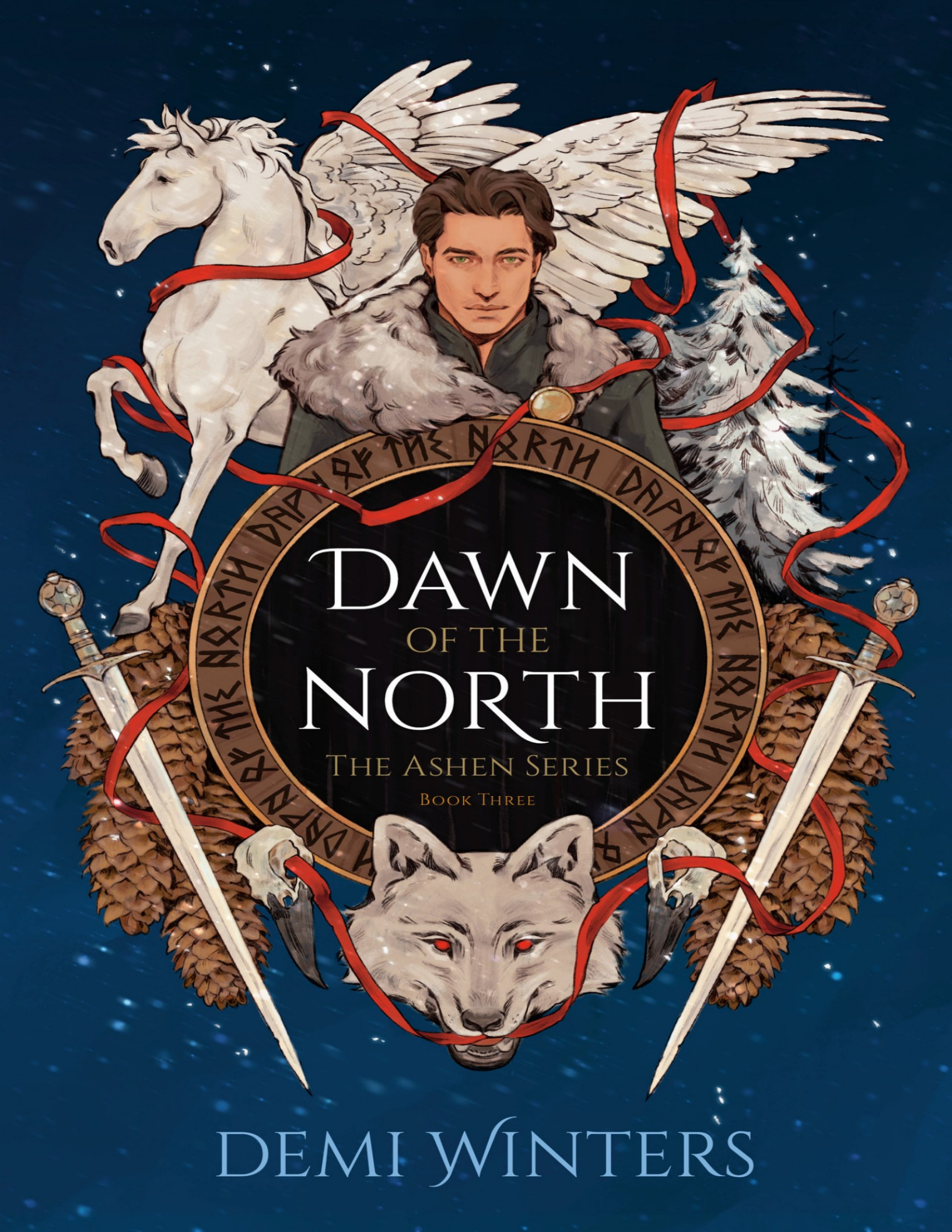




DAWN OF THE NORTH

THE ASHEN SERIES

BOOK THREE

DEMI WINTERS

BY DEMI WINTERS

THE ASHEN SERIES

The Road of Bones

Kingdom of Claw

Roots of Darkness

Dawn of the North

DAWN OF THE NORTH

—○○○○—
THE ASHEN SERIES
BOOK THREE
—○○○○—

DEMI WINTERS



DELACORTE PRESS | NEW YORK

Delacorte Press
An imprint of Random House
A division of Penguin Random House LLC
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019
randomhousebooks.com
penguinrandomhouse.com

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Hardcover ISBN 9780593975657
Ebook ISBN 9780593975664
International ISBN 9798217300983

BOOK TEAM: Production editor: Christa Guild • Managing editor: Saige Francis • Production manager: Meghan O’Leary • Copy editor: Laura Jorstad • Proofreaders: Julie Ehlers, Alissa Fitzgerald

Book design by Betty Lew, adapted for ebook

Map design by Megan Wyreweden

Endpapers by Scuttlekid

Cover design: David G. Stevenson

Cover illustration: Adelle Kincel / Klimtsonian

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin
Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland.

