wouldn't have done what he did in this moment.

His hand lifts to brush against my collar bone and I take in a deep breath, leaning closer in to him.

"Ivar," I whisper seductively, moving to be nearly on top of him. His hand cups my cheek, his face hardening as if taking notice that he's becoming vulnerable. His head tilts slightly, eyes studying me briefly before he grips his hand on my jaw and brings my lips to his roughly.

Our tongues tangle, heat spreading through my core, my hand resting on the back of his neck to pull him closer to me.

He obeys, his hand slipping from my jaw to my throat and it becomes more and more difficult to breathe. His hand is tightening around me, so hard that I can feel where bruises are starting to form.

A soft whimper escapes my throat, my hands lightly pushing on his chest to get out of his vice grip. He only pulls his lips away from mine, his eyes holding a furious anger and his hand only communicating that anger towards my throat with each passing second.

My sore back collides with the blankets underneath us, and he's baring all of his weight on me. Black spots splatter across my vision, and I arch underneath him, struggling to get him off of me. He doesn't listen, a sadistic baring of his teeth down at me causes me to genuinely fear for my life as he growls out:

"Did you really think I would not find out, Iskra?"
Dread weighs down on me as heavily as Ivar is, trapping me underneath him.

He released my throat long ago, now he's just been staring at me intensely, waiting for me to defend myself with mustered up words of utter bullshit.

"How long have you known?" I ask hoarsely, my throat dry and aching from the struggle Ivar put it through earlier.

He eases off of me, sitting up, his eyes on the wall ahead of us.

"I have known for many years now." He admits. A sadness is evident in his voice and I can't help but to hang my head in shame. "I just got really good at pretending to be oblivious to what was really happening."

"How did you find out?" I feel like this isn't my business. I have no business asking him this question.

He lets out a single, breathy chuckle, looking down at me.

"You were not the most quiet, Iskra. I know exactly what you sound like when you moan, when you cry out..." His saddened expression turns dark and he meets my eyes deviously. "...when you come."

My face burns with a blush and he looks me over.

"When I heard you one night in Ubbe's bedroom, sounding the exact same way you did anytime we were fooling around, I knew I was sharing you with my brother." He continues. "I wanted to kill the both of you for thinking you could hide it from me."

"We didn't know what to tell you." I say truthfully to him. "You loved me so much, Ivar. We knew it would crush you. And I loved you, I didn't want to lose you."

"You loved me yet you slept with my brother?" He asks me roughly.

"I did love you." I argue gently. "I didn't know what I wanted back then. Ubbe and I weren't in love with one another. I don't love him the way I love you. What we did was strictly physical."

"Did I not satisfy you?" He cocks his head, his jaw sharp as he angles his head to look at me.

"We didn't start messing around until my parents died, Ivar." I say this like it will help the situation, I should have known it wouldn't have.

"When exactly did you first betray me with my brother?" I didn't expect him to ask this, but I owe it to him to be truthful.

"The night of the funeral." I state hesitantly.
4 Years Ago

Kattegat

Kattegat is silent for the most part. The only thing I'm able to hear is the low hooting of an owl in the woods and the hazy slurs of drunks stumbling along the streets and telling stories that don't quite make sense due to their lack of ability to think clearly.

The torches are lit every so often, casting just enough of a glow where people can see where they are stepping in the moonless night overcasting us.

I'm not sure exactly where I'm walking, I just had to get away for a short bit. Ivar's sleeping presence in his bed when I had woken up had become suffocating and I needed to step outside and catch my breath.

He was worried about me since this morning. After I had fallen asleep, he'd woken me for lunch, I refused. Again at supper, I didn't eat, only slept. But hours after everyone in town had called it a day and went home to spend time with their families and rest, my mind was wide awake. I played possum when Ivar had crawled to bed, and when he drifted off to sleep I had carefully moved away from him and snuck out of the house.

Here I am now, stepping past the well-built square of town where most of the markets and shops are filled with buyers and sellers during the day.

My feet crunch softly over the frosted ground. It isn't frozen completely, but the shimmering of ice specks that catch the lighting of the orange torches lets me know to step carefully because I don't want to risk slipping and breaking a bone like Sidka had done two winters ago, trying to show out in front of his wife.

A giggle leaves my throat at the memory.

It was crazy to believe how much could happen in so little time.

I stop walking when I get to the hog pin, seeing the gilt everyone's been trying to fatten up to prepare for the next feast.

She's been refusing to gain weight, though, despite how much she eats. It's almost as if she knows our intentions so she won't will herself to do the one thing that will lead to her death in order to buy herself some more time in this world.

I don't blame her...her theory of survival is inspiring.

I reach out to run my fingers across her damp nose, when hands grab at my waist.

I jump, whipping around, and before I can scream, Ubbe puts his hand over my mouth before he starts aughing foolishly.

"What are you doing?!" My words are muffled as they escape through the cracks of his hands and he smiles broadly.

"What are you doing out here?" He asks, ignoring my question and letting my mouth go.

"I needed some time to myself."
"In the company of dinner?" He motions to the swine and I glare at him.

"Do not call her that." I argue, reaching my hand through the fencing to pick at one of her floppy ears.

"We have already decided what parts of her to prepare first, though." He continues his aggravation and I punch his shoulder. "Ow! I was just playing with you, Iskra, Gods." He widens his eyes, rubbing where I hit him.

"I told you to stop. You didn't listen." I shrug, not feeling a shred of remorse.

"I hope you do not hit my little brother like this. It's very low of someone to abuse a cripple." He tries to get me to smile, but the term irritates me.

"Contrary to popular belief, he can handle himself." I state, rolling my eyes.

"Ah, and by 'popular belief' you mean 'what Sigurd says'?" He asks and I look up at him.

"Sigurd, Aslaug, all of Kattegat..." I start listing off people that think Ivar cannot put up a decent fight due to his inability to walk. Little do they know the damage he can truly do.

"I do not doubt my brother, Issy. I never did. He is the son of Ragnar Lothbrok. He still has Viking blood in his veins. As do you, regardless of whether you want to embrace that part of you or not.” He raises his brows as he speaks and I let out a breathy chuckle.

"Ah, so this is what this is about. My parents have died and you want me to embrace what they wanted for me to do, so that their legacy can live on through both of their children instead of just one of their children."

"They both pleased the Gods in many ways through their explorations with my father and Uncle Rollo. They wanted you to live the way they did because they did the most with the life the Gods gave to them. Don't you want to do the same?"

"Success is in the eye of the beholder. If raiding and exploration is what makes you successful, in your mind, then by all means, do it. But that does not appeal to me, Ubbe. It never will." I take a step away from the pin and he follows me.

"And what does appeal to you, Issy?" He grabs my hand, stopping me in my tracks and I breathe out.

"Children. A husband. A normal life." I say to him and he laughs as if I said something funny.

"You have so much potential, Iskra." He informs me when I scowl at him and I cross my arms. "I could teach you how to fight, Bjorn could tell you of his journeys and mentor you and you could join me, Bjorn and Hvitserk when we travel and raid."

"Or," I start, creating a distance between us, pushing him back slowly. "You could stop bothering me about it and accept that the Gods have my fate set in stone already. And if they wished for me to live as my parents did, they would have equipped me with a passion for doing so. But they did not, therefor I do not lust after foreign lands and treasure and I never will, Ubbe. Why can't you just accept that?"

"So you would rather stay in Kattegat for the rest of your life and farm?" He furrows his brows and I lick my lips.
"I did not say I wanted to farm." I glance at him. "I just said I did not want to travel."

He thinks hard for a moment, trying to understand why I'm like this. I assume he thinks he's figured it out and he takes a step to me, his thick fur over his shoulders billowing in the cool breeze that sways by us.

"Are you not wanting to leave to new lands because you know it would mean leaving Ivar behind?" He asks me seriously and I exhale.

"Who is to say Ivar will not someday sail away and leave me behind?" I dodge the question and Ubbe gives me an unamused look.

"Iskra," He says sternly, knowing that I know the low possibility of that actually happening.

"It is by coincidence that my dreams for my life align with what Ivar's own fate will most likely be. My choice to remain in Kattegat and never participate in traveling has nothing to do with Ivar more than likely staying here the rest of his life, as well."

"I think you have created the narrative of your life around Ivar." His tone drops, the bold words hitting me in the face.

"No one influences the choices that I make, Ubbe!" I raise my voice at him. "Not even Ivar."

"You do everything he wants you to do, Iskra. You spoil him more than my mother does and because of this, you do not want to disappoint him by leaving him so you plan to stay with him the rest of your life and miss the opportunities the Gods provide you with."

"You are making very, very, ballsy claims without the evidence to support such things, Ubbe." I laugh without humor. "I love Ivar. Yes, it is true that I spoil him and ruin him just as well as Aslaug but that does not mean I will plan my life around what is convenient for him."

"If my little brother is able to sail one day, explore and fight as our father was capable of, what will you do?"

"I am not answering that." I hiss, turning on my heel.

"Just answer the question, Issy."

"No!" I snap over my shoulder at him as he follows me. "I do not have to answer to you, Ubbe Ragnarsson."

"If you are not afraid of your own response then tell me the truth and I will leave you alone!"

He grabs my arm in his rough hand, pinning me against the side of the barn that the slaves are housed in.

"Let go of me." I push at him but he doesn't relent. "Ubbe, let go of me--"

"Answer me and I--"

"I will go with him!" My mouth betrays me, shouting out the truth that I am thinking and he loosens his grip on me, his face looks as if he wasn't expecting that answer from me and I blink back tears. "My feelings against being nomadic are my own, they weren't inspired by him. I felt that way before him and I got together but after losing my parents, I am sure now that I don't want to travel because I do not want to lose him. He is all I have now, Ubbe." I whisper hoarsely. "Where he goes, I will
go. Where he stays, I will stay. Where he meets his final fate, I will meet mine. He is all I have now.” I repeat.

"Do you fear him? Are you afraid of what he will do to you if you tell him you don't want to be with him?"

"No.” It's the honest truth, and he sighs.

We're silent for several moments, looking at each other and thinking.

The thought crosses my mind that if someone were to see us, they would get the wrong idea. He still has me trapped against the barn, only a cow's hair length separating us.

"Well," He finally mumbles, taking my hand in his. "I admire your dedication to my brother." He sounds disappointed.

Ubbe was always an open book to me. He wasn't as complicated as Ivar, mainly because he didn't have nearly as many demons as he did.

"I admire your dedication to get me to leave Kattegat with you." Humor is supposed to come with the words leaving my mouth, but something shifts within him that I pick up. He doesn't find it funny. "Why do you really want me to go with you, Ubbe?"

I'm scared of the answer that's bound to slip from his lips and he takes a deep breath and his emerald eyes meet mine.

"I hoped you would eventually grow tired of my brother and choose me." He admits calmly. "But now I see that the only way you and I will ever be given the chance to act on how we feel about each other is in Valhalla."

I'm taken back what he's said. Not because of his feelings for me, but the way he speaks like I return those feelings to him.

"Ubbe," I start softly, confused. "You mistake me."

"No, I do not."

"Yes, you do." I shake my head, aware of the tension enveloping us. "I love you but not in the way that I love Ivar."

He scoffs, pushing away from me and I furrow my brows.

"How?" He asks in frustration. "I hear the way you two speak to each other when you are angry. I hear the way you argue. You both say hateful things to each other and think that because you are able to fuck each other afterwards that every thing in your relationship is okay when deep down you know damn well it's not."

"We have never had sex, Ubbe." I deny his accusation.

"Well he sure as hell does something that causes you to pant and moan like a cock-hungry bitch in heat."

It feels like a slap in the face.

Ubbe's never been mean to me. I didn't think it possible for him to be mean to anyone who didn't deserve it...but he's related to Ragnar Lothbrok. He's bound to have a temper, even if he is good at
controlling it most of the time.

"You are jealous of him." I spit at him, my eyes cutting at him. "Just like Sigurd is, except you won’t say anything to Ivar about it to his face."

"You cannot blame me for wanting you."

"This goes beyond simply wanting me, Ubbe, it sounds as if you think you are entitled to me because Ivar has already had a turn. I am not some new toy that you moronic children can fight over and demand playtime with!" This time, I actually shove him away from me.

Being the daughter of Synnove Youngblood, I also have a temper.

He shoots daggers at me from where he’s on the ground.

"I will see you tomorrow, Ubbe. When you’re thinking clearly and don’t smell of whiskey and mead."

I go to walk away but he grasps my ankle and pulls me down beside him.

"I am sorry, alright?" He asks, defeat thick in his guilty voice. "I am just frustrated with you, Iskra. I am tired of watching you live the way Ivar wishes you to live."

"I live the way I want to live, Ubbe."

"Yes, to please Ivar." He points out weakly, looking up at the sky. "I believe nothing we feel is from ourselves. I think the Gods have put feelings for you in my heart to tell me something."

"I think they did it to teach you to get used to hearing 'no'."

"Maybe they’ve done so to teach Ivar to get used to hearing 'no'." He retorts. "You feel things for me as well, Issy. You just don’t want to admit it. But when you do, you will leave him."

"I’m in love with Ivar." I repeat what I told his earlier and he turns his face to look at me.

I’m aware of the cold ground sinking through my dress, making me shiver.

I’m aware of Ubbe turning on his side, pulling me closer to him by my waist.

I’m aware of seeking comfort in his warmth.

I’m aware that for the first time today, I am not focused on my parent’s passing.

I’m aware of Ubbe looking at me the way Ivar does before he does something lustful to me.

I’m aware of him leaning closer to me, and the scratch of his faint facial hair against my skin when our lips meet, then our tongues.

What I’m not aware of, are the consequences I am bound to reap from what I’ve just began to sew.

Ivar blinks at me, his jaw twitching from being clenched tightly.

"So that was it?" He asks me and I move away from him, sliding to the edge of the bed and pulling the blanket on the bed up to cover my chest.

"All we did that night was kiss." I tell him truthfully and he scoffs.

"I'm sure."
"That's the truth!" I snap my head around to look at him and he balls his fist up.

Tears fill his eyes. Not tears of sorrow, tears of anger.

"When did you fuck him?"

I squeeze my eyes closed, tears streaming past my lashes.

"Ivar--"

"When did you fuck him?" He repeats, this time he doesn't outburst suddenly, his tone is calculated, filled with menace.

A shuddering breath leaves my mouth, every single time Ubbe and I snuck out to put more knives in Ivar's back comes to my mind.

"Why do you want to know this?" I ask him, turning my body to face him. "Why do you want to torture yourself like this?"

"Because I deserve to know these things, Iskra. I deserve to know what it was that my brother could provide you with that I could not."

"What I did..." I trail off, biting back the lump in my throat. "What I did, Ivar, had nothing to do with you. It had nothing to do with you. There was nothing that you could have done differently. It was fate."

No, it wasn't fate. It was my free will. I know it wasn't fate. Fate is a myth to me now, it doesn't exist, but he doesn't know that. And he doesn't know that I don't believe in fate anymore.

"What did you just say?" He asks me darkly.

"I said it was fate. It was bound to happen. It was the will of the Gods."

I pray that this is what it takes to get him to calm down.

It's as if me saying these words changes something in him and he snaps his face to me, his brows pinched together slightly.

He doesn't say a word, only grinding his teeth together, even though I can see from his face that his anger has dispersed immensely.

Like Floki, he takes the Gods' vision for our lives very seriously. Even if it means that they choose for something to happen that hurts us.

"I will get Freydis in here to finish dressing your wounds." He says to me in a hushed voice and I give out a breath of relief when he crawls to the door, leaving me by myself.

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I weave through the drunk men and women with the pitcher full of ale, my focus on Delilah. She's holding the toddler she rescued earlier today, bouncing him gently as he sucks on his fingers.

"You are supposed to be working." I furrow my brows as I speak to her and she chuckles.

