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# ENTHRALLED

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A Short Story

by

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I was not always a trader. Nor was I always poor, not in the beginning, but my family made unwise choices, borrowing heavily to buy sheep and expand our land. Then harvest failed and the windfall my father had been expecting to clear our debts did not come. Our sheep had grown thin and the meat was of poor quality. Even the wool did not fetch enough to repay their debts. Though they and my husband tried to hide this from me, I could not allow my father to be dragged before the Alþing for unpaid debts. The shame alone would kill him. He had worked hard and honestly all his days, but for the want of a good harvest my father would suffer greatly. I decided to take the burden upon myself. If there was a way for me to ensure their survival then I must do it.

My first option was to sell my share of the land but who would want land that was not good for more than grazing sheep from which we could sell neither the wool nor the meat. It would also take too long. Father's debts had been called in and the people he had borrowed from were not patient men. The second option was more drastic and would not be something my family would agree to unless honour demanded it. A trading company was settled some distance from but they were leaving in less than three nights. The only way to do this would be to approach the group on my own and then let my family know after the fact. I did not have much time to gather enough courage to do what was needed and they were at least half a day's hard ride from our home.

Steeling myself, I make sure my horse is saddled and ready to go as soon as the house was asleep. I did not want my absence noted until morning at the earliest. If I left at night and rode hard I could possibly arrive before dawn, make my case and be home with the silver by noon. I was aware of the danger. I had heard stories of people being taken into slavery and never seen again. I knew Storbjorn would find another wife easily enough—he was strong and intelligent-- but I would miss him. Leaving my children? That would be a scar on my heart that would never heal but this was something I must do to ensure their survival. What I wanted was not important.

The night was frigid and I shivered under my cloak as I made my way back to the stable. It had rained earlier that day so my boots were sodden, and it made the cold feel like it had

teeth. I had kept my pack light with my work tools, some food, and my brother's old seaxe for protection, though I hoped I would not have cause to use it. I needed to leave some assurance that I would return to the camp once I had delivered the silver. Fastening my things to my saddle, I count slowly, my breathing and urging myself on and telling myself it must be done. I led my horse outside and was thankful that the grass would mask her hooves. If all went well, it was doubtful that the traders would let me keep her. That thought brought tears. I brushed them away, ashamed of such sentiment, and mounted. Moving away at a walk so that I would not disturb my family, I scanned the Mosfell horizon searching for signs of a campfire.

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I arrived at the camp, exhausted and thirsty, as the sun was rising but would not let my discomfort stop me. There were two men on guard at the perimeter of the camp. One of them leered at me. I scowled back. It would not be wise to encourage their attentions.

"What do you want?" the leerer said

"To speak to whoever is in charge around here. You have a chief, I assume?"

"We have a Jarl."

"Will you take me to him? I have business to discuss."

"What business would a girl have with me at this time in the morning?"

In my exhaustion, I had not noticed the third figure approach. He was huge and I was very glad I had not dismounted. I realise now that they must have seen me coming some time ago and given warning. Staying on my horse was my only means of a speedy escape should I need to. "Sir, forgive me but I would rather not discuss it in front of your men."

"Until you get down off your horse and speak to me in a respectful manner, you have nothing I wish to hear." He turned and disappeared into a large cone tent. A huge dog at his heels.

I quickly dismounted and tethered my horse to a nearby tree. I could feel my legs shaking under me. I adjusted my belt and made sure my blade was accessible should I need it, but covered by my cloak, then made my way to the tent followed by the two guards. Both were helmeted carried spears. I knew now that there was no turning back. One of them, the one who had leered earlier poked his head through the flap. I heard at least three voices but I could not make out what they said. The guard turned back and gestured to the other.

"Search her. No weapons."

Without a word, the other guard roughly pulled my cloak aside. Gesturing to my blade he said, "Hand it over." He was taller than me and looked older, and I doubted any resistance from me would prove effective

"I would rather..."

"Be on your way then." He leered again and held out his hand.

I sighed and handed over my brother's weapon.

"You'll get it back. *If* you behave. Boots off."

In the tent, there was another man aside from the Jarl. Slim and pale with dark hair and eyes. His clothes indicated wealth and influence but he seemed very young to have acquired them so early. The two men sat either side of a tafl game and it looked like the second man was winning.

"Sir?"

"Well? What is it you want?" the Jarl looked up at me. I could tell he was not impressed with what he saw.

I returned his stare, "Silver. Enough to clear my father's debt and get my family through winter... And a promise."