<https://eu-contact.penguin.ie>

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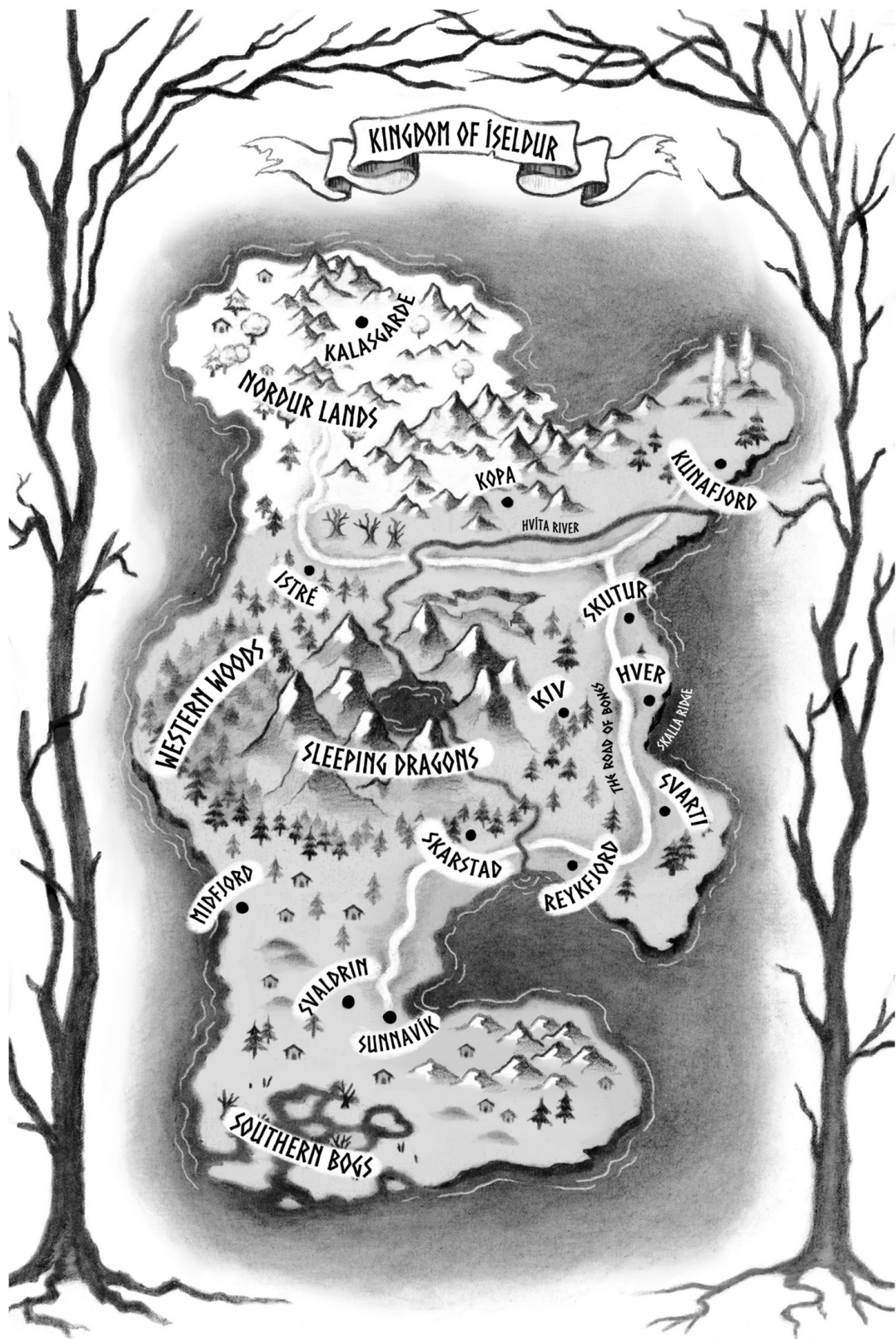
[*About the Author*](#)