"He was crying." She shrugs and I raise a brow, my free hand resting atop his soft head soothingly.
"What do you believe his name is?" I ask her out of curiosity, trying to configure what the chubby child is addressed as.

"I do not know." She sighs, looking at a loud group of men several feet away from us that are slurring out a song.

"We should rename him." I suggest and she looks at the baby. "He won't remember his first name."

"Do you think he will be with us that long?" She asks calmly, frowning slightly. "I mean, do you think they will allow us to keep him?"

"He's a baby. Not a dog. Yes, we are keeping him." I state confidently and she looks relieved.

"Good, because I have already named him." She informs me and I smile.

"What have you been calling him?"

"Kezikai." She says, her thumb rubbing the slobber from his chin.

I feel my heart swell, standing in front of her to look at her directly.

"Is that alright?" She asks me, wanting to make sure I was okay with her giving my dead baby brother's name to another child. "I just thought, the original Kezikai did not get to live his life very long and perhaps God is using this child by allowing Kezi to live on through him."

"I don't know if I've told you this before," I step closer to her. "But I love you, so, so, so much."

She smiles widely at me, kissing me on the cheek before wrapping her free arm around me.

When she pulls away, she's looking at someone from over my shoulder and I turn to see Hvitserk.

"You two are doing a piss-poor job of serving." He comments, bringing the horn of mead in his hand up to his lips, taking a large swig of it.

"Sorry, I didn't think it would be appropriate for me to entertain the ego's of drunk men who'll just grope me as I fill their horns to the brim with whiskey with a child in my arms." Delilah points out, raising a dark brow and he finds it amusing, grinning crookedly at her in the way a child would acknowledge a playful crush.

I look between the two of them, seeing the way he's looking at her and the way she's completely ignoring him, talking silly to Kezikai to get him to smile a little.

First Ubbe and now Hvitserk.

I would say she's bewitching these men to bow at her feet if I didn't know she didn't have to even try in order for men to risk everything for her.

She's just that alluring. I'd never met someone who could love and hate just as hard as she could. Someone who was as compassionate yet spiteful all at the same time.

Hvitserk snaps his attention from her and turns to look at me.

"There is something Ivar wanted to show you." He tells me as if he's concentrating really hard on what to remember to tell me and I glance at Delilah.

"Where is he?"
When me, Hvitserk and Delilah arrive by the river, I see Ubbe and Ivar sitting an waiting patiently. The only thing lighting our way is that of the moon above and two torches that Ubbe and Hvitserk are carrying.

"What is it?" I ask Ivar, nervous because the last time I spoke to him was when we talked about Ubbe and I's relations in the past.

It's obvious the youngest Ragnarsson isn't happy with the way Ubbe gives me small smile when he greets me, and I fold my hands behind my back and keep my focus on the ground mainly.

Delilah's still bouncing the now sleeping baby, and she steps closer to me as if to silently reassure me of her presence. I've always felt safer with Delilah around because I know -- I've seen -- the extent she's gone to in order to protect me.

"What is it?" I repeat, gaining enough confidence to square my shoulders and hold my chin up.

Ivar smirks, glancing at Ubbe and Hvitserk as the sound of heavy footsteps make their way from the treeline a few feet behind us.

Delilah and I slowly turn, seeing a figure stepping to us and we walk backwards the closer it comes.

It's broad, the ruffling of a fur around it's shoulder catches in the lighting the torch offers. The silhouette comes closer, and when it's towering above us, only a few feet away, I see the prominent features of someone I recognize.

That brown and green eye reflects back the orange flame, dark hair cascading down shoulders, and a well grown beard outlining a face that expresses how I imagine every emotion known to man would appear in a single look.

Sidka.

Chapter End Notes

The story will be picking up the plot of 5x02 in the next chapter. Thank you for reading and please let me know what you think so far.
I don't know exactly how to describe my emotions when I see the face of my older brother.

Like almost all of the Northmen I've seen in my life, he ages like wine. He's handsome and still looks strong, if not stronger.

Mother and father would be proud of how he carries himself.

"Issy." He says calmly, causing me to be brought back from my thoughts.

I look at Ivar, Hvitserk and Ubbe, realizing they planned this. I suppose this is the closest thing to forgiveness any of them are giving at the moment.

"Sidka." I say with a smile, tears coming to my eyes.

I've missed him.

I rush to him, wrapping my arms around his neck and he picks me up, squeezing me tightly.

"Issy," he whispers in my ear, his lips pressing to my hair.

"I thought you had died." I admit lowly, pulling away to look at him, my fingers brushing over his cheek bones.

"I stayed behind in Northumbria to fight off illness." He explains and I furrow my brows in worry.

"What happened?" I ask.

"I quit drinking." He tells me in a serious tone. "My body endured Hel when I stopped but I am well now."

"Why did you—"

"We learned of your residence here and if I were to cross paths with you again, I did not want to be drunk." He admits to me and I raise my brows, turning slowly to look at Ivar.

"You knew I was in England?" I ask him sharply and he gives me a smug smirk.

"King Ecbert mentioned you were in Sherborne to Bjorn."}

"And what else did that cowardly bastard mention about me?" I ask sharply, my nerves struck at the fact that Ragnar's indirect killer had my name leaving his mouth at some point.

Delilah clears her throat, causing me to look at her and she shakes her head slightly as if to calm me down before I start an argument.

"You will have to ask Bjorn. He only told him, Bjorn relayed it back to us."
Heahmund must've gotten the message to the fallen King that Synnove and Erling Youngblood's child was in England.

This sends a violent chill down my spine, and I wonder if Ecbert told Bjorn I was Christian. Surely he didn't, or Bjorn would have told his brothers...or would he?

"You did not change your name upon arrival and rumors spread quickly." Sidka tells me. "I figured you would have."

"Why?" I ask before I can stop myself. The kind, loving demeanor of my brother shifts and he breathes out heavily.

"I guess I thought because you left, you were ashamed of where you came from and wanted to get away from us. I always assumed I'd never see you again because you would change your name to avoid crossing path's with us further." He explains.

"I am so glad you once thought so much of your little sister, Sidka." I sarcastically reply, a hand over my heart before I look at Ivar. "Is that another story Arne Stronghold and Daan Reinorson tell about me? That after I, so cowardly, fled that I even went as far as changing my name to completely help myself forget where I came from because I was so ashamed?"

"You are overreacting." He states simply, dragging himself to his chariot that awaits beside my, Delilah's, Hvitserk's and Ubbe's horses.

"Says the one who killed his brother because he was spreading lies about him. Two men are spreading lies about me and yet you tell me I am overreacting when I get angry over it?"

He stops in his tracks at the mention of Sigurd, and grabs my ankle, forcing me beneath him when I fall.

I expect Sidka to take a step forward or drag Ivar off of me, if this were four years ago he would have. Instead Delilah makes a deliberate step towards me, causing Hvitserk to hold his arm out to stop her.

"You do not question what I do, Iskra." Ivar threatens me lowly, the blade of one of his throwing knives grazing my cheek. "If I tell you to stop doing something, you obey and when I tell you to let something go, you drop it. I don't want to hear anything else regarding what people say about you. The only thing that matters is what I and the Gods think of you. No one else. Understood?" It's as if the few people around us are least of my worries at the moment, my full attention of Ivar.

"Yes." I say quietly and he moves away from me, letting himself leave.

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I pour Sidka some more water as he continues to tell Delilah and I of his raiding with Hvitserk, Floki, Bjorn, Rollo, King Harald Finehair, Halfdan the Black and many others in land that surrounded the Mediterranean.

He spoke of the rich markets that carried everything from precious jewels to fresh produce and fine meats. He tells us of how Floki defended the people their when they invaded a temple used to worship their God, Allah, and how beautiful the women were - each of them wrapped in beaded silks of all different colors. He doesn't go in to detail, but from the way he and Hvitserk are grinning at each other, they obviously sampled some of these women.

"Is that the God you worshipped growing up?" Hvitserk asks Delilah when they're on the topic of
the religion practiced there. "Allah?"

"I always believed there was no such thing as a God." She tells them. "Not Allah, nor Jesus, nor Odin. I believed that until I came to England."

"Ah." Sidka nods, quietly picking off pieces of bread from the loaf he and Hvitserk were sharing.

"What land did you explore?" Delilah asks him with a curious tone in her voice. I know she didn't care for them killing innocents and obtaining fine treasures, but she enjoyed hearing of explorations.

"They called it Algeciras, Spain." He says to her and her tan skin pales ghostly.

Her homeland.

"How bad was the slaughter?" She asks next, causing Ivar to cut his eyes at her.

He's been quietly listening to their stories as well, nursing a horn of mead as he picks meat off of a rib.

Sidka looks at Hvitserk, trying to agree on an estimate to give her an idea of how many were killed.

"More dead than not." He finally states and her brows arch. "Why?"

She swallows thickly, standing from where she's seated on the ground, careful not to wake Kezikai.

"What is wrong?" Hvitserk asks her, reaching up from where he's seated and grabbing her wrist when she tries to step past him.

"I feel ill." She tells him lowly, obviously holding back tears.

"We have a healer--"

"I just need some time to myself." She interrupts him and he frowns slightly, releasing her.

When she's out of earshot, Ivar looks at his confused brother and chuckles.

Hvitserk only sighs heavily and glares at his younger brother before he stands and leaves to go after her.

I decide not to follow him, knowing the two of them probably wanted privacy for their inevitable argument.

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Later in the night, I finished serving the now mostly sleeping men and women laying down wherever they can rest their heads, and make my way to the church to bid my brother, Ivar, Hvitserk, Ubbe and Delilah goodnight.

When I arrive, I raise my brow at the sight of Freydis perched on Ivar's lap, hand feeding him ripe berries.

I'm tempted to throw up the bread and few bites of meat I had earlier.

The two of them stop when they see me, a smile still splayed on the slave's lips, but Ivar looks at me with distaste.
Ubbe, Hvitserk and my brother are nowhere to be seen, but Delilah is asleep on the ground next to a pillar with Kezikai tucked under her arm, resting on the fur Hvitserk usually keeps on him when it's really cold out.

"Yes, slave?" Ivar's name for me has me snapping out of my thoughts and I furrow my brows a little.

"What?" I ask without thinking.

Surely...surely, he wasn't speaking to me like that.

I might not have the courage to fight him, but I sure as hell would have no problem strangling the girl in his lap with her own long, blonde hair, until her face turned blue and her heart stopped.

"Why have you disturbed me?" He asks next in a harsher tone.

"I was going to bid you goodnight." I explain. "But seeing as you're occupied--"

"You may go now," He tells Freydis, and she gives a tiny pout. "I will have plenty for you to do tomorrow and you need your rest so that you are able to keep up." His hand slips up her thigh in an extravagant show, rubbing it in my face that he's not interested in what I have to offer any longer, and I try to hold back the biting anger within me.

She smiles at the provocative undertones his words promise, before she nods.

"Yes, my prince." She says quietly, sweetly, and I have to force myself not to throw my shoe at her.

She slides off of his lap, making sure to put emphasized movement over his groin as she goes and I swallow the chuckle that dares to leave me. She's wasting her time trying to get a reaction out of his cock, that's all I'm going to say.

She gives me a smug, yet innocent look that screams "game on" and I watch after her as she leaves, not turning to face Ivar until she's shut the door.

Little does she know I am the queen of playing dirty to get what I want.

I already have one advantage: I know what makes Ivar tick. And pleasures of the flesh only interest him at certain times. She can't expect to flip her skirt up at him at any time and get ravaged.

I always think of it similar to witching hour being at 3 in the morning because that's when the veil from this world and the spiritual world is at its weakest.

With Ivar, there is a certain time where he is more susceptible to seduction, as this world is more susceptible to wandering spirits and easier communication between worlds at 3 in the morning.

Ivar's "witching hour", I've learned, is typically when he's happy or in a decent mood. Trying to distract him when he's stressed or angry only causes him to lash out more and from experience, it comes with an onslaught of abuse.

So, Freydis should appreciate being able to crawl in to his lap like a little dog, because once the high from conquering York is blown, and he's back to stressing over keeping enemies away, she'll get herself a brutal beating when she tries to distract him from the tasks that will be at his hands. And something tells me she won't take such punishment as well as I was able to...partly because I liked when he was angry. A fucked up part of me found such rage and threat to be desirable. He scared me, but I had nearly been addicted to the euphoric release when he would angrily cut in to my skin with a knife, or pin me to the bed and drive his fingers in to me at a pace that would leave bruising in
me so badly, he'd have to wait two weeks in order to toy with me again without me crying in pain.

I remember one time in particular, I had tried to cheer him up after he had gotten in a mood thinking about his father's absence. He acted like he was repulsed that I would dare "offer my body to him like a desperate whore" and "act like the mediocrity I had to offer would take his mind off of his father". The word "mediocrity" is what set me off. That was the first and last time I fought back just as aggressively as him. I had kept my mouth closed, gathering a good amount of saliva as he continued his fit, and when he finally was almost done, I spit in his face.

I had yelped like a dog having her foot stepped on when the back of his hand contacted my jaw. The impact left a bruise that I had to blame on our family's goat kicking me when trying to milk her. No. I don't think sweet Freydis is prepared for the kind of monster he's capable of being when the mood strikes him.

He says something to me, and I don't comprehend he's speaking until he's finished, waiting for me to answer.

"I'm sorry, what?" I ask, pulling myself from my thoughts.

"I said, 'have you done what I asked of you tonight?'" He repeats lowly, staring at me from where he's seated on a wood chair, making it seem as if he were on a throne.

"I served the warriors and shield-maidens throughout the night. The only time I stopped was to check on Delilah and the short period I spent with Sidka." I answer him truthfully.

"Mmm." He hums with a single nod. "How are your wounds?" He asks next and I look at him pointedly.

"Why don't you ask Freydis? She's been tracking their progress." It wasn't a lie, regardless of how I feel about her, she did make sure Delilah and I were healing properly.

"Are you jealous of my actions taken with her?"

"I am not jealous." I cut my eyes at him, despising the smug expression on his face. "My prince." I mimic Freydis' sickeningly sweet voice and he lets out a bark of laughter.

"You and I were once together, so that means I cannot appreciate other women?" He asks with faux confusion.

"I don't see you appreciating her unless you know I am bound to show up at some point."

"You think way too highly of yourself if you think I plan my time with her around whether you will see us together or not." He sneers out and I ball my fists up before breathing out.

"Fine." I agree to disagree, turning on my heel.

"Did I dismiss you?" He stops me in a harsh tone and I stop in my tracks and look at her from over my shoulder.

"Excuse me, my prince, I'm going to see if Ubbe wants to be appreciated."

It was a low blow. One that ruined his decent mood quickly and had dark shadows clouding in his blue eyes.

"That's not amusing, Iskra." He growls out and I cross my arms.
"Doesn't sit well with you, does it? Picturing me fucking someone else?"

Delilah would have a fit if she heard me cursing in church, but she's asleep.

"What she and I would do is nothing compared to what you would do with Ubbe." He says dangerously.

"And why's that?" I ask, though I know damn well why, but he needs humbling the way he thought I needed it when he ordered for my whipping and enslaving.

His fists just clench around the armrests of the chair and I raise a brow.

"Goodnight, Boneless." I bow my head, leaving, and immediately regretting the newfound courage that had pushed from me.

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In the many days to follow, Ivar and I avoided each other. Simply because I had retreated back in to my shell of utter fear of him and he didn't want to acknowledge my existence because I belittled him.

It wasn't until I had no choice to speak to him that I actually did, and it didn't go as civil as I assumed it would.

"Issy," My brother nudges me with his boot. "Wake up." He urges and I wave him off, groaning in displeasure. "Iskra." He repeats, this time less patient.

He huffs out a breath, and I hear him walking away. Perhaps he'll leave me alone.