They both laughed. Maybe I had been too bold but I had certainly won their attention. The second man stood and circled me where I stood. He stopped behind me, between me

and my only point of escape, and spoke quietly, "And just what do you offer us in return for this sum?", a slim hand closed around my shoulder.

Swallowing my fear, I whisper, "Service.... Sir." keeping fists clenched under my cloak. They were both staring at me now, and it frightened me but I was not going to let them see that. The feeling of my nails digging into my palms helped me control my breathing. Fear is not a good position from which to strike bargains.

"Speak up, girl!" the Jarl snapped.

"I offer service sir. I have some skill with textiles, and I am not afraid of hard work." The second man was standing so close I could feel his breath on my neck. Was this meant to intimidate me? If it was it was working.

Silence. All I could do to hold my composure was stare at the canvas above their heads. The second man went back to the Jarl and they whispered for several minutes, before he sat back down he turned back to me. "Sit." He took a long drink from a horn cup and casually took another of the Jarl's game pieces.

I looked behind me there was no stool so I simply sat on the sheepskins which covered the floor.

"Your request is not unreasonable but what I want to know is why?"

"Sir?"

"Why are you, a young woman of some means judging by that horse, coming to a trading group in the early hours of the morning to sell your services?"

"Does it matter?"

"I think so. I want to make sure that I'm not going to find out I have a fugitive in my midst. You could be a murderer or a thief for all I know."

"I am no thief!" I snap, unsure if my anger came from fear or exhaustion. "You have not asked me what I wish you to promise me."

The Jarl stood and took my face in one hand, raising my chin so I met his eyes. I was still glaring. "That will depend on your answer and your manners. I advise you to speak truthfully, girl, I know when I am being lied to." He said before sitting back down.

"And how far will knowledge of my private affairs go?" I did not break eye contact.

"No further than this tent," The second said, "unless we decide it should go further." I was handed a cup of water which I gratefully accepted. "But think carefully, what you say now could determine whether you leave this camp at all."

I sighed. Realising too late how dangerous a position I placed myself in. I hadn't thought of having to explain myself but being reluctant would only delay me further, and I had nothing to be ashamed of so I explained. I told them everything: my name, the location of my farm, the fact I was trying to save my family and not simply desert them. It wouldn't do to be caught in a lie later. I just needed to make sure they understood I wasn't on the run.

"And the promise?" said the second man, who I now know was named Kveldulf.

"I want assurance that you will allow me to work out my debt to you in peace and not simply sell me to recoup the money." This *was* bold. Indentured slaves had a few rights but not many. Placing conditions like this was unlikely to garner much sympathy.

"That is a lot to ask" the Jarl said, "You would fetch a good price but I will grant your request. However, I have conditions of my own."

"And they are?"

"That you will return with an armed escort of three men and leave that horse behind when you leave to return here with my men. You will not have the means to keep it, and I cannot spare the food it will need."

I had expected this, "Very well. And the other?"

"Other?"

"You said conditions."

"The weapon you brought with you. Can you use it?"

"Well enough. It was my brother's."

"Where is your brother now?"

"Gone," I said, "a fever two winters ago, he was not eighteen."

"And the rest of your family?"

"I have three sons, only one is old enough to work but the others..."

"So, you leave them low-handed."

"I do what I must to make sure they survive." I hadn't meant to snap.

"You'll keep a civil tongue in your head!" The Jarl rose from his seat again and started rummaging in a chest behind me. "that's the last of my conditions. I demand respect and you will watch your manners. There will be no special treatment. You'll dig in and work like the rest of them."

"I understand."

As I left the tent, I heard Kveldulf laugh and say, "Now, that one will be trouble." That's where I got my name.

In hindsight, I should have placed a limit on my term of service. I had not allowed myself any way out of the bargain should the Jarl not honour his side of it either. He didn't seem the sort to, but it was still careless of me. The amount of silver paid to my family was far more than the average cost of a slave and once I saw it I knew it would take me several years to work off. Even if the Jarl did sell me, he could not have recovered even half that amount. It was certainly generous. On the other hand, it ensured that my family had a lingering obligation to him. I should have realised something was wrong when I was made to accept an armed escort of three back to my parent's house. At first, I had foolishly believed this was for my safety. I now know that I now represented a considerable investment on the Jarl's part and he was taking precautions. There were bandits on the plains and even making my way to the camp alone had been a huge risk.