FOR BEN, AND YOUR UNFOUNDED CONFIDENCE IN
EVERYTHING I DO.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dawn of the North takes place in a dark fantasy world and is intended for mature (18+) readers. Some scenes may make certain readers uncomfortable. A full list of content warnings is available at:

demiwinters.com/trigger-warnings/



KINGDOM OF CLAW RECAP

Silla

Fleeing from the queen's warriors, Silla hides in the Bloodaxe Crew's wagon, and, upon being discovered, convinces them to take her to Kopa. The Bloodaxe Crew, meanwhile, are assigned the biggest job of their careers—to travel to the village of Istré where a deadly mist terrorizes its citizens.

Jonas "The Wolf" Svik begins a secret romantic affair with Silla, but when his younger brother Ilías is killed in battle, Jonas turns against her. Jonas drugs and kidnaps Silla, before handing her in for a reward. Meanwhile, the leader of the crew, Reynir "Axe Eyes" Bjarg, comes after them and helps Silla escape Kopa. Together they flee to a shield-home in Kalasgarde. In the process, they learn the truth about each other—Silla is Eisa Volsik, the princess long thought dead, while Rey is Galdra, and the murderer who'd been burning people along the Road of Bones.

Silla begins magic training with Rey's grandmother, Harpa, while Rey helps hunt down a monstrous serpent terrorizing the town. In the confines of the small shield-home, Silla and Rey are unable to ignore their attraction to each other.

After discovering Saga has almost taken her own life, Silla and Rey leave Kalasgarde to find help for her, but they are ambushed by Jonas and a warband. They battle, and Silla and Jonas are trapped under an avalanche.

As Saga's magic matures, a dormant curse awakens in the sisters' blood—a shard of Myrkur, the god of chaos, is activated. In order to survive the avalanche, Silla gives Myrkur access to the heart of her Ashbringer magic.

Silla emerges black-eyed and ruthlessly kills all remaining Klaernar before turning on Rey. He pricks her with a galdur-quelling needle (hindrium), then strangles her until she's unconscious.

She awakes in Kopa to discover that Rey has been dosing her with hindrium to keep Myrkur from accessing her Ashbringer source. The story closes with the revelation that Saga is missing.

Saga

Saga lives in Askaborg Castle with the king and queen who killed her parents. She's betrothed to their thirteen-year-old son, and struggles with anxiety, particularly when trying to set foot outdoors. After learning that her younger sister Eisa is alive, Saga vows to stop Queen Signe from capturing her.

Saga has a panic attack after struggling to leave the castle, and a mysterious man comes to her rescue. She soon learns he's Kassandr Rurik, a lord from Zagadka in Íseldur to negotiate a grain treaty. Saga also meets Ana, a woman who works for the Uppreisna (a rebel group seeking to push King Ivar from the throne) and begins working with her.

Queen Signe, having discovered Saga's satchel in a room where she's been performing experiments on the Galdra, has Ana executed. Frightened, Saga makes plans with Rurik to escape the castle. But before they can enact their plans, they're caught kissing.

When the Zagadkians flee without Saga, her engagement is changed from Bjorn to Magnus, and she almost jumps from her balcony. A mind-to-mind conversation with Eisa (Silla) changes her mind.

At her engagement feast to Magnus, Signe slips the catalyst in Saga's wine, making her lose control of her Sense. She retreats into her mind, where she meets Silla/Eisa (unconscious due to the avalanche). Saga goes through her Cohesion Rite and comes into her full power, which awakens a bargain made by her mother with the god of chaos. Saga grants Myrkur

access to her magic and the god causes an explosion of black flame in the hall.

Saga wakes on a boat, Rurik sitting by her bed. After explaining what had happened, he takes her to the ship's hull, where Magnus is tied up. Magnus provokes Rurik, making him lose control and reveal himself as the Beast of Zagadka. Terrified, Saga flees.

The book closes with Rurik's revelation—he will take her to Zagadka, and not to the city in Íseldur as they'd agreed.