I damn that thought to hell at the feeling of ice water stabbing in to my skin like sharp blades.

"Sidka!" I scream, my body now drenched in water he just threw on me. "What the bloody hell is wrong with you?!"

"I told you to get up. This is not time for defiance, Issy. There are Saxon forces on their way here. Me and a few others are about to go do some hunting before they arrive and I need you to find Ubbe, Hvitserk and Ivar and warn them about the Saxons, in case they have not heard yet."

"Why don't you go tell them?"

"Because I don't know where they are and I asked you to. I stopped drinking for you, you spoiled brat, the least you could do is what I ask of you." He points out.

"Fine." I roll my eyes, getting up and shivering from the watery fabric of my dress sticking to me. Sidka laughs at this and I give him a death glare. "I hate you."

"I'm aware. Stay out of trouble while I'm gone." He gently pats my cheek and takes his leave with the hunting party.

I curse under my breath and set out to find the three Ragnarssons.

I find Ubbe and Hvitserk by water troughs, splashing their faces to help themselves wake up.

"Where is Delilah?" I ask Hvitserk and he sighs.

"I saw her earlier with the bloody baby she's carrying around." He gives a shrug, wiping water off his face with the back of his hand and I raise a brow.
"Mmmhmm." I hum, secretly accusing him of caring more about her than what he's let on and he narrows his eyes at me daringly. "My brother wants me to inform you two that a Saxon army, I assume is being lead by King Aethelwulf, is on it's way here.

Ubbe looks at me with furrowed brows.

"Does Ivar know this?" He asks me and I blink at him.

"Go ask him." I give him a look and he glances at Hvitserk and then back at me.

"What happened between you two, Issy, that's gotten you two so damned repulsed by each other all the sudden?"

"Are we going to pretend the past four years where I was practically dead to all of you didn't happen because I would say he's still pissed about that." I point out and they don't say a word.

"Very well," Ubbe finally says under his breath, sighing. "Let us go warn him."

I reluctantly follow them, keeping an eye out for Delilah on the way to the church. I find her with Kezikai in one arm, and a hen in the other. Kezi was occupied with poking the feathered animal, giggling.

"Lilah," I catch her attention and she looks at the three of us.

She goes to put the chicken down, but the young boy in her arms puts up a whiny fight.

"We will come back and see her." She assures him soothingly, standing from her crouch and walking to us. Ubbe and Hvitserk are several paces in front of us, and she looks at me worriedly.

"What is wrong?" She asks, feeling the uneasy vibe in the air.

"Saxons are coming."

"What?" She furrows her brows. "King Aethelwulf and his soldiers?"

"I assume so."

"Heahmund is among them, Issy."

"I know."

"They will recognize us."

"I know."

"Are you not going to try to escape like you normally would do?" She asks with all jokes aside. The thought of fleeing again has crossed my mind since Sidka told me we would be attacked and I lick my lips. "Are you going to fight alongside your people?" she adds.

"Are you?" I flip the question on her and she opens and closes her mouth.

"Do you not want the Northmen to know of your training?" She ignores me and I shrug.

"I just don't want to fight if it's not needed."

"And if it is? If someone's to attack you--"
"I didn't make it this far in life just to have a Saxon whelp end me. If I can survive heathens, Englishmen shouldn't be near as bad."

We see Ivar and when we try to get to him, we're stopped by a group of men that tower over Delilah and I. They hold shields and weapons as if acting as body guards for Ivar.

Ubbe and his brother look confused for a moment.

"Let us through." Ubbe orders them. They don't make a motion to do as they're told. "Do you know who we are?" He asks them.

A tall, grey haired man approaches from the group and looks down at all of us.

"We know who you are. What do you want?" He asks.

"I want to speak to my brother Ivar now get out of my way." Ubbe replies, the tone of impatience rising in his voice.

"I'll ask him to see if it's alright." The man responds and Delilah and I glance at each other.

What the hell was this man's deal?

"No, you won't." Ubbe states. "Because you won't have a tongue to ask him with. And I will nail you to that post just over there." He promises darkly. "Do you understand?"

The man looks at us, then at Ubbe, then at his men, calling them off with a nod of his head. We push past them, Hvitserk shoving at one of them before following his older brother.

"Ubbe, Hvitserk!" Ivar calls out and we look ahead to see Ivar gripping the edges of a table, shirtless, getting a tattoo tapped in to his back.

"I see the appeal now." Delilah whispers to me, not able to stop herself from admiring Ivar's muscles that ripple with each twitch of discomfort he gives as the needle works ink in to his back.

"Forgive me father for I have sinned." I mumble, lustful thoughts seeping in to my mind. He definitely is no longer the boy I once knew.

"Did you take a look around? The work on strengthening our defenses is going well." Ivar says to his brothers.

"Why do you need a personal body guard, Ivar? Hmm?" Ubbe asks, rubbing his face with one hand.

"What?" Ivar asks, looking at his other brother.

"We were just stopped by your bodyguards. Why do you need them?" Ubbe repeats. "Do you need protection against us, against your brothers?"

"Of course not."

"Then why do you have them?" Hvitserk asks.

"I am a cripple. I need a bodyguard." Ivar argues as if it's obvious and Delilah lets out a single scoff that catches the three men's attention.

I don't blame her. The idea that Ivar the Boneless would ever need anyone to protect him, was bullshit. Even he knew it.
"It's not just the bodyguard, Ivar." Ubbe states as he steps forward. "The fact is, you never seem to consult us about anything. As if you are now the leader of our great army." Ubbe explains.

Ivar puts a hand up, motioning for the tattoo artist to stop what he's doing. He walks away, and Ivar sits up and brushes his hands together.

"Do you think you are the leader?" Ubbe asks him.

Yes.

"No, I don't. Why would I think such a thing?"

Liar.

"Glad to hear you say that. Because you are not the leader. Us three brothers together, are the leaders." Ubbe makes it clear.

"Hmm." Ivar hums sarcastically.

"As our father would've wished." Ubbe continues.

"We are older than you, Ivar. You can't push us aside. It's unacceptable." Hvitserk adds.

"No, you're right, Hvitserk." Ivar agrees, motioning to his brother. "But you two have to understand it is harder for me to share, and harder for me to stake my claim." His eyes fall on me when he says this, his intent to make me squirm under his heated gaze and I have to dig my nails in to my palms to keep my knees from weakening. He looks to his brothers again and raises his brows. "I truly want to be your equal but in order for me to do so, I have to do better than you." He points to himself. "I have to make you forget, that I am a cripple."

Oh, bullshit.

"Listen, Ivar, we know what you are. And we accept what you are." Ubbe offers gently.

Ivar rolls his eyes and picks up his cup to drink.

"It makes no difference to us, you're just our brother." He continues.

"Don't make us try to feel sorry for you. Because, my brother, we never will." Hvitserk says next.

Ivar just gives him a sly smirk and raises his glass to him slightly.

"There's a large Saxon force on its way here." Ubbe informs Ivar and his baby brother glares up at him from where he's seated with an annoyed look on his face. "But I thought you would already know that." He finishes and he and Hvitserk walk away.

The look on Ivar's face says that he didn't and he takes another swallow of his drink and motions the tattoo artist back to him.

He knew the Saxons would come, he just didn't expect so soon.

Me and Delilah share the same expression at the mention of the Saxons and she takes a ragged breath before going to leave as well. At least we were until Ivar grabs my wrist in a vice grip.

"Tell Freydis needs to be waiting for me in the church for when I am finished here."
"Are you serious?" Delilah speaks before I can and his eyes flicker to her. "There's an army of pissed off soldiers coming with the intent to slaughter us and instead of preparing your own forces and making sure everything is together as it should be, you're going to screw a concubine?"

She basically asks what I am thinking, but I still gently grasp as her wrist to calm her down. I knew she'd toss me the baby in a heartbeat and lunge over the table to claw Ivar's eyes out if she needed to...she'd try at least.

Blue eyes roll off of her and back onto me, not even giving her accusation the time of day.

"Do what I asked you to do. You know I don't like repeating myself." Ivar tells me lowly, not releasing my wrist until I'm sure the dark bruising of his fingers are embedded in to my flesh.

When I'm free, I have to pull Delilah away, feeling her shaking from how angry she is.

"Heathens." She grumbles to me as we search for Freydis. "They're despicable. Who the hell does that? You've just been told a swarm of fighters are coming after you to reclaim their city and what do you do? Have sex with an easy harlot in a church." She rants. "A church, Issy! The house of God! He is doing disgusting things to a disgusting woman in God's house!"

"Delilah," I hold back my smile, raising my brows. "Love and compassion and understanding, remember?" I remind her of her life's mission and she sighs, looking guilty.

"I'm sorry. Lord, forgive me but Iskra that just boils my blood.

"I know, but it is what is. Ubbe and Hvitserk will make sure everything is ready for when they attack. Do not worry."

"I'm not worried, I know where I'm going if I die. I just don't want to face other Christians." She admits and I look at her.

"You don't have to fight if you don't want to, Delilah." I assure her and she shakes her head.

"These people mean a lot to you." She sighs out. "I see the way you look at some of them that you've known your whole life...you grew up around many of them and even though they aren't happy with you right now and you're not happy with them, I know you care about them."

"Delilah, they embody everything you are against." I argue, flattered she would fight for the Northmen, but confused still.

"Yeah, but you don't." She replies with furrowed brows. "I am not fighting for them. I'm fighting for you. The way you would've done for me if you were aware of your people's claim on my homeland."

If I weren't afraid to die, I would've done my best to have defended her people if I were there when they were attacked.

"I also just really need to get all of this pent up anger inside of me out and killing people in the name of self-defense, to avoid guilt, seems like a better option than attempting to kill the evil crippled bastard that plans on destroying everything sacred about that church by committing every sin known to man in it."

"At this point, I would assist you on that attempt." I grin, chuckling a little.

I see Freydis feeding some of the livestock from over Delilah's shoulder and my face falls.
“There's the little enabler.” I grumble and Delilah mocks what I said earlier.

"Don't forget, compassion and love and understanding.” She teases as we approach the slave.

"Quiet mother Mary, those are your promises, not mine." I reply under my breath and she laughs.

Freydis looks at us when we get to her, an odd look on her face.

"Ivar has requested your presence later on in the church." I tell her and she looks between Delilah and I.

"Of course." She smiles at us innocently and I narrow my eyes at her.

"Don't look so smug." Delilah cuts through her good mood and Freydis drops the act and exhales.

"I am just pleased that between the three of us, Prince Ivar has chosen my company to keep him over either of yours."

"The reason he requests your company over ours is because I am one fast away from being a nun and even touching me would cause him to burst in to flames because he is Satan in spoiled, unstable, brat form and Iskra won't let him have his way with her either and he knows both of these things so he hasn't bothered to ask for our company. But if you want to be proud of being the least moral out of the three of us and happily oblige to being degraded and defiled in a holy place of worship by Satan in spoiled, unstable, brat form then by all means, as you Northerner's say, skol.” Delilah gives the blonde an earful and I am at a loss for words.

Ubbe and Hvitserk aren't far from us, seeing the exchange while they're sharpening their weapons under a blacksmith's shed.

Ubbe steps to us, making sure to keep whatever heated discussion we're having under control. He knows we'd be punished if something were to get back to Ivar about this.

Freydis doesn't even flinch, smiling once more as if we just complimented her.

"Skol.” She whispers to me, pushing past me harshly with her shoulder hitting mine.

My patience and resolve withers and my I finally do the one thing everyone in Kattegat had been waiting for me to do at least once in my life.

I snatch Ubbe's sharp axe from his hand before he knows what's happening, and I throw it towards my target.

Chapter End Notes

Just letting you guys know this story is also on fanfiction.net and wattpad.com under the same username as on here. Thank you to the guests who have already left Kudos, it's appreciated. Also, I have a tumblr where I also post my writing and sneak peaks of chapters at siliwanoel.tumblr.com. Again, thank you.
I watch with sheer resentment in my eyes as Freydis is rushed to by a few people around us. I just nicked her arm with the blade of the axe. I would've done more damage but she moved her just in time and now only bares a nasty gash.

"What the hell has gotten in to you, Iskra?!" Ubbe raises his voice.

I don't acknowledge him, seeing the slave is now crying, weeping and putting on a good show. It doesn't take long for Ivar to come see what all the ruckus is about. And when he drags himself close enough to see Freydis sobbing, he immediately looks at me with a sharp scowl.

"What happened?" He asks Freydis and she glares at me.

"She was attacked." One of the men watching us speaks up and I clench my jaw tightly.

Again, Ivar looks at me with the whimpering Freydis beside him, grasping her arm tightly.

"Take her to the healer." He orders one of the shield maidens. She listens, helping Freydis up and Ivar grinds his teeth together.

I don't say a word to him, my eyes never leaving his and I can't help the little smirk on my face at the thought of hurting her.

Oh, yes. I can plan dirty.

Ivar's terrifying eyes nearly kill the high I'm on, promising to break the defiance out of me. I feel the smug expression on my face fall at the sight of him looking so angry.
He motions for one of the men he assigned as a body guard, and when the man steps to him, Ivar mumbles something in his ear.

I can tell by the look on the man's face, it's something he doesn't necessarily want to do and I ball my fists up at my sides when the man starts towards me.

I know why he doesn't want to try to drag me to wherever Ivar ordered for me to be locked up.

The very reason he fears coming closer, is standing right beside me in the form of an aggressive Spaniard.

I glance at Hvitserk, seeing him stand behind Delilah, grasping her wrist in his hand to keep her from stepping any closer to the man when he harshly grabs me and tugs me along with him.

That doesn't stop her from cursing at him in a venomous tone, causing Kezikai to cry out from her distress, and Hvitserk to try to pull her away.

—

Saxon forces were just outside of this town now. It's been days since my altercation with Freydis. It's safe to say she no longer sanitizes my wounds. She refused to and if she didn't then Ivar wouldn't let her anyway.

I had been shackled to a wood post in town, denied food and given little water. Which is fine to me, I wouldn't take anything from any of these guards at the moment.

A part of me wonders if this is how Delilah feels when she gets herself in to trouble due to her defiance.

The clanging of metal against metal sounds out several feet away from underneath the blacksmith shed and my eyes catch on Ivar who's sharpening his knives and pick.
He avoids me, pretending I'm not starving and thirsting. Pretending I haven't grown weak over the last week. I don't even want to mention my repulsive smell due to lack of bathing. I've been refused that, too. Delilah's tried to help me take care of myself secretly, but Ivar's gotten guards watching the both of us like hawks, so I told her not to worry about it anymore because I didn't want her in trouble for helping me.

I sit on the cold, muddied ground, looking at the overcast sky. Dark clouds rolling in. Saxons were suspected to attack tomorrow so tonight we are to offer the Gods a sacrifice.

My luck, it'll probably be my blood being spilt in the name of Odin and victory.

My nerves twitch at the thought. I'll kill myself before anyone else has the chance. The guard that's been assigned to me approaches me and I glare up at him.

"Prince Ivar wishes to speak to you." He informs me. "Come." He motions for me to stand and I stay seated, my arms around my knees that are pulled to my chest. "I said--"

"I heard you." I cut him short. "You tell Prince Ivar that if he wishes to speak to me, he can come tell me so himself."

The man gives me a reluctant look before he sighs out heavy, and walks to Ivar.

Dangerous eyes as vast and blue as the ocean size me up, like a serpent about to strike. I breathe out, tired eyes of my own looking at him directly.

He pulls himself off the stool he's perched on, and drags himself to me, sitting in front of me with proud eyes.

"Your mouth is going to get you in to even more trouble. Have you not learned your lesson yet?"

"Are you punishing me for hurting your precious slave or for fucking your brother?" I get to the point, my words sharp and full of resent.