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To say that my family were unhappy with the situation would be putting it mildly. I wasn't surprised but they were not unhappy for the reasons I had expected them to be. The gravity of what I had done for them did not appear to register with either of my parents. My skills were needed they cried, who would care for the children, or spin for them? Who would cook for them and mend their clothes? My value to them from that moment became very clear. I was a pair of hands. My act of love and duty to my father could not make up for my crime of not being my brother. Of surviving the fever that had taken him and leaving them with only a daughter to hand the farm too.

To them, I was abandoning them for greener pastures but I cannot imagine why they believed that slaving for others would be preferable to slaving for them. I bid farewell to my children and made them promise to be good until I returned. My husband seemed a little more upset to see me go than my parents but he was also angry with me for taking this burden on myself. He even went so far as to say that I must send the money back, that it was not my debt to pay. I pointed out that should the farm fail, we would all starve. This meant one less mouth to feed. It has been many years since I left and I doubt I shall see them again. I have probably been given up for dead.

As I made my way back to the camp, I wept for the loss of my children. Of all my family, they alone were genuinely sorry to see me go, little Herryck especially. I would not bring them with me. It would not be safe and I could not be sure that the promise not to sell me would extend to my children. Besides which Erick was needed to work and Oskar was not far behind him. From that moment, I realised how alone I was even before I sacrificed my freedom to save them. I could only hope that my new master would be fair and keep his word.

A year went by. Then two. I felt the absence of my children keenly and it only increased with time. The work was a little dull but not unbearable and they did not treat me cruelly, but my longing for home and the lack of any committed expiry on my servitude had taken its toll. They had tried to be kind, showing at times more kindness than my own family had. From the first night, they had welcomed me into their group but I did not know how to respond. I was afraid that if I had accepted this welcome, it would mean I had abandoned my family in my heart. I would not bother them with my grief and could see no reason why they would be interested. Slave I might have been but I was, after all, there by my own choice. I had struck the bargain and I must live by that.

I found myself withdrawing further. I was doing what I had agreed to do, and to survive it I had ceased to feel. While the Jarl had agreed not to sell me, it was still his right and if that happened, I might never find my way home. I did the work, but it had proven hard to keep my head down and do as I was told without argument. I tried not to draw attention as I had never been one to back down and I was not picking my battles wisely. Holding my tongue was never my strong point and discipline in the camp was certainly swift. I had felt the Jarl's whip more than once for my insolence and I still to this day have not learned to hold my tongue in the presence of my betters.

About half way into the third year I decided to run. No mention had been made of any prospect to buy my own freedom. I had worked my time and more. Nor did I have the means or any idea what I would be returning to should I manage. It had worked before. I had walked in so I would simply walk out again. It was foolish, in hindsight. I was barely trained and only about providing for my own defence, I had no means to support myself, no idea where home even was. I had my seaxe but that was more tool than weapon and I was not allowed to keep it with me at night. There was no option. I would have to steal it back. It would be more dangerous for me to attempt to leave unarmed, especially when alone and on foot. I would draw too much attention. The seaxe would hopefully deter attackers long enough for me to get away. Until I could get this collar off, I would be also marked as a runaway. I hadn't initially agreed to the collar. As far as I saw it I was there by choice. There was no need to shame me

into the bargain. I think it was to remind me of my lowly status. To remind me that I was the Jarl's property.

That evening I quietly went to my sleeping space. It was far enough away from the main group that I wouldn't be noticed leaving. Hopefully I would not be missed at all until morning and they were unlikely to need me before then. None of them had shown even a passing interest in me physically. Not that I was surprised. I took off the square of cloth covering my hair and tied it around my neck to hide the collar, tucking it up and over to hold it in one place. Under my blanket, it wouldn't be noticed. Not unless someone was standing right over me and I was thankful that would never happen. I had worked quite hard to remain uninteresting and unnoticed in that respect. Before settling down to wait, I gathered my belongings into a bundle so I could make a quick exit. That night would be my final night as a slave. I must admit I was terrified of the idea of leaving the safety of the camp.

I waited shivering in the dark for what felt like hours. The fire had died some time ago so I was able to feign sleep, watching and waiting as the last of the group took to their beds and extinguished their lights. It didn't take long for the snoring to begin and as soon as I was sure they were all asleep, I gathered my bundle, slipped on my boots and picked my way through to the armoury, trying not to step on anyone.