Roots of Darkness

Hekla and the Bloodaxe Crew are in Istré, trying to solve the mystery of the mist with a heartbeat. Frustrated that Istré's chieftain continues blocking her attempts to investigate, Hekla has a passion-fueled night with a stranger who's recently arrived to town, only to discover the next day that the man is Eyvind Hakonsson, Rey's childhood friend who's been sent to help with the job.

While investigating the forest, Hekla is trapped in the mist, then saved by a squirrel-turned-grimwolf. The squirrel takes to following her around, pestering her to free his mistress.

After disobeying Eyvind's orders, Hekla discovers that the chieftain has kept the human victims of the mist chained up in a barn, and that they've been Turned into draugur, undead creatures who do the mist's bidding. After discovering her betrayal, Eyvind is forced to throw Hekla off the job. She sneaks back in and partners with the Bloodaxe Crew and, reluctantly, Eyvind and his retinue, in order to evacuate the town.

Hekla risks her life to distract the mist so the citizens of Istré can escape, but when an explosion rocks the village square, Eyvind shields them both with his fireproof cloak. They abandon the city, and Hekla considers resuming her romantic partnership with Eyvind, only to overhear that he's been betrothed to a woman named Liv all this time. Upset, Hekla prepares to

flee back to Kopa, but encounters the squirrel, who begs her to return to the woods and free his mistress. Hekla vows that she will return with more men.

PROLOGUE

Signe did not flinch as the High Gothi's dagger slid across the thrall's throat. A crimson trickle quickly grew to gushing, rhythmic throbs as the Gothi's acolytes rushed forward with cups to collect the girl's lifeblood. Signe watched the thrall's blue eyes go from wide and panicked to dull and unseeing as the low, undulating tones of the High Gothi's voice met her ears.

A hundred or so figures had gathered on the southernmost dock on this sullen, overcast day. Askaborg Castle loomed behind them, Sunnavík harbor's many piers stretching out before them. Gulls called overhead, the smell of seaweed so pungent it nearly overwhelmed the acrid scent of burnt corpse.

Nearly.

All morning, Signe's moods had wavered between disbelief and brutal, aching grief. It had to have been a mistake. The corpse in the ship docked at the end of the pier wasn't Yrsa. Surely her girl was just missing. Hiding perhaps. The chaos in the great hall had been so very frightening, after all. Any minute and her Yrsa would appear and reassure Signe that it had all been one big misunderstanding.

The High Gothi's voice shifted to guttural rhythmic chanting as he poured the thrall's blood over the altar stone. Signe charted its course over the deep grooves carved into the stone; watched as it pooled in the trough below. When the thrall's lifeblood had drained from her, acolytes wrapped bear cloaks around her naked body before carrying her to the end of the pier and lowering her into the ship.

As Signe's gaze fell upon the figure in the center of the boat, tears tried to claw forth. The resplendent silks wrapped around the corpse could not hide the fact that the body was nothing but charred flesh and blackened bones.

Her baby.

Her Yrsa.

Signe's hand curled into a fist as she stared at what remained of Yrsa. Never again would she kiss her daughter's cheek. Never again would she hear the sounds of her laughter.

"Mama?" A small hand prodded her balled fist.

Signe forced herself to exhale and unclench her fingers, reaching for Hávar's hand.

"Not much longer, my darling," she said in a low voice.

Little Hávar had seen only three winters, and it was unlikely that he understood what was going on. In the days that had followed the explosion, he'd asked countless times for Yrsa, wrenching Signe's heart anew. But it was worse than merely her heart. It felt as though a piece had been torn from her very soul.

The next thrall was yanked forward, her ice-blond hair marking her as Norvalander. Beside Signe, Ivar loosed an impatient sigh. She ground her teeth together. *Get on with it*, that sigh seemed to say. *I've important matters to attend to*. It was no secret that Ivar favored his sons above all else, but Signe had dared to hope he'd *pretend* to mourn his daughter.

Hávar's hand squeezed Signe's as the thrall girl wailed and thrashed before the High Gothi. Her elbow collided with one of the acolytes, sending the man staggering backward into an ornamental brazier. But the thrall's attempt to flee was fruitless; three more acolytes rushed forward and seized her. The High Gothi ended her with a slash of brutal efficiency, the wound on her neck opening like a crimson smile.

By the end of this service, five maidens would lie alongside Princess Yrsa to accompany her on the journey to Ursir's Sacred Forest. Signe hoped that the thralls and treasure heaped upon the ship were sufficient to allow her girl an afterlife without wanting for anything.