He seems pleased by my outburst and licks his teeth.
"I was actually thinking of ending your time out here." He motions to me chained to the post. "But since you have yet to show any respect--"

"Freydis is the one you should be speaking to about respect. I know you see the way she looks at me, the way she speaks to me when you're not paying attention. She thinks we're playing some twisted game and you're the prize." I scoff, shaking my head. "I will be damned to Hel before she or any other woman believes they can, so easily, stake their claim on you. I will not be competing for something that is already mine."

He licks at his lips, a tight, unwavering smirk pulling at the corners of his mouth.

His hand slips in to his pocket and he pulls out a key, pulling himself closer to me. He grasps the metal cuff around my wrist and unlocks it.

"Go." He orders, dismissing me with a wave of his hand. "Eat, drink, be ready in time for the sacrifice tonight."

"Am I the one being sacrificed?" I ask him blatantly and his brows arch.

"I will discuss your role in all of this tonight. Now go, before I change my mind."

I wonder why he's in a decent mood, I saw Freydis going to the church this morning, so I assume she did something to make him happy. My eyes roll at the thought and I hold back the urge to vomit.

_____ 

A hot bath is beyond appreciated at this moment. Delilah pours the last bucket of water in to the tub and wipes the steam from her face.

"Do you need anything else to eat or drink?" She asks me softly, relief on her features that I'm finally let go.
"No, thank you." I reply in the same tone, aching to get clean. She just gives me a nod and leaves the abandoned house, leaving me to myself. I let the muddy, disgusting smelling dress fall off my body, and step in to the hot, clean water in the tub. It brings a relieving warmth, allowing my bones to not be so chilled. I dunk my head under water, wetting my hair, and scrub at my scalp, relishing in the feeling of getting rid of the dirt in it. When I'm sure all the grime is out, I rinse my hair once more and reach for the tiny container of oil that helps get the matts out of it.

The soothing fragrance of the oil mixed with the smell of healing herbs Delilah got from the healer to help with any aches or pains, is evident in the steam coming off the water and I lean my head back and close my eyes.

I block out the outside noise of people bustling and shouting every now and then, focusing on the quietness of my mind.

I exhale, letting myself relax deeper. Sleep is sneaking up on me, I can feel it, and I part my lips to let out another heavy breath.

A cold, sharp prick, at the side of my throat has my eyes flying open. Before I can muster up a scream or fight back, hand clasps over my mouth and pulls my head to angle it towards the right. I realize it's Ivar, calming down a little, only to tense up again when his knife penetrates deeper in to my skin, enough to cause a droplet of blood to run down my skin. I'm about to question him, but it's useless when I feel his warm tongue at the base of my throat, licking up my skin to taste the blood he drew.

Everything in me is screaming to get away from him, but I can't pull myself away.

"Ivar," I breathe out, trying to keep my composure and he hums gently. "What are you doing?"

"I cannot come see you?" He asks lowly, his lips brushing against the shell of my ear.

"You never do so, which is why I am weary." I reply honestly and he lets out a breathy laugh.

"I told you I would come discuss the sacrifice with you, did I not?"
This is when I manage to worm away from him, sitting up and turning to face him, my arms resting on the back of the tub, my face inches from his.

"Let's discuss it, then." I suggest, struggling to talk through the haze that's casted over my mind by lust.

A genuine smile pulls at his lips, something I haven't seen from him in a long time.

"You will be performing the sacrifice." He tells me and I feel my heart start to speed up.

"Why's that?"

He opens his mouth to speak, but quickly shuts it, his brows arching slightly while his tongue smooths over the inside of his lips.

"You once promised me," He points a finger at me, pulling the stool beside the tub to him and hoisting himself up to be level with me. "That you would follow me anywhere and trust me always." He reminds me, settling on the stool.

"Yes, I remember, Ivar." I agree, nodding my head.

"Though circumstances we are under now are complicated and misconstrued...I would like to think you still believe that you would be willing to trust me enough to still do just as you promised."

I nod a little, lost in his words, and he narrows his eyes at me.

"I will eventually become the leader of this great army, Issy, and that will surely lead to my own kingdom one day. Perhaps even ruler of Kattegat once Lagertha is dead. I think it will be an easier transition if our people see that you and I are unified as leaders."

His words are harder for me to comprehend than they should be and I furrow my brows.

"Unified as leaders? Ivar, I lead an army--"
"You won't necessarily be leading, Iskra. I will be leading and you will be my right hand."

"I understand that, Ivar, but still I can't..." I trail off, wondering how he went from hating me, to wanting me to lead an army with him. "I have no business leading an army when I myself cannot fight. I am no shield maiden, Ivar."

"An amateur cannot throw an axe that accurately, Issy." He states knowingly and I blink slowly, trying to come up with an explanation, but failing to. "You may be the daughter of a great warrior and shield maiden but aim like that requires skill and much practice. It is not something that occurs naturally and do not tell me it is." He argues.

"Delilah is a much greater fighter than me. If any woman should lead the army alongside you, it is her." I inform him and he laughs loudly.

"The Christian? Do you think the Gods would ever serve in our favor with a Christian leading at my side?" He scoffs out and I bite my lips.

"It should not matter whether she is Christian or not. If they truly favor you, whoever is by your side should not affect their decision to help you."

My words cause him to look at me blankly before he finally licks his lips and exhales.

"And what about when I become king?" He speaks in a more quiet tone, his eyes burning into mine. "Will you expect her to continue her leadership alongside me as my queen?"

I ignore the thought of anyone ruling beside him other than myself, but I know he'd never truly trust me as a queen being I don't stick around when things start getting ugly. I'd abandon my kingdom if it came down to it, regardless of how cowardly that makes me, at least I'm admitting the truth.

"I will not fight for you, Ivar. I refuse to do so."

He seems intrigued with my refusal, his broad form leaning closer over the tub, his calloused hand
reaching out to touch the skin at the base of my neck.

"Maybe I don't necessarily want you fighting for me." He whispers, his thumb rubbing circles on the skin of my neck. "Perhaps I have plans for you to fight beside me as my..." He looks as if he's searching for the word to use. "ahh...Queen." He suggests and I study those blue eyes, wondering if he's truly gone mad now.

"You trust me enough to rule alongside you as your equal?" I raise a brow and he pulls his hand away from me.

"Should I not trust you, Iskra?" He asks me, knowing his own answer is an obvious "NO" screaming at him in his mind.

"I wouldn't." I whisper, the warmth I felt earlier in my body from speaking to him quickly turns to an uncomfortable ice.

"Ah, and I believe you should not trust me...and you have yet to run when you've been given plenty of opportunities to do so. So, why is it you stay?"

"I might be curious enough to stick around and see what it is exactly the Gods have in store for you, Ivar the Boneless."

"Or you are afraid the slave girl will take your place." He suggests and I rub my lips together.

"As I said," I lean in to him, on my knees in the tub, my naked body dripping the hot water on to his clothing but he doesn't seem to care. "I am curious to see if you actually pull off any of the things you would ramble on about doing when we were younger."

"Hmm," He hums softly, a smug grin as his face before his lips meet mine. "I assure you, I will." He promises me darkly when I pull away to gasp for breath.

_____

I get to the middle of the town, after finishing my bath and dressing, searching for Delilah. I see her
talking to Hvitserk and Ubbe, Ubbe holding multiple dead animals. They must've been hunting.

"What did Ivar say to you?" Delilah asks me when I get to her.

I think about Ivar telling me his plan, take the army from his brothers and invade Kattegat to kill Lagertha and become king.

Ubbe And Hvitserk look at me, awaiting my answer as well, and I look at them.

"Just a lot of yelling." I lie, shrugging and they scoff.

"Sounds about right." Hvitserk mumbles.

We're stepping past the workshop shed, when we hear Ivar groan out.

Ubbe's attention is caught by Ivar on the wood floor of the shed, and he goes to rest on a wooden pole under the roof.

"Ivar," Ubbe starts, Hvitserk and Delilah coming to stand beside us.

"Ah, What are you doing?" Hvitserk asks his little brother.

"Wait," Ivar tells us. "And I'll show you."

A few more clings of a hammer on nails and a couple strains from Ivar and a man stands up at his feet and says "ready". Ivar nods and is pulling himself to sit up, turning to put his legs in front of him.

We notice he's gotten stronger braces on his legs, and he exhales before grabbing a metal crutch.

I furrow my brows, realizing what he's about to do.
With a grunt, he's grabbing on to the crutch and pulling himself up to stand. He pauses halfway, his legs straight, his body only a foot off the ground before he gathers more strength and balance and brings himself to stand.

He stumbles a little, having to steady himself using one of the wood poles from the shed.

Delilah takes in a sharp breath, seeing Ivar let go of the pole and start walking to us, slowly but surely, his feet dragging against the wooded floor.

Hvitserk's expression is excited and happy, while Ubbe looks worried and not as amused.

Ivar gets a foot within us, before he stops walking and stands straight, his shoulders back as confidence consumes him.

He looks like a king, ready to claim what's his.

Loud drums rattle the air, bright fire warms my skin as Ivar's lips ghost across my bare shoulder.

Streams of strong alcohol and euphoria enhancing plants run through my veins as I sway gently, Ivar's hand gripping the side of my neck as his tongue licks up the other side. My eyes lock with Delilah's, the fire glowing off of her tanned skin. She's nearly unaware of what's happening, the heavy effects of the fungi and whiskey in our body's hitting the both of us hard. Which is good because I wanted to be gone from my own mind when I did this, and I wanted her to be gone from her own mind so she wouldn't remember me doing it.

Ivar stops his demonstrations, pressing a single kiss to my cheek before he hands me a large shining knife.

I look up at him, too drunk to form words, and he smiles widely, chuckling before he kisses me on the lips, briefly.
"Make the Gods proud," He tells me lowly, his lips against the shell of my ear.

I blink slowly, stepping to the large fire, seeing the woman prepared to offer herself to the Gods.

The dress I'm wearing slides up my legs, exposing the tops of my thighs, when I lean down a little to grab her hand and pull her to stand.

The fabric is short, reaching the middle of my thighs, the nearly see-through cloth ghosting over me, the sleeves are thin straps, resting on my shoulders and the back is completely cut out, exposing my skin and the intricate lettering of the commandments written in Latin down my spine that has been singed permanently by the leather of a whip.

I see my reflection in this blind woman's eyes, the heavy liner I have on making my blue eyes appear to be the color of ice.

"Are you prepared to please and honor the Gods?" I ask the woman, Ingrid, and she breathes out.

"Yes." She's unafraid.

I envy her for it.

I can't pay attention to the people around us, my focus only able to capture on one thing at a time.

Sacred words are spoken to the Gods and repeated by the onlookers, I'm almost unable to say them, the slur thick in my speech.

I'm barely keeping myself up, but that doesn't stop me from holding the knife to her throat.

My eyes drift up to meet with Delilah's, and I see she's in the same state of mind I am. Her dark hair cascading down her shoulders, her brown eyes lost. Her features are soft, gentle and relaxed. Thick brows don't show a sign of worry, not even revealing a bit of expression as she stands between Hvitserk and Ubbe.
I help lower Ingrid to the ground, her warm blood gathering on my hands.

Without thought, I smear the blood down my face, not really knowing why, I figure it's what Ivar would be pleased with.

The feeling of a hand in my hair has me turning my head slowly.

Speak of the devil and he shall appear.

I stand, turning to Ivar and he grabs my wrist and stares me directly in the eyes before he presses his lips to the base of my palm, and gives one strong lick to my fingers, the blood coating his tongue. It's enough to nearly make my knees week, my thighs squeezing together.

His tongue rolls over his own lips, wiping away the messy blood. He grins crookedly, and takes advantage of my slightly opened mouth when I try to take a deep breath. His mouth molds to mine, teeth digging into my lip and I moan, my bloodied hand smearing the red liquid on to his cheek.

I taste the saltiness of Ingrid's blood on my tongue, mixed with the mead on Ivar's breath.

He grips his crutch with his left hand, while his right arm wraps around me, pulling me flush against him.

Ivar's staring down at me in adoration, like he's just seeing a glimpse of what's to come if he does take over Kattegat and place me at his side as Queen.

The thrumming of the drums fades to the background in my mind, my heavy eyes catching on the pretty blonde standing behind Ubbe, peering at me.

My mind wills my mouth to try to form coherent words, my tongue forcing itself to speak clearly to my lover.

"I want to kill her." I tell him thickly, blinking rapidly for a moment to be able to see him the way I need to.
He glares down at me, looking disappointed but doesn't deny my request. He instead says:

"You may do whatever you wish with her once you become Queen. She is valuable to us now, though."

I can't comprehend what he means but that word. Valuable.

I just close my eyes momentarily and open them once more when I feel cold hands grip at my arm.

Her dark, curly hair nearly covers her face, her wide smile is relaxed and she's at ease as Hvitserk helps her stay on her feet.

"Issy," Delilah giggles out lowly, pulling me to her. I lose my balance, colliding with her and the both of us crumple to the ground, too much in an altered state of mind to even feel the pain or bark out laughter like we would do if we were sober. Instead, shallow breaths take the place of our chuckles and our lips expose teeth in uncontainable smiles.

Ivar looks slightly irritated while Hvitserk seems to enjoy Delilah's looseness. He's probably thanking the Gods he found a way to get Lilah to not be so uptight and cutthroat.

Even in my altered state, I can see the way Hvitserk looks at Delilah. What was once a lustful gaze, is now a look of something that I can't quite put my finger on. I brush it aside and turn my focus on Ivar, his blue eyes holding a dark, sensual promise in them. I'm tempted to strip down naked and let him do what he pleases with me in front of everyone.

I'm still a child of God, regardless of what my heathen blood whispers for me to do

Chapter End Notes

So sorry it's taken so long to update! Thank you for the comments and kudos and I hope you enjoy this chapter:)
IX

Chapter Notes

I am back! I know I said I'd be back before New Years but I took a much needed (3 month long...?) break. But I am back and better than ever and I'm so excited for what's to come, especially after season 5B (which my thoughts on that are all over the place but once I gather them I'll gladly share what I thought of the season as a whole).

Just a warning, this chapter describes some violence pretty in detail so beware.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

You Should See Me in a Crown

Chapter Nine

"Issy," I'm shaken awake, my eyes meeting Ubbe's. "Come on, the Saxons will be here shortly."

I groan, not wanting to leave the warmth of the blankets I've been tucked in to - I assume by Ivar from last night. Instead of arguing, I nod. I'm about to pull the blankets back when I realize I am naked underneath, and my cheeks burn a little as my eyes meet Ubbe's.

It's as if he reads my mind, his hand extending to hand me my dress that I changed out of last night before the sacrifice. I take it, waiting patiently for him to turn around so I can change. He just looks at me with raised brows, and says:

"Issy, we don't have all day."

"I don't want you looking at me while I'm naked." I argue, my brows raised.

"I have seen you naked before, it does not matter at this point." His tone is bland, emerald eyes rolling in an exaggerated manner.

"If Ivar were to crawl in here and see you looking at me naked, it would matter, Ubbe." I state and he lets out a heavy breath, turning around so he won't see me while I pull my dress over my naked body. He turns back around to face me when I'm done, and I pull my hair back to braid it, reaching for a leather string to tie it off so it'll stay in.

Before I finish my hair, sickness hits me and I vomit over the side of my bed, the contents of my stomach hitting the floor. A whine leaves my throat, my entire demeanor changing as I start holding my splitting head and rise to my feet.

"Here." He hands me a steaming cup, and I smell the odd aroma of herbs. It's familiar, and I realize it's the "magical" cure for sickness after drinking too much alcohol. My mother used to prepare it for my father almost every morning after he became an alcoholic. The warm water soothes my dry throat while the earthy taste of the mixture gives a sense of clarity to my aching mind.

"I need to pray." I say to Ubbe when I'm finished drinking, and he opens his mouth to say something, but closes it quickly.