Slipping through the tent flap, I waited for my eyes to adjust to the dark. It was like ink. I had not expected this. It would delay me. I slowed my breathing and willed myself calm. Arms outstretched, felt my way forward and groped for something solid. By chance, I came to the rack I was hoping to find but, in my excitement, I had not paid attention to where I was putting my feet. A helmet, I think, fell from its perch on a low box and landed with a crunch on a pile of chainmail behind it. I froze and held my breath, listening carefully for the sound of feet in the darkness. If I were caught here, I would be flogged at the very least, but I had come too far to turn back now. I had to be fast.

I still couldn't see well enough to identify individual weapons, but I knew what I was looking for. The first was the Jarl's favourite sword. I would take only what was mine, then if caught, I may only have to face punishment for trying to run. Moving from handle to handle, identified them by touch. Horn alternated with wood, one after the other until my fingers brushed the smooth wooden handle of my brother's seaxe. I had found it! To my relief it was in its scabbard. Slowly I lifted the weapon. My heart was pounding so hard I could hear it. I reminded myself that this was a risk I chose to take. Whatever happened from here was on my head. Eventually I had it in my hands. I clutched it to my chest and tried to keep my breathing slow and silent. Peering out of the tent I saw the way was clear in both directions with the nearest clearing to my right. Then I saw lights coming toward me. There was only one choice. I ran.

## 4

This escape was not going to plan. My legs felt leaden. In panic I rounded a tent, crouched down to break up my shape leaned against a tree. I tried to get my bearings back. I had no idea who had been sent after me, or even if they knew it was me. They must have heard an intruder, but they weren't looking for me. Could I hide or pretend I was seeing to a call of nature? No. I would have no explanation for my bundle. If I was caught they would haul me back and I would surely be flogged. Then there would be no telling when I would get another chance. This had to happen now!

The camp had not been here long enough for me to fully get my bearings, not that I was ever allowed to go wandering, but the terrain had been familiar. I thought back to when the sun had set this evening and my heart sank. The west was on the other side of the camp. Going back through the middle was not an option and I couldn't risk plunging into the darkness. The woods might provide some cover but a person could die in woods and never be found. I had also heard wolves. I would have to edge around the outside.

I began to creep, keeping my distance from the tents so that I did not disturb the sleepers within. The rustle of leaves at my feet sounded incredibly loud and I was sure that my pursuers could hear every step. As soon as I could, I fled into the woods, trying to ignore the angry shouts and thundering feet behind me. I dared a glance behind me while trying to run in a straight line. Suddenly I recognised the voices! Kveldulf, Bjorn, and Ginnarr! I tried to run faster but my dress was catching on branches. Fear and exhaustion from running were disorienting me and my chest hurt from breathing hard in the cold night air. It didn't matter if I was armed if I was too tired to fight and there was no way I would be able to hold off all three. I lifted my hem with my free hand and sped up.

Without the full use of my arms running was hard. Stealing another look behind me, they had not slowed and I did not have time to pull my blade from me bundle I couldn't carry on much longer but there was nowhere to hide. The trees were densely packed but spindly and offered no hand holds to climb up. The futility of my situation had not escaped me. I was running from the unknown in the dark toward another unknown. If I had not needed my breath to run, I would have laughed at myself.

I'm not sure what happened next. Whether I tripped on the uneven ground, or a tree root I do not know. I do know that my foot turned and I came crashing to the ground grazing my chin and knocking the remaining air from my chest. I must have hit my head too as my skull felt as though it would burst. I lay dazed for a moment as I realised they would be gaining on me. The Jarl was not a cruel man, but he did expect a return on his investments and this investment had just tried to escape.

I tried to drag myself to my feet but my ankle would not allow me to place weight on it, let alone run. I let out a cry as I tried to put weight on it. All I could do was wait on the ground and wait for them to pick me up and drag me back to camp, and drag me they did. I did not make it easy for them however. I kicked, scratched, bit, swore and fought every step of the way. My shouting was met slaps and one of them tried to silence me with a hand over my mouth. I sank my teeth as far into his finger as I could until a slap round the back of the head made me let go. My opinion was not required and to demonstrate this they removed the cloth scarf I had used to hide my collar and tied it tightly around my mouth. The more I fought, the tighter they held and their grip on my arms and ankles was painfully tight.

After getting a proper grip on my flailing limbs, they continued back to the camp, straight to the Jarl's tent. It was now open and he was standing in the entrance, waiting for his men to return with the intruder. Waiting for me. I was dumped on my knees in front of him. Ginnarr and Bjorn flanked me on either side of me holding a wrist each. I could feel Bjorn's bleeding finger dripping down my arm. I knelt, staring defiantly ahead of me, as Kveldulf approached the Jarl, handed him the blade he found in my bundle and whispered something. I didn't have to hear what he said to him to know this wouldn't end well. The rage had flared in his eyes but there was something else there too.