"Be quick. I will be waiting outside." He leaves, shutting the door behind him and I exhale. I don't
"You are angry with me." I say lowly to the one I choose to worship. "Forgive me, Lord, for I have betrayed your law. Protect me and Delilah...Ubbe, Hvitserk and Ivar. Whether we conquer or fall in defeat, let your will be done today." I wipe the tear from my face and push my shoulders back before I head to the door. I open it and nod to Ubbe a little before he shuts the door and leads me to the bell tower where Hvitserk, Delilah, and Ivar are waiting.

"Glad to see you sober." Hvisterk teases me.

"I'm never drinking again." I promise myself aloud and Delilah let's out a light chuckle. She looks good, probably already been given the warm drink.

I look at Ivar to see he's staring at me, a soft, yet serious, look on his face as I walk to him and sit beside him. His hand reaches out from underneath his black cloak and his fingers pull my face closer to his and with a light kiss on my cheek, he moves his lips to my ear.

"I am proud of you for last night." He whispers to me lowly.

"You are?" I ask him softly, pulling away to look at his face and he nods, his smile still pulling at his lips.

"Very proud." He mouths and I kiss his cheek.

"Ugh." I hear Sidka say suddenly and I turn to see him at the doorway of the room. "I didn't come back to see you two fawning over each other again." He aggravates us and I let out a chuckle while Ivar rolls his eyes, not amused.

We wait for what feelings like hours in the complete silence of the early morning.

"Brother," Hvitserk, gets Ivar's attention and we look out the window and see the Saxons climbing through a weakened wall of brick.

Ivar scoffs a little and I give a nervous glance at Hvitserk.

"That's him." Ivar tells us, seeing a man standing on the wall.

"Who?" Hvitserk asks.

"King Ecbert's son. Aethelwulf." Ivar explains. "Oh, and he brought his own sons!" Ivar exclaims, seeing two young men standing beside Aethelwulf. "Like lambs to the slaughter."

"Foolish." Sidka huffs out under his breath.

"Issy," Ivar starts and I look to him, furrowing my brows slightly at his serious expression. "You and Delilah will be fighting alongside my brothers."

"What?" I give him my full attention, the room falls in a heavy silence as Delilah looks up to stare at Ivar with a lack of expression.

"They are not fit to be-" Hvitserk starts, standing to show his protest.

"Hush, Hvitserk." Ivar interrupts his brother, looking between me and Delilah. "They are fit for it. Are you not?" He looks to us as he asks and Delilah reads my expression, and I read hers. I know she'll fight alongside my people if she has to, but neither of us are particularly happy to do so. If Heahmund is among them still, there's no telling what will happen.
"Yes." Delilah agrees with Ivar. "However, Issy is not equipped with proper training, as Hvitserk was about to point out." She lies for me, though Ivar has already told me he knows I've picked up some sort of skill over the years, he just doesn't know the extent of it. "So, I will fight. Iskra will stay here with you." She states as if there is no argument.

Ivar gives out a hum, a slick grin on his face as he probably thinks of her being killed in the battle that's to come.

"Christian-" Hvitserk starts under his breath to her and she looks at him with dark brown eyes that swirl with stubbornness.

"I am fighting, Northman." She leaves no room for discussion. With those four, simple words, it's as if he's a bull that's been castrated. He calms, realizing her faith in her God is stronger than his doubt of her being able to look at the blade of an enemy and laugh. This shred of reassurance is all it takes for him to give just a hint of a grin at her, a single nod thrown her way as if to say, "I know you won't be harmed, christian".

I feel like an intruder, being that I'm the only one that paid attention to their exchange that has some questionable undertones. I've noticed their attitudes towards each other have shifted since their first meeting. She still calls him "Northman" most of the time, while he refers to her as "christian" or "saint". But there's moments where one of them slips up and dares to use the names given to them at birth. And in those moments, the one's name rolls off the tongue of the other like wine made of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of The Knowledge of Good and Evil . . . and they can't have on another.

"Let's go, Hvitserk." Ubbe orders as the streets continue to fill with Saxon forces.

Sidka follows Ubbe as Hvitserk plucks an ax from his belt and hands it to Delilah after she kisses my cheek in a goodbye. I settle next to Ivar, praying silently in my head for God to spare the four of them.

The streets below are silent, the only noise is that of soldier's feet hitting the mud as they move in to position.

It only takes a couple of minutes for the Saxons to fall in to the trap prepared for them, being attacked with arrows only to run the other direction fleeing. Sharp, pointed wood spikes stick up from the ground and await the soldiers who trip and fall on to them, impaling themselves while others are doused with oil tossed out of windows of the abandoned houses and lit aflame to burn alive.

I try to keep my eyes on Delilah, making sure she's okay. Ubbe and Hvitserk seem to be doing the same, "helping" her when she needs it, even though I am convinced she could face an army alone and live to tell the tale.

My thoughts are interrupted by the voice of the King shouting, "Come out and fight, you coward!"

He knows Ivar is avoiding the fight, somewhere watching and I shift my attention to the youngest son of Ragnar.

"Ivar," I start and he looks at me. A look I have seen more than once. "What are you thinking?"

"What do you think I am thinking?" He asks and I roll my jaw and shake my head.

"No." I argue, not even entertaining his suggestion. "You are staying here."

"I am not a coward, Iskra." He replies sternly.
"I am." I say just as quickly.

"What does that have to do with-"

"Because if you go, I go." I remind him of the vow I took . . . wherever he goes, I follow. Panic settles in me at the idea of having to go down there and face that hell.

He looks at me intensely now, studying for the lie in my words. When he sees there isn't one, his expression changes and he looks as if he's thinking intensely about his next move.

"Ubbe!" I cry out, piercing pain stinging at my shoulder. I scream, pulling the arrow from my shoulder.

He turns, and blood sprays my face as he strikes down the Saxon stalking to me.

I hold my ax up, blocking the hit of a sword and Hvitserk's sword cuts at the man's throat, sending him to the ground.

Delilah's shouting has me snapping my face in her direction, and I see a man being impaled on a sword she's holding. She discards his body and swings around, knocking another man on the ground just in time for Ubbe to behead him, kicking his head across the mud as heavy rain falls over us.

In the midst of Ivar trying to figure out if he wanted to fight or not, I witnessed Delilah come very close to being killed and my instinct to protect her overtook my fear of death for once in my life and before I realized it, I had cast myself out tot the wolves without even thinking of what I was going to tell everyone after the battle what my reasoning for such developed skill is.

"This isn't so bad!" Delilah shouts to me, tripping a man and stabbing him in the stomach.

"I beg-ah!" I yell as I slash through a man's back. "To differ!"

"Do you see Heahmund?!" She cuts a man's arm off with her ax, before the same blade hits his chest with a loud crack.

"Well!" I breathe heavy, taking a man out with my ax, then with my sword, almost simultaneously. "I'm not really looking for him, Delilah!" I reply.

We get a very brief moment of relief and she looks at me.

"Do you think he'll spare us?" She asks me.

"You say that like the Saxons will be victorious." I say to her, avoiding an arrow.

"They're the ones that have God on their side, Issy," She splits a skull and wipes the blood from her brow. "All we have are a bunch of drunk pagans, a sadistic cripple," She coughs, her throat hoarse from screaming. "A woman who's lusting after a heathen, and a woman who's more afraid of the sadistic cripple than she is her own God!"

The two of us clash with two Saxons, our swords tangling in each other.

"You and Hvitserk?!" I ask, pretending to be shocked and Delilah and I pull our swords from the Saxon's swords and stab them.
"Let's talk about it later!" She dodges the question, an arrow whizzing past her head.

She sees the culprit, and throws her ax at him, knocking him from on top of a building.

"I performed a human sacrifice last night," I stab my sword backwards, skewering a Saxon that's fighting Hvitserk. "There's not really room for judgement here." I assure her and she rolls her eyes.

Delilah picks up an ax from a dead Northman on the ground and looks around.

The Saxons seem to be regrouping, less and less of them around us now and I look at Delilah and find Ubbe.

"Come on!" Ubbe shouts at us over the noise of yelling around us.

We all gather around him, and it gets quiet. So quiet that it sends a chill down my spine.

Delilah and I stand beside Ubbe, approaching an alleyway.

When we get on the other side and come across another muddied clearing, we see Ivar sitting, leaned against his chariot, screaming at the Saxon's that regrouped. Their weapons are all pointed at him, but they make no move to attack.

He screams curses at them in our language, his face covered in blood, making his blue eyes stand out even more.

Another group of our fighters come through another corridor, yelling, but Ubbe stops them.

"Wait!" He shouts, looking to Ivar, waiting for Ivar to tell us when to attack.

Ivar gets a few more curses in, before Ubbe steps forward.

"Charge!" He screams out and we all attack, the Saxons coming to us and visa versa.

We collide with a hard force, weapons swinging and voices screaming out.

My back bends, avoiding the sword slicing through the air, trying to get my head off my body.

A northman's ax cracks ribs of the man doing so, and he hits the ground in a sharp cry. Me and the stranger give each other a look of mutual respect before I search for my best friend.

I see Delilah get hit in the back of the thigh with a sword and she screams, her knees hitting mud. I look at her attacker as he raises his sword to end her with his back turned to me.

I walk to him, only a few feet away, my jaw clenching tightly.

My sword hits the back of his own legs, causing him to fall on his knees and I take great joy in pressing my foot on top of his shoulder to hold him still, fitting my hands under his jaw, jerking it sharply upward to expose his throat just in time for Hvitserk to turn around and slice it open. I push the body away from me, my focus now on her.

"Are you okay?" I ask Delilah and she's tearing off a piece of her dress.

"I don't feel bad for killing them, now." She sneers, making a bandage around the wound. "Behind you!" She warns me and I sling my sword and the side of the blade buries deeply into a man's waist.

She gets up, readying her weapons once more.
Her foot raises to kick a man in the chest, but he catches her ankle, and twists it. She follows the movement in order to keep from having a broken ankle, her body twisting mid air before she swings her sword and splits his throat open.

As he falls to the ground, the blade of my ax connects with his damage neck and dismembers his head.

She jumps on another man's back, taking him by surprise and causing him to be brought to his knees. Her sword enters at the top of his head and continues until the handle of her sword hits his scalp. I can see the shining silver of her blade in his opened mouth. She's cruel in her element.

I look to Ivar, seeing his attention caught. He's hitting his pick against his hand in a clap and I follow his line of vision and see Bishop Heahmund.

Heahmund's pointing his sword at Ivar, determination on his features.

An arrow hits Ivar's right thigh suddenly, but he just shows annoyance instead of pain and breaks the arrow in half, tossing it at Heahmund.

A handful of my hair is grabbed roughly, bringing my head back. I hear the wisp of a blade preparing to take my life, and I swing my ax upward, hitting one of my attackers in the jaw. The one that has my hair doesn't have time to think before the blade collides with the top of his skull, spraying me with blood, before the ax comes back full circle at my side.

Heahmund's eyes are on me now, a look of horror on his face.

Delilah's fighting catches his attention as well, the look worsening.

The mentor has seen his apprentices become his enemies.

He doesn't forget the reason Delilah and I are such good warriors.

He doesn't forget what he's created to, unintentionally, aid the Great Heathen Army.

"Fight for your king!" Heahmund screams to his discouraged men. "Fight for your God!"

Ivar's laughing now, a bone chilling cackle as he watches the chaos in front of him.

Heahmund gets on a horse, looking around as the fighting crowds.

"Oh, clap your hands all Ye people! Shout unto God with the voice of triumph!" He continues. "For the Lord most high, is terrible!"

He's shot in the shoulder with an arrow, before he snatches it out and discards it.

The Saxons are pulling back, running to the nearest way out now. I make my way to Ivar, staring at Heahmund.

"God reigneth over the heathen!" He yells at Ivar, his eyes shifting to me. He looks pissed, betrayed.

"Retreat!" A Saxon captain shouts as they all rush to get out of the town.

Heahmund's eyes linger on us a moment longer before he wills the horse to go with the rest of the men.

Ivar's laughing like he's lost his mind and screaming out his prideful victory.
I clean out Delilah’s leg wound, apologizing when she hisses at the pain of straight whiskey coming in contact with it.

I understand the feeling, my own wounds wrapped up but still warm from the burn of the alcohol that Hvitserk had to pour on them.

Delilah's hand grips Hvitserk's as she curses, her eyes squeezing closed.

We hear the thump of Ivar's crutch hitting the floor as he walks in to the church, looking at us as we drink and rest.

"We did well, Brothers." Ubbe says to the men around him. They agree in a quiet cheer, mumbling among themselves in exhaustion.

"We?" Ivar asks, furrow his brows.

"Yes." Ubbe repeats. "I saved your life." He points at his younger brother.

"It was all my strategy." Ivar argues calmly and lifts one of his legs to rest on a table with a groan. "And you know that."

"We all did very well, though," Hvitserk cuts in, trying to keep the peace. "Why...why do you argue, huh?" He asks his brothers and Ubbe looks at him as if he's innocent.

"I'm not arguing." Ivar defends himself in a high pitched voice.

"Good. The most important thing is what we do next." Ubbe states as he leans back in his seat.

"And isn't that obvious, Ubbe?" Ivar asks his brother.

"Yes. We have defeated the Saxons. Let's make good our claim to the land." He suggests and I can't help but laugh.

"What is so funny?" He asks me, his ego faltered by my laughter.

"It doesn't work like that, Ubbe." I inform him, shaking my head, wrapping Delilah's leg up in more cloth.

"We've rightfully won. Let's all make peace." His words cause me to want to laugh harder. Instead, I take the blood soaked piece of clothing that was originally around Delilah's wound, and discard it on the table Ivar's sitting on.

"I have no interest in peace." Ivar states sternly, his face twisted. "'Peace' is a dirty word."

Some of the men chuckle, but I know he's serious.

"More of our people can cross the water." Ubbe explains. "We can all farm, huh?"

"Do not tell me," I start laughing, though no humor is evident in it, crossing my arms and turning to him. "That I just endured hell," I raise my brows. "Just to become a bloody farmer."

"Yes, That seems like a waste for all the work we just put in." Delilah agrees.
Ubbe licks his lips and exhales.

"Despite what we have endured today, it is the time to negotiate." He tells us, his eyes on Delilah.

"They didn't seem willing to negotiate when they were just out there trying to kill us so what the hell makes you think they'll be willing now? Especially after we just beat them? The Saxons are prideful. They'll be back to fight again." She tells him. "Yes, we fought well, but you're giving yourselves too much credit."

"I agree with the Christian." Sidka gives us his input from where he's been quietly sitting against a pillar.

"Yes, that is the wrong advice as always, Ubbe." Ivar challenges next.

"So, Ivar," Hvitserk asks as he stands from Delilah's side. "What do you suggest? Hmm?"

"The Saxons lost the battle but they have not yet lost the war." Ivar clarifies. "I would beware of trying to negotiate with them." He stares at Ubbe, his face holding warning, a threat.

It's now that I see his left eye has a blood vessel popped in it, the red around the beautiful blue iris making him look demon-like.

I hold Kezikai, waiting for Delilah to finish braiding her hair before I hand him back to her, and he doesn't stop fussing until he's back in her arms.

"He's spoiled." I mumble and she gives me a look, smoothing his full, curly hair.

"Hush." She tells me in a soft voice, pressing a kiss to Kezi's forehead. "You have no room to talk."

"Oh, bull-" I'm interrupted by a knock on the door of the house we've nested in, and the two of us look to see Hvitserk open it.

"Ivar wants to speak with you, Iskra." He informs me and I tense up, exchanging a look with Delilah.

"Okay," I hide my apprehension and step to the door, pushing past him to go find his brother.

He's pacing the floor of the empty church when I enter, his eyes going to mine sharply. His expression is unreadable, something that causes a slight panic to arise within me, but I don't show it. Instead, I walk to him where he's standing still.

"Hvitserk said you wanted to see me?" I ask him and he licks his lips, his eyes darting to a blank space hesitantly as he tries to put his thoughts together.

The worst goes through my mind, like maybe he found out what I've been hiding . . . what he'll surely kill me over if he finds out about it.

"Ivar," I dare to speak again, extending my hand to cup his cheek and he looks at me again, stepping closer with his crutch until our bodies are touching. "What is it?" I ask him, worry filling me as he stares down at me, the thumb of his free hand rubbing at my jaw.

"I love you." He tells me sternly, seeming to be unsure, but saying it anyway. None of this is helping my nerves. My fight or run instinct starts warming up, and I have to force myself to stand in the fire.
that Ivar's starting to burn within me.

"You are worrying me," I tell him truthfully and he blinks a few times in a row, snapping from his trance, before his hand falls on my shoulder, pulling me closer to him so he can comfortably wrap his arm around me in the closest thing to an embrace we can get to as long as he's standing.

I'm confused, but I don't fight him, slowly wrapping my arms around his torso, my forehead fitting in the space between his jaw and neck.

"Marry me." He finally speaks and my eyes snap open, and my breathing comes to a halt.

"I-What?" I ask him, completely confused by him and he chuckles a little, pulling away slightly to look at me.

"Seeing you today . . . helping to protect our people . . . " He starts, thinking a moment more. "Marry me." 

"Ivar," I try to keep my tone easy so I don't upset him. "You've been celebrating our victory over the Saxons and I think you have had too much to drink."

"I am not spitting out thoughtless words due to drunkenness, Issy. I am thinking clearly." 

"Obviously not or you wouldn't be asking me to marry you." I argue and his eyes darken, his brows furrowing together.

"You told me you're curious to see if I pull off any of the things I rambled on about doing years ago." He tells me, rolling his jaw. "I wanted to marry you. I spoke of marrying you quite a few times and you would brush it off as if it were nothing but I mean it, Iskra. I want to marry you."

"You want to raid. You want to explore and conquer lands, Ivar. You want to become a king and rule many kingdoms." I say to him calmly, enjoying the warmth coming from the palm of his hand as he rests it against my cheek. "You do not want to marry me." I try to tell him but he shakes his head, his aggravation for me strengthens and he pulls away from me to go sit down.

"You have no clue what I am thinking, Iskra. What I want and why I want it, you have no idea. You keep telling me I don't want to marry you, truly, but perhaps it is you that does not want to marry me." He argues, motioning to me. "Iskra Youngblood does not want to marry the crippled son of Ragnar Lothbrok, after all."

"You know that is not true, Ivar." I speak angrily, stepping to him. "Crippled or not, you know it makes no difference to me. I've loved you regardless of your obstacles just as you've loved me regardless of mine."

"Then marry me." He snaps, his nostrils flaring slightly.

I don't argue with him, staring at him intensely as I try to calm down. Getting into a screaming match with him wouldn't be smart, especially sense he can kill me with one throw of a knife.

I get closer to him, getting on to his lap, my nails gently trail over his cheek and his harsh eyes soften. It's as if in this moment, we're both young teenagers again. As if neither of us have cruel blood on our hands, aside from him killing a child when he was little and didn't know any better, and it feels as if the both of us still have our innocence.

"When we go back to Kattegat," I say in almost a whisper, my eyes looking directly in to his. "And you kill Lagertha, and become king," I lean forward and kiss him, trying not to smile when he
returns it, his arms wrapping around my waist. "I will marry you." I say when we pull away from each other and a small smile pulls at the sides of his lips.

"So, you will be Queen." He states, brushing his palm over my blonde hair. "Not the christian?" He raises a brow, a smirk on his lips and I giggle, remembering my suggestion from the last time we spoke of this when I suggested he take Delilah to be his queen instead.

"So, I will be Queen." I repeat him in confirmation. "Not the christian."

The cool night air moves through the town. Wisps of loose strands of hair falling out of my braid dance across my face as the breeze blows by me, extending a fresh, deep breath of air that I hope will give me a sense of clarity after the day I've had. It offers me no clarity, its greed wagging its finger at me as if to say "lying women don't deserve peace of mind. Not even for a breath."

I roll my jaw, keeping my tears at bay, which I'm glad I do, because someone clears their throat behind me and I don't have to look to know it's Ubbe.

"You fought well today." He compliments lowly, coming to my side to look out at the landscape outside of the walls of the city from where we stand on one of the guard towers. "I did not know you knew how to fight like that."

"I did what I had to do. Don't get use to me fighting alongside you all." I cut his hope of getting me to become a shield maiden, in two.

"I do not expect you to continue to battle alongside us, Issy. Though, it is a shame your skill goes to waste all because you are afraid to die." He points out.

"Ubbe-"

"And there is no reason for you to even be afraid because you can clearly handle yourself." He continues, disregarding my attempt to get him to leave the subject alone. "You're blessed by the Gods to have two parents who possessed such skill in battle. Why do you take such inheritance for granted?"

"I've once told you before, Ubbe. It is not my desire to fight constantly. God knows I have enough personal wars within myself and I don't wish to add to it in my surroundings" I outburst, snapping my head in his direction to scowl at him.

He exhales and nods, irritated with me, but refusing to voice it anymore. As he goes to turn away from me I grab his wrist and stop him.

"I'm sorry," I apologize, looking at him in the dim light provided by the torches around the town. "The way I spoke to you earlier in the church when you told us you were ready to settle the land given to you . . . I shouldn't have been rude about it and I was. I'm sorry for that."

He takes his wrist from my hand and takes a step closer to me, causing me to dig my nails in to my palms.

"You don't want to fight, you want to settle somewhere and live a simple life. But when I propose we all claim the land, settle and farm, you act repulsed by it." He explains, brows furrowed. "It confuses me, Iskra. I thought you would be happy about my proposition but I am starting to believe you have no idea what you want."
"Ivar." I say sternly and it looks like it hit him in the face. "Whether we ever settle somewhere and stay, or not. I want him."

"Well," Ubbe scoffs, licking his lips. "Being your destiny depends on him, I pray to the Gods he loves you as unconditionally as you love him when he finds out you and Delilah have more in common than just running away from home."

"He won't find out." I hiss, giving him a glare.

"Not from me." He assures, looking me up and down. "But do not think I did not notice the similar skill set you and Delilah share with that Bishop in battle." His words send chills up my spine and I feel uneasy. "Ivar observes far more than any of us. Be mindful of that."

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you thought of the chapter and what your thoughts on 5B are, and have a good night, you guys. Thank you for reading!
You Should See Me in a Crown

Chapter Ten

I feel as if I'm witnessing judgement day.

My eyes are glued to Ubbe and Hvitserk, the two of them look guilty as ever. Ubbe's face is busted up pretty badly, his right eye matches Ivar's red one. The blood vessels popped and causing the white to be bloodied. Hvitserk's scraped up some, dirt covering his face.

We're all gathered in the church, Ivar perched on the alter as I stand beside him as one of his hands absentmindedly twists strands of my hair between his fingers.

I can't bring myself to say "I told you so" to the two men. they look like sad dogs and I can't force myself to be that mean right now because something tells me Ivar is about to lay in to them enough for the both of us.

"Welcome back, Brothers." Ivar says to them smugly. "Are you thirsty?"

Everyone around us just chuckles a little, but I, again, can't bring myself to be mean to them.

Delilah just stands by a pillar, holding Kezikai with a scowl on her face directed to the back of Hvitserk's head.

"I know you shouldn't say, 'I told you so'," Ivar starts, "But I told you so." His voice isn't harsh, it's soft in a piteous mocking way.

Laughter echoes from different men in the church as they hear Ivar's taunting, and I gently nudge Ivar. He looks down at me and I give him a "cut it out" look. He challenges me, furrowing his brows before he brushes his thumb across my chin. His bottom lip pokes out like a pouting child who's having too much fun to stop tormenting his siblings.

"Ivar, we went—"

"No, no, no," Ivar interrupts Ubbe. "Let me guess: you went to the Saxons and tried to make a deal..." he's thinking of what probably took place after that before he speaks. "They spoke sweet words to you." He adds.

Ubbe blinks slowly, before explaining what happened.

How they were told to wait for an answer, how Bishop Heahmund beat Ubbe...

Ivar's clapping and laughing by the time Ubbe's done, and I keep my eyes closed for a moment.
"But of course you were brave!" Ivar exclaims enthusiastically. "You fought back!" He continues. "You fought back, right?"

He knows they didn't, they couldn't. They were outnumbered.

"You didn't let them get away with that," He states, his tone turning slightly darker. "Huh?"

"I was just trying—"

"You made a bad call!" Ivar yells to interrupt Ubbe, causing me to flinch slightly because I wasn't expecting it. "You showed yourself to be weak. You two are lucky to be alive." His tone drops more. "And now it is the time, for you to recognize me as the rightful leader of the Great Army." He raises his brows as he says this and I tense up, Delilah's eyes shooting in my direction.

Ubbe looks around a couple moments before he brings himself to a stand, Hvitserk doing the same.

"As your older brother," Ubbe starts as he approaches Ivar, but is stopped by a couple men getting in his way. He just looks at them a second and they step aside. "As your older brother, I will never, ever accept that." He tells Ivar.

Ivar just smirks, knowing his brother would be stubborn to give up leadership.

"Hmm." Ivar hums briefly, nodding a little.

"In any case it would be a dereliction of duty." Ubbe argues. "And after all," he turns, throwing his arms up. "Doesn't Someone have to be responsible for the care of our people?"

"Hmm, It doesn't seem to me that you have taken that good care of them so far." Ivar points out.

Ubbe breathes out, turning slowly to face us once again. Ivar's leaned over, whispering to the man beside him as Ubbe tries to get his attention.

"I cannot—" Ubbe sighs out, seeing Ivar is ignoring him. "Ivar." He says calmly. Ivar continues to ignore him. "Ivar." His tone is getting louder until finally: "Ivar!" He screams and Ivar's attention is snapped to Him, an evil glare causing Ubbe to step back a little bit.

I can feel the irritation seeping out of Ivar and I blink slowly and gently rest my hand at his knee cap to try soothe him.

"You cannot continue to fight in England without Hvitserk and me." Ubbe finally spits out and Ivar chuckles.

"I think that you will find that more of our warriors and shield-maidens want to stay and fight with me, than go farm with you two." Ivar makes a good point, and the disappointment on Ubbe and Hvitserk's faces, at the realization that he's right, is evident.

Ubbe hears the murmurs of the warriors and maidens loud and clear, and looks at Ivar.

"Well, then me and Hvitserk will go back to Kattegat tomorrow with our forces." He motions to Hvitserk and I look between the two of them, noticing Delilah's nearly got smoke coming from her ears.

Oh, they will be hearing earfuls from her in languages they won't even be able to understand.

I don't want them to leave. The two of them are two of the only best friend's I've had growing up, and I find myself wanting to argue for them to stay.
"If that is your decision." Ivar seems to agree that would be best.

Ubbe And Hvitserk both look at me hesitantly before stepping away from us, about to leave. Ubbe stops suddenly, shaking his head, turning to look at Ivar one last time.

"Our father..." He trails off, steadying his voice. "Our father would have hated you for sundering and splitting his family." His finger points to Ivar.

"I don't think so." Ivar shows no concern, a satisfied smirk tugging at his lips at his brother's defeat.

X X X

I step to the house Delilah and I have been sleeping in, about to enter, when I hear Delilah speaking loudly.

"How could you do this to me?!” She raises her voice, the obvious betrayal laced in her tone.

"It will only be temporary." Hvitserk's voice is the next I hear.

"Temporary? You say that as if you are traveling a few miles anyway!"

"If you are so deeply affected by it, by all means, come with us." He offers and she lets out a loud laugh. "I'm being serious, Delilah."

"I cannot leave Iskra. She needs me." She explains defiantly.

"Iskra needs Ivar." He corrects her and she scoffs. "And I need you, and you don't want me to leave. So, come with me."

"Or you and Ubbe could stop being a difficult little girls and stay." Delilah continues to not give in and he sighs loudly.

"I am leaving tomorrow morning to go back to Kattegat, Christian. Either you come with me, or not. It is your decision and I respect whatever you choose to do."

"No, Northman, you're running to Kattegat." She hisses and I hear the tears in her voice. "You are abandoning your pregnant wife to prove a point to your little brother."

The revelation nearly knocks me down, my face contorting in extreme confusion.

"Delilah," His words are gentle, the shuffling of feet against the floor lets me know he's moved closer to her. "I will come back for you as soon as I can. I am not abandoning you." He assures her. "I promise."

She finally drops it, exhaling shakily.

"Okay." I barely hear her whisper out and the two of them going silent is probably caused by them kissing so I step away from the door before they start doing something I won't want to hear.

I find Ubbe sharpening his weapons in the small, barn like structure, and walk to him, a pissed expression on my face as he looks up from where he's seated.

"Issy," he greets me, not taking his attention off his task.

"Did you know Delilah and Hvitserk are married?" I snap and he hides his smirk, rubbing his lips together.
"I might have heard a whisper or two about it recently. Why?"

"Oh, really? I assumed if our people were to know about them, some of them wouldn't be too happy with him marrying a Christian and be quite vocal about it."

"Which is why it was a very private ceremony, done in the dead of the night, miles away." He states as he examines his work and I raise a brow.

"And how did you know of this?"

"I wed them."

"You wed them?" I lean forward, stopping the stone wheel with my hand and he lets out a heavy breath and raises his brows, his face inches from mine. "Without telling me?"

I notice his bloodied, emerald eye and busted lip, from his altercation with the Saxons after he and Hvitserk went to negotiate with them, show incredibly well in comparison to his pale skin.

"Iskra," He says lowly, moving my hand from the grindstone. "If she wanted you to know she was marrying Hvitserk, she would have told you. There's reasons why she did not."

"Like what?"

He gives a frustrated sigh and forgets his sharpening, tossing his blade aside.

"Perhaps she was afraid you'd tell Ivar. He hates her. Hvitserk would not hear the end of it and Ivar would use Delilah against him if something were to arise and he needed leverage."

"Ivar would not—"

"We both know he would." He cuts me short, giving me a stern look and I sigh, knowing it's true. "If your friend is happy with my brother then you should be thanking your God he and Odin plotted for their paths to cross, huh?" The grin he gives me causes me to roll my eyes. "What about you? Are you happy with my brother?" He asks me next, leaning forward to rest his mouth to his palm to hide his reaction of my answer and I raise a brow.

"I am very happy with your brother." I tell him truthfully.

"He wants to marry you." He informs me of what I already know and I smile.

"He's wanted to marry me since we were children." I remind him. "Floki gave us a fake wedding when we were little and instead of a wedding ring, Floki lended Ivar his arm ring to give to me to let everyone know I was a married woman."

Ubbe laughs, nodding his head.

"I remember. I was the one who gave you away." He recalls. "We had to hold you down to get that bloody arm ring back from you, though."

"I was nine, Ubbe, I thought it was mine to keep. I didn't realize it was pretend." I argue and we both calm our chuckling, exhaling. "If life were only that simple now."

"It could be," He starts and I immediately lose my smile, knowing where he's going with this. "If you come back with Hvitserk and I."

"And that's my cue to return to my beloved." I grumble, stepping away from him, but he stands and
grabs my wrist.

"Issy—"

"For the last bloody time, Ubbe, I have no interest in leaving Ivar. Farming and children and simplicity sounds wonderful, however, I am tethered to someone who has no interest in simplicity and he shouldn't because Ragnar Lothbrok's blood runs through his veins and ordinary people's stories are not told for generations to come like Ragnar's stories. If the word 'extraordinary' were a man, he'd be Ivar the Boneless. Therefore simple things like farming and settling and sitting back to watch others explore, are insulting to him."

He looks impatient with me, reluctantly tossing my hand away from him like I'm diseased. He waves me off, and as I walk away I hear his blade hit one of the wood posts holding the structure up.

XXX

A dark, deadly glare cuts through me as Ivar's lip curls over his teeth at me, the shaking of his body incredibly evident.

He paces on his crutch, the heavy dragging of his feet on the ground and "thump" of his cane making me grow even more uneasy as I await the back of his hand to my cheek that is sure to come with the hell storm brewing within him.

Ubbe and Hvitskerk went against his orders of no negotiations with the Saxons, and I helped them sneak away. Of course, like everything I do behind my dearly beloved's back, Ivar found out.

Well, he assumed Delilah helped them and she didn't deny it when he confronted her, even though she didn't even know they were going to sneak away to negotiate, and she took the fall for me. But Ivar knows when he's being deceived.

"Ivar," I start softly and he holds up his hand and rolls his jaw, silencing me.

"No." He hisses, his teeth clamped shut tightly. "Do not speak. You do not have the right to defend yourself over this matter because there is nothing, Iskra, nothing that you could possibly say to make this situation any better!" He shouts and I jump slightly, closing my eyes as he continues to pace. "Is it so difficult to obey me?!"

I shake my head, trying to stay calm. If I argue, I'm dead.

"Then why do you act like if you listen to my orders, Thor will strike you down?!"

"They only wanted to make peace, Ivar." My tone is as low as possible to keep from making him think I'm trying to start a fight.

"Peace," He mumbles to himself, mocking me.

"They are tired of fighting." I state with a more even voice, and he stops his pacing and turns to me. "As am I. So can we please not fight about this?"

"Oh, so you can get away with defying me yet again? Yes. Let us sweep this under the rug and pretend you did not help my brothers deliberately go against my orders!"

"What do you want me to do, Ivar? Do you want me to apologize?"

"No, I do not want you to apologize because you would not mean it!" He shouts and I close my eyes
again, sitting on the edge of the bed in the house he dragged me into to argue in private. "I want you to start listening to me, Iskra! That is what I want! My way of handling something should be far more important to you than how Ubbe decides to handle it!"

"Why must you bring your brother in to thi—"

"Because had anyone else come to you to help them go against my orders you would have told me as soon as possible." He accuses me poisonously, sneering. "But because it was Ubbe, you chose him over me, once again."

"I did not choose him over you." I stand back up, taking steps to him as I slowly swallow my fear. "If I chose him I'd be packing my things to leave with him and Hvitserk tomorrow morning, Ivar, but instead I'm standing here trying to make things right with you which I should know by now, does no bit of bloody good."

"It does do no bit of bloody good, Iskra." He agrees with a stern nod, his eyes burning in to me fiercely. "You do no bit of bloody good." He's adding fuel to the fire. "How can we one day rule a kingdom when there is no guarantee you will reinforce my orders when someone tries to step out of line?"

"I agree." I tell him gently. "You are right. If we are to take care of our people the best we can, I cannot be making decisions without you and giving Ubbe and Hvitserk my blessing to go against you was wrong. I should have told you and handled it differently." I say to him and he breathes out, irritated. "I am sorry, Ivar. I am sorry for going against you."

"But not for helping my brothers," He points out.

"I love you. I'll always choose you, but not everybody else will. You need to understand that. Instead of silencing those who disagree with you, have a conversation with them and listen to why they think differently and then see which solution is best for the particular problem. That is what I did, and Ubbe has a right to want peace for our people and the Saxons. I know I went about it the wrong way and it was a stupid mistake, Ivar." I try to reason with him.

*It was a stupid mistake.* I don't know if I'm talking about helping Ubbe and Hvitserk go against him, or sleeping with his brother which he's convinced plays a factor in the supposed soft spot I have for Ubbe.

"You cannot afford to make stupid mistakes, Iskra!" His fist hits the table he's standing beside, his bruising knuckles curling and uncurling from the impact of the hit. The little courage I had dissipates and I exhale, giving up my side of the fight.

I step to the door to leave, but he grabs my arm roughly and forces me to face him.

He looks like he could kill me right now. I don't put it past him to.

"Are you afraid of me?" He asks me as if he's surprised by the way I flinch when he touches me. I don't say anything, rubbing my lips together as his ocean blue eyes examine me.

"Not afraid enough." He says in a whisper, his hand angling my chin up so he can force me to look at him. "Or you would obey me more than you do."

His thumb runs over my bottom lip and I close my eyes and pray he's not buttering me up to yell at me some more or worse, hit me.
When his hand leaves me, I open my eyes and he motions to the door.

"Go," He says to me. "I am too angry to think about anything besides what you have done. I will come find you when I am no longer tempted to kill you."

X X X

Morning comes sooner than later and I try not to cry as Ubbe looks down at me, a sad smile on his face. I know he's still angry at me for our argument yesterday but it's not mentioned.

"It is my turn to leave you, now, I suppose." He tells me teasingly and I snuffle, shaking my head. "Issy," he pulls me to him, his lips pressing to my cheek.

"I don't want you to leave me." I state weakly and he rests his forehead against mine.

"There is nothing good for me here, Iskra, whereas in Kattegat, I have plenty." He points out. "I'll have...simplicity." He adds, smiling at my tear enriched scoff.

"I feel like I just got you back and now you're leaving me." I tell him and he chuckles.

"I will never leave you." He assures me, his finger gently poking at my chest. "I will always be here, and you will always be here, huh?" He points to his own chest and tears roll down my cheeks. "Try to keep my brother out of trouble." He orders, wiping my eyes before patting my cheek gently.

"Send my love to Torvi and Bjorn." I request and he nods.

"I love you, Issy. Don't be so sorrowful, we will see each other again."

Yes, I think. On a battle field, trying to stab each other.

I just nod, giving him one last hug before going to Hvitserk so Delilah can say bye to Ubbe.

"Ivar will get jealous." Hvitserk warns me sarcastically when I try to kiss his cheek. I just give him an unamused look and he chuckles, blatantly pressing a quick kiss to my mouth.

"Now he really is." I point out and he laughs, hugging me.

"Don't get yourself killed, Issy." He warns lowly, more than likely referring to Ivar's temper that I've already fallen victim to. He squeezes me tightly and I have to ignore the lump in my throat. "And please, keep a tight grip on Delilah. She's important to me. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if she were to anger my brother and get herself hurt."

I nod, giving him a promising look and he returns it with a closed lip smile.

"Goodbye, Hvitserk." I force out, sighing.

"Goodbye, Iskra." He whispers.

We pull away from each other and I look at Delilah to see she's smiling widely at Ubbe.

She gives his hand a single squeeze, before she turns and walks to Hvitserk. She hugs him once more and wishes him farewell, before the two of us climb out of the boat and walk on to shore to stand next to Ivar. He's perched on a large rock, his black cloak covering him.

"Look at you!" He shouts to his brothers. "Trying to sneak away to avoid your shame!"
Me and Delilah glare at him, but he ignores us, fumbling with his fingers.

"Surely you must be embarrassed that nobody else is with you!" He adds and I stare at the ground. "And why is that?! I can't understand it can you?!"

It's obvious Ubbe's ignoring him, speaking to one of the few other people on the boat with him.

"Ubbe!" Ivar screams. "Nobody is with you! Everyone is with me!"

The Vikings gathered behind us cheer and I exhale.

Ubbe And Hvitserk look at each other, Ubbe's face slowly falling.

Hvitserk suddenly turns and hops off the boat, stepping to us.

Ivar's lips pull in to a satisfied smile and me and Delilah look at each other, worriedly.

"Hvisterk." Ivar's pleased, amused that Ubbe doesn't even have the support of his other brother.

Hvitserk stands beside Delilah, crossing his arms, mixed emotions on his face.

The boats slowly leave shore, turmoil evident on Ubbe'a face.

"You see." Ivar says lowly, talking more to himself. "Everyone is with me."

X X X

Ivar sits on the bed in the house we were in yesterday, he stares at me from my place at the door I've just closed and am resting my back against.

Loud chattering and celebration echoes outside, everyone's getting excited for our next fight that sure to come any day now with the Saxons once more. Now that Ivar is the official leader of the Great Heathen Army, they're even more confident in their power and the plan of attack he's already shared parts of with them.

He sent one of his men to come get me from where I was seated with Hvitserk, Delilah and Kezikai. I haven't seen Sidka very much the past couple of days. He was no where to be seen earlier when we were telling Ubbe goodbye. Knowing him, he's probably been rolling around with a servant somewhere, too unbothered by all of this to care who sides with who. As long as they don't threaten me, he doesn't care.

He stopped caring very much about anything when his wife died.

"Do you still want to kill me?" I ask Ivar boldly, staying against the door and he breathes out, shaking his head slightly.

"I am the leader of the army." He tells me instead of acknowledging my question. I play along, but stay away from him.

"So day what you have wanted has come to pass. I hope it all goes your way." I reply calmly and he licks his lips and smiles a little.

"Okay, now you are clearly tip-toeing around me." He states with raised brows, motioning to himself.

"Well, when I don't tip-toe, you threaten me."
"Because you're either tip-toeing around me or blatantly disobeying me." He argues, keeping his voice light and his features soft. "Well, blatantly disobeying me is more so choosing my brother over me but the two go hand in hand, really." He adds with a sarcastic smile.

"He wanted me to leave with him today." I spit out bitterly and Ivar looks at me, intrigued. He expected his brother to invite me to go with him, his expression tells me that. "I could have left you but I didn't. And I'm not saying that to be mean or to tell you that you should be grateful I haven't left you yet because that's not what I'm trying to prove. I have spent my entire life fighting like hell with everyone, Ivar, because I've always chose you. And that night I snuck out on the ice of that lake, a few months after my parents died, I wasn't trying to kill myself." I state, my body tensing at the mention of it and his face turns to stone, his focus catching immediately. "I was pregnant with Ubbe's child and I knew I would lose you if you were to find out I was pregnant because we never had sex and Ubbe would've claimed it as his. And I tried for two months to drink enough to kill the damn thing but nothing worked so I went out on the ice and decided if I put my body through that much of a shock, it would finish the baby off. It did. Floki and Bjorn are the only ones who know because they were there when I started bleeding and Ubbe never found out." I continue, ignoring the tears that come to my eyes. "So I never want to hear you question whether I really want to be with you or not, ever again. I sacrificed my own child just so I could guarantee a destiny with you. And I might disagree with you at times, I might not listen to you all the time, but in the end none of that matters because you are the one I have put myself through absolute hell for but I don't regret a damn thing I have done to make sure we stay together until our deaths and that is something I will not ever apologize for, my King." The term is used spitefully and I await his reaction, his ocean blue eyes showing signs of a stirring chaos within his mind at this revelation.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Please let me know what you think so far and have a good night!
We've been sitting in silence for hours, now. Ivar's now laying on the bed, staring up at the ceiling with his jaw clenched so tight that I'm scared his teeth might shatter if he isn't careful.

I'm sitting on the floor, my back still against the door with my hands gently clasped together.

He still hasn't responded to what I told him about me killing my child with Ubbe so he wouldn't find out I cheated on him and leave me.

I don't think he was prepared to hear of me doing something so selfish.

"Come here," I hear him whisper out and I raise my head to look at him. He doesn't look at me, his focus still on the ceiling, but he lifts his hand and motions me to him once before letting it fall back beside him.

I get up slowly, cautiously making my way to him and when the tops of my thighs hit the side of the bed he finally turns his head to watch me move closer to him.

I rest on my knees when I get on the bed, my arms staying close around myself as I wait for him to say something. Anything.

He sits himself up with a low grunt, his fingers fumbling to rid himself of any weapons on him. I watch as he tosses them off the bed, the heavy weight of each blade and handle thumping against the flooring.

When he's finished, he looks at me from the corner of his eye and his hand reaches out to grab my arm and snatch me on to him.

It's sudden and confusing.

I expect to be bleeding out and dying by the time he's settled between my thighs as I straddle him, our lips merely touching.

My hands rest on his broad shoulders and the callouses of his hands are rough enough for me to feel through the material of my dress from where they rest on my thighs.

Shallow breaths brush past my lips as I try to grasp what exactly is on his mind.

My question is answered when his hands move to my hips, pulling me closer to him as his lips touch mine briefly, softly.

When he pulls away slightly, eyes examining my expression, I open my mouth to ask him what he
thinks of the entire situation I told him about and he places his thumb over my parted lips to stop me.

"I don't want to speak right now." Is all he says before his hand grasps the side of my cheek and pulls my lips to his once more.

I don't argue, giving in to the rough kiss that's being shared between us. His hand leaves my face to join his other one in its desperate attempt to get my dress off. Again, it's sudden, the movement swift and effortless. Our lips are only interrupted by the fabric passing between our faces for a split second before the dress is thrown aside. His eyes grow heavy with lust—an emotion not often felt by Ivar the way it's felt by most men—and they drift down to the bare skin of my breasts and waist, his jaw clenching and unclenching when he sees the flesh between my legs against his clothed groin.

I hate the fact I'm the only one who's bared and vulnerable. But nothing's new.

My hand goes to the buckles of his thick armor, my fingers tugging at the leather and metal, loosening it, and pulling it off of him. He complies, his hands falling to my thighs once more as I pull his shirt over his head to reveal smooth, warm skin underneath. My fingers brush against the bare skin of his chest, my eyes retracing every movement.

His hand is tugging at the bottom of my braided hair, demanding the strands to be set free. My hair falls down my back in waves as his fingers comb through it before gently grasping it at the root as his thumb rubs at my cheek bone. He gives me a hint of a smile before he's angling my head to the side to give his lips, tongue and teeth access to my neck.

The whisper of a moan leaves my lips as he starts his slow torture of marking up my neck and shoulders.

The palms of my hands cling to his muscular arms that could crush me if he wanted them to, and I absentmindedly grind in to him, causing my head to tip back and my mouth to gasp out in pleasure.

"Ivar," I say with pure want laced through my tone.

His teeth let go of the skin above my collar bone and he brings his lips back to mine, his hands tracing up my sides, ghosting over my ribs.

We haven't been this intimate in _years_. A sudden nervousness washes over me at this realization just as he flips us over to be on top of me and his hand trails down my abdomen to the junction between my legs.

I have never closed my legs so quickly in my life.

"What is it?" He asks me quietly, his other arm flexing as he holds his weight above me with ease. My arms cover my chest, my mouth opening to speak, but closing shortly after to avoid embarrassing myself. "Issy." His tone is stern but not in an angry or irritated way. If something's wrong, he wants me to tell him.

"We haven't..." I start, tears coming to my eyes for some reason unknown to me. Surely I'm not thinking that much in to this. "It's been years, Ivar." Is all I can get out and his brows furrow.

"Do you not want to?" He asks, about to shift off of me but I shock myself and lock my legs around his waist to keep him still, my arms still covering my bare breasts from his eyes.

"No, I do." I argue frantically, my voice shaking. His brows raise, confusion cloaking his features as he tries to figure me out in this moment.
"So you want to, but you don't...?" He glances down at my covered chest and then back up at me.

"I feel like it's the first time we are doing this, Ivar." I finally spit out helplessly, my voice holding a small whine to it.

"Iskra, it is the billionth time we've done this." He points out. "This," He motions between us. "Is all we ever did towards the end of our relationship. This is undoubtedly the one thing we are guaranteed to actually do right." A chuckle holds in his throat and I swat at his shoulder.

"It is not funny, Ivar. I think I have a good reason to be nervous." I explain and he rolls his eyes.

"We've seen each other naked many times. I have done things to you many times. Everything still works the same way as it did then. The only difference is that we are older. That is it." He tries to calm me down and I nod slowly, closing my eyes for a brief moment. "If anyone here should be nervous, it is me." He continues with a sarcastic look on his face. "I am, after all, the crippled one out of the two of us."

I can't help but smile, my arms falling from my chest so my hands rest against either side of his face, the prickling of his facial hair tickling at my palms.

His lips press to mine again, his teeth tugging at my bottom lip before our tongues collide hotly. My legs lace tighter around him, my center grinding into him to get some friction between my legs as a way to get some relief from the tension building within me.

I need more.

His lips trail down my throat, past my collar bones, and his eyes look up at me darkly before he smirks and presses a teasing kiss to my breast, causing me to arch my back further in to him to try to get his lips and teeth where I want them most at the moment.

He catches on to this, his eyes burning into mine as his tongue traces around my nipple. My lips part to let out a breath of relief as my hands move across his shoulders.

His tongue is soon doing the same sinful routine on my other breast, my gasps and moans his motivation before he presses his lips down each of my ribs, descending to my stomach, and only going lower.

My legs fall from around him due to him holding them open with his hands, staring down between them with glassy eyes that are clouded with lust.

No, we haven't done this in years.

Lips press against my inner thighs in a horribly slow, taunting way.

The first kiss pressed to my core ignites a thousand flames within me as memories flood my mind.

All the nights spent in the middle of the woods somewhere away from our parents, or when one of us would get particularly bold and sneak in to the other's room. We were stupid, love sick, kids. I had only lived fourteen years but now, the two of us are considered adults. Man and woman.

The thought terrifies me.

We can barely look after ourselves. How the hell are we going to lead an entire population of people?
His tongue catches me off guard with one strong lick from my entrance to the nerve endings that send a tremor up my spine. He repeats it, his tongue moving slowly still.

My hands grip the sheets, my back arches and "Ivar" seems to be the only thing I know how to say under my breath.

My hips buck in to him, trying to get him to pick up the pace. He only pulls away with a chuckle, looking up at me with a devilish sparkle in his blue eyes.

"You are just as impatient as you were back then." He comments, taunting me and I narrow my eyes.

"You are just as—ah!" I cut myself short when he gently tugs at my flesh with his teeth before his tongue smooths over it. He's no longer going slow, his arms hooked around my thighs and his hands grasping my sides to hold me down while he feeds off of my flesh the way he wants to.

My calves rub the smooth skin of his back, my hands resting over his as I try to think clearly but I can't.

The tension in me nears release, and I feel like my backs going to break with how much I'm arching it. Tears start rolling down my face as I claw at the backs of his hands, spasms overwhelming me as I finish beneath him.

His chest is puffed up, confidence leaking from his pores as he cleans my skin with his tongue, not letting a single drop of me go to waste.

When he's done, he's moving back up my body to grasp my throat in his hand and kiss me.

"Please, Ivar," my voice is thick with lust when he pulls away from my lips, it's sultry tone almost unrecognizable to me.

I don't have to finish speaking for him to know what I'm asking.

He looks at me the way he's always looked at me when I suggest what I'm suggesting at this moment.

I want more of him.

"Iskra," He whispers in a tired voice, rolling off of me. "I can't. You know I can't."

"We have never really tried, Ivar." I point out.

"I said 'no', Iskra, just drop it!" He snaps at me suddenly and I breathe out and look away from him, not letting his harsh tone bother me.

I cover my body with the wool blanket at the foot of the bed and swing my legs over him to straddle him again, leaning down so our chests are touching and my cheek presses to where his heart's beating.

His hand runs through my hair, fingers massaging my scalp, and my nail draws imaginary pictures on his skin as we lay in silence.

"You could have told me," he finally speaks after nearly an hour, but avoids looking at me.

"It would've crushed you, Ivar."

"But I would have gotten over it." He snaps, his eyes bearing in to mine when he looks at me. "I
would not have left you or hated you, Iskra. I worshipped the ground you walked on. There was nothing you could have done that would have made me throw out my plans of being with you the rest of my life." He continues and I furrow my brows slightly. "I would have not talked to you until the baby was born, but I wouldn't have been angry with you the whole time. I would just need the remaining time of your pregnancy to find a way to fit a baby in to my plan for us. I probably would have killed Ubbe, which would have worked out because I would then be the baby's father." The hint of a smile ghosts over his lips briefly. "We would have gotten married after the baby's birth so our wedding night wouldn't have been interrupted with sickness or weird food cravings...not to mention I wouldn't be able to participate in the ceremony without speaking to you which we already established I would not have done until after you gave birth." He goes on. "Elska, if it were a girl. Baldur, if it were a boy. But both would be trained to be great warriors." He tells me, a slightly solemn look on his face. "I would have despised you. I would have resented you for years to follow, possibly, but I would have gotten past it and I would not have left you if you had my brother's child."

"Why not?" I can't help but ask him, my throat thick with on coming tears of shame mixed with shock.

"Because the two of us love each other, even when we hate each other." He says, not meeting my eyes. "I do not think we have even known this but I have realized that is how it has always been between us, and how it will always be."

"So you love me even when you hate me." I repeat, my voice cracking, a tear rolling down my cheek and he wipes it with his thumb. He smiles faintly, his hand in my hair tugging my lips to his for a brief moment before he kisses my forehead and lets me rest against him as I drift off to sleep.

*My whole body is set a flame.*

*Stinging.*

*Irritating.*

*Burnning.*

*Water so cold it feels as if I'm being hit with scalding bricks that weigh me down easily.*

*My lungs fill with the freezing liquid, engulfing my innards in as much chilling fire as the rest of my body.*

*I force myself not to struggle, opening my eyes to see the glow of the moon radiating through the ceiling of ice above my head.*

*My eyes look below me, deep water appearing black underneath me. The slow movement of something catches my attention, a fish perhaps or a group of fish?*

*A night-cloaked vaporing wisp of a large outline seems to be slithering, as if pacing thirty feet below me. I swear solid white eyes catch the glimmering attention of the moon through the ice, staring up at me, witnessing what I am trying to do.*

*I blink, trying to see if the trick my mind is playing on me fades but it doesn't. My witness is still glaring up at me.*

*Ice cracks and warm blood sizzles when it collides with the water, nearly solidifying.*
The source of the blood is a pair of shaking hands...perhaps it's Odin coming to take me away to Valhalla.

My eyes close as my mind slowly shuts out that my body wants to go against what I planned.

I hear more breaking of the ice and feel the brief warmth of more crimson, when I'm dragged from the water.

My back hits a sheet of ice, my eyes keep shut and the chilled air around me is hot compared to the water. Cold hands press to my throat, checking a pulse.

It's slow, lack of air and the cool temperature of the water causing blood flow to decrease.

My eyes slowly blink open, water leaving my lungs in a horrid choke. I cough until my throat's raw and blood's being spit out with the remains of water.

I lay back down, taking as many breaths as I can.

Two pairs of eyes are on me, and I look up at Bjorn and Floki.

They look like they're distressed, confused and perhaps scared. I don't think I've ever seen Floki scared.

"Issy," Bjorn whispers, his bloodied hands cupping my jaw. "What are you doing?"

I ignore them, angling my head to see if I've bled out my womb yet. When I see I haven't, I give out a frustrated scream and try to go back through the hole they made to pull me up from.

"Issy!" Floki shouts at me, both arms around my waist as I struggle against him.

I don't listen, elbowing him as hard as I can in the jaw. He doesn't budge, and Bjorn helps him pin me down.

"Issy, Stop this!" Bjorn yells over my shriek.

Now I'm crying, giving up on going back in to the water, my hands over my face at the realization that I will eventually have to tell Ivar what Ubbe and I have done...what sits in my belly and refuses to die.

Bjorn takes his fur off and wraps it around me, picking me up and carrying me off the ice. My entire body is numb, every nerve frozen in place.

We get to the healer's house and she tells them to lay me down and take my wet, cold clothes off.

I don't protest when Bjorn helps me undress and plans to tuck me under piles of wool blankets and furs.

Just as my dress is off though, he sees a giant, streaking, red stain on the white fabric, his face contorting in to worry.

"Iskra, where are you hurt?" He asks, grabbing at me to look over my bare skin to see where I might be bleeding and I feel a solid lump in my throat, my eyes tearing up with shame as I feel another gush of blood come from between my thighs. I stand to avoid getting the healers bed stained, too relieved in the moment to even be worried about Bjorn and Floki seeing me naked.

Their eyes go to my legs as crimson runs down my skin, realization coming to them quickly and they
look at each other.

I know Bjorn's seen his mother through many miscarriages, and he's giving me the same heart breaking look he's always given her.

"I thought you and Ivar have never..." Bjorn starts and I see the healer step outside to get some fresh water for me.

"We haven't." I tell them. "Ivar cannot know about this. You two cannot say anything to him." My voice cracks and the two of them are at a loss for words.

"Who is the father—"

"Bjorn, that is not important." I cut him off, tears rolling down my cheeks.

"It is important to me, Issy." He argues and I breathe out raggedly and look at Floki, who's staring at the ground, a shocked expression on his face.

"Floki," I say hoarsely and he looks me in the eyes. "You must promise me neither of you will tell Ivar and neither of you will tell Ubbe. Ever."

They catch on quickly, giving me an even more piteous but disappointed look.

"Issy," Floki starts and I shake my head, not wanting to hear anything from the two of them.

"Promise me." Is all I say, my voice thick with tears.

"No one else will know of this." Bjorn says next, glancing at Floki.

"I promise not to speak of it." Floki assures me lowly and I nod, exhaling as a weight lifts off of my chest.

"Iskra," Delilah's voice breaks through the dream of me reliving my past, my eyes opening to look at her with slight confusion.

I can tell Ivar is no longer beside me, and I tug the covers over my chest before I sit up to face her.

"What is it?" I ask tiredly, yawning and stretching.

"Your brother is looking for you." She tells me. "I figured it'd be better for me to find you naked in bed with Ivar, than for him to find you naked in bed with Ivar."

"He's not even in here." I argue, still half asleep.

"He just left." She informs me. "Get up, it is morning and we have lots to do today. They say the Saxons could attack any day now."

"You say that as if you will be fighting again." I say as she grabs my dress from the floor and shakes it off, smoothing it out before laying it over the bed.

"And why wouldn't I?" She asks hesitantly, refusing to look at me as she continues wandering until she finds my shoes by the door.

"Surely you're not reckless enough to fight with my niece or nephew growing like a weed in your belly." I state and she freezes, her body tensing slightly. "Not that your husband would allow you to do something so foolish in the first place." I add and she looks up at me, licking her lips and
narrowing her eyes.

"Did Ubbe—"

"I heard it directly from you while you were arguing with Hvitserk." I explain and she scoffs, stepping to the bed to sit behind me and braid my hair.

"I was going to tell you. I just...I didn't know how." She tells me lowly. "I was afraid you would be upset with me."

"For marrying a pagan?" I snort, smiling at the ridiculous assumption of hers. "Delilah, I don't know if you've noticed but I'm screwing around with one. And we aren't married which makes it worse. At least you aren't defiling a marriage bed every time you lay down together." I remind her. "Unless you got knocked up and had to get married to make yourself feel better."

"No." She's quick to rebuke my suggestion. "Believe it or not we didn't do anything until we married."

"So Virgin Mary isn't a Virgin anymore?" I tease and she gently shoves my shoulder. "How was it?" I ask next.

"How was what?"

"It." I reply and she's silent, probably trying to figure out what I mean. "His..." I clear my throat.

"Iskra!" She scolds and I roll my eyes and look at her over my shoulder. "That is none of your business."

"What? I've only had Ubbe and Ivar—sort of—I never planned on doing anything with Hvitserk so I'll never find out if it's any good so I'm just asking." I defend myself.

She exhales a heavy breath and finishes my hair, standing and crossing her arms.

"He's very skilled." She says smartly. "Use your filthy imagination to figure out what that means and hurry up because your brother is getting impatient."

She leaves me laughing at her innocence and I dress and step outside to find my brother and see where Delilah went.

I find the both of them fighting, the loud clanging of their swords rattling through the air.

Hvitserk is watching them, Kezikai at his feet playing with a fluffy-feathered hen as she pokes at the ground for grain.

Sidka had beaten Delilah the last couple of times they fought, but she managed to get frustrated enough to win.

She extends her hand and helps my brother up off the ground, a proud smirk on her lips.

"I am impressed." Sidka tells me, nodding to Delilah. "Who would expect someone so small to fight so big." He adds.

"I was trained by the best." Delilah says to him, picking her axe up.

"Not so bad for a Christian." Hvitserk says to her with a grin. "Although I expected much more from you." He furrows his brows at my brother teasingly.
"Then why don't you fight her?" Sidka asks him and Hvitserk smirks and looks at me.

"Because I'd much rather put this one on her ass," he motions to me.

"Oh, I'd love to see you try." I grab the sword from Delilah and she chuckles, taking a step back with my brother.

"I'll try to send you back to Ivar unscathed." Hvitserk comments with a wink and I raise a brow.

"Won't be a problem." I shake my head.

He gives me a single nod before our blades meet.

He moves faster than I do, physicality over mentality. I like to map out my moves before I make them, manipulating my opponent by studying their strategy before I find ways to use it against them whereas he doesn't think before he swings a sword or axe, the pure instinct of life and death taking over him.

I've noticed he's like Delilah: calm and collective and easy going regularly, but the second he's in a fight with someone, he only needs milliseconds to be the victor, and those milliseconds are merciless.

We fight for what feels like forever, wearing each other down before my back hits the ground, knocking the breath out of me but the top of my foot tugs at the back of his thigh and pulls him on me, the edge of my axe resting against his abdomen by the time he catches himself with both of his hands on either side of my head.

"And you're dead." I breathe out laboredly and he chuckles, glancing at the axe pressed to him.

He grabs it and discards it, about to get off of me.

A whoosh of heavy air washes between us and we turn to see an axe in the dirt next to us, the blade caught, causing the handle to stick up.

We both look to see Ivar standing with Sidka and Delilah, not pleased with me being under his brother even though it's not the way he thinks.

I'm obviously impressed with Ivar's ability to throw the axe at the perfect angle through such a tiny space, not touching either of us but Hvitserk is annoyed and moves off of me.

He helps me up and we make our way to the three observing us.

Ivar lowers himself to sit on a stool he brought with him, looking me up and down.

"Anyone up to challenge a cripple?" He asks and I raise my brows a little.

"Are you sure?" I ask, unsure, and Sidka and Hvitserk laugh.

"Don't say that like he's helpless, Issy. He's more than capable of combat." My brother warns me and I look at Ivar.

"I'll try to go easy on you." Ivar says to me in a sickeningly sweet manner, sarcasm coating his words.

"Don't." I reply. "I can handle anything you throw at me." I state, leaning in closer to him. "I promise." My voice lowering and he raises his brows.
"Hmm." He hums as he nods, catching the sword Sidka tosses him and Hvitserk hands me his sword off the ground.

"Ready when you—"

I don't have time to finish before he completely shifts himself in to that of a warrior, his skill with a blade making up for what he lacks in his legs.

He's hard to keep up with, harder than Hvitserk, his skill stemming from physicality and mentality. His movements are sharp but his mind is sharper, tracking and assuming every swing of my own sword that I make. I do the same with him, able to keep him from completely winning...up until I start getting tired, my arm starting to get weak from the constant push and pull forced on it while holding the heavy weapon.

Ivar's strength doesn't falter, not that I expect it to being that he's crawled most of his life so his arms could more than likely choke out a bear.

When the sheer force behind his sword suddenly knocks mine to the dirt, several feet away, I look at him, my mouth opened in near shock.

His gaze on me is intense, blade pointed to my throat and his features soften little by little.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be the second battle for York, in which Delilah and Iskra will come face to face with Heahmund and keep in mind what Ubbe told Iskra about Ivar being particularly observant. Thank you for reading, let me know what you think of the chapter and have a good night!

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