I refused to drop my eyes. In my view taking my life back but the law did not agree. My life was in the balance. Indentured it or not, slaves were property, and running away could be met with hard punishment. We had no status under the law. While I was slightly better off than born slaves, I would still have to pay my price before my freedom would ever be considered. I had broken the bargain I had made two years ago, and now I could meet the same fate I had tried to save my father from.

“Did she take anything else?”

“Nothing that was not hers to begin with. What do you want us to do with her?”

“I have a good mind to sell her.”

I wrenched my arm away from Bjorn and pulled the cloth out of my mouth, “We had an agreement—”

A hand grabbed my hair yanking my head back, “Quiet, you!”

“Any agreement we had is dead and buried!”



The Jarl had me chained to a post in the middle of the camp for the rest of the night. I was to be whipped in the morning. The manacles cut into my wrists and my toes barely touched the ground. Eventually, a tree stump was shoved under my feet, but I think that was more to shut me up so the rest of the camp could sleep. I suppose it was to teach me my place but I am sure it was simply to set an example to the others. This is what happens if you get caught trying to run. Lesson: don't get caught.

I felt a boot to my leg as exhaustion took me.

“Oi, wake up, you little bitch!” Bjorn said, “If we don't get to sleep tonight, you sure as hell don't.”

Erika was tending to his finger, and squeezed hard, “Don't speak to her like that.”

“Pah, you're too soft on them. They're here to work.” Ginnarr replied, and gave me another prod with his boot before sitting by the fire.

“And would you not have tried to get away if you were her? She's been a slave for years. She's earned her freedom.”

“Jarl says otherwise,” said Bjorn tentatively bending a stitched and bandaged finger.

“I told him he'd be best off selling her when she first got here,” Ginnarr said. “Wouldn't hear a word of it. She's been a problem since day one. Argumentative. Anti-social. Who'd buy the shrew once they heard her carry on?”

“The agreement? Yes, well, I'm sure that the Jarl will have seen the error in that decision by now.” said Bjorn

The conversation went on that way until first light. Erika insisted on giving me a drink of water before she would leave them to it but even she scolded me soundly for my foolishness in trying to escape. That anything could have happened to me out in the woods. I was instructed to take my punishment and learn from it.

The next morning, I was woken by a hand sharply slapping my face. I shook my head and tried to move my face away from the hand as I attempted to focus my eyes but the post behind my head impeded my movement. The few hours of sleep I'd managed to take had not been restful, I could barely stand and my bare feet were a mass of splinters from the tree stump. Every muscle screamed in protest at what seemed like an eternity in one position.

The Jarl came out of his tent. He was still furious with me. Kveldulf stood to his right but his face was an unreadable mask. Not that I knew him well, but he was normally all smiles and joviality. I knew then that my punishment had been decided. The night chained to a post had been nothing compared with what would come next. The rest of the camp gathered around me. The other slaves were made to sit in front of them and witness the consequences of my actions. I *was* to be an example.

“It has been decided that due to your past behaviour and your attempted escape last night that you will be flogged. Any previous agreement we had not to sell you is now void.”

## 6

It took months for my back to heal from the flogging I received that morning. At one point, it was not certain if I would survive. I never saw who administered that punishment though I suspect the whip was shared around those I had most annoyed. Two slaves were made to turn me around and strip me to the waist. My arms were burning from the strain of supporting my weight all night and forcing me to turn caused me to cry out. Fifteen strikes might not sound a lot but each blow hurts more than the last and by the eighth I was screaming. I could feel the blood from my back running down the back of my legs and soaking my dress. As I was unchained and dragged away I saw that the stump was bright red and shining.

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Movement still impeded by scarring, I was sat sorting through fleece for combing when Kveldulf approached and sat on the bench beside me. I was not sure how to respond to this so kept my mouth shut for once and continued to work. Was this it? Was this the news I was dreading? I had behaved for months. That had to be worth something, right?

“How are you feeling?”

I couldn't look at him or speak so I just shrugged and continued to work, hoping he wouldn't notice my hands shaking. Was this a trick question? Were they testing me to see if I had learned my lesson? He moved closer but since that morning I was not able to tolerate having anyone within more than a few feet of me. Every fibre of my being was telling me to run but I was afraid of what it might cost me. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest.

“You needn't be afraid of me.”

I manage to nod to show I understood, but my hands are shaking so much now that I drop my work. I don't dare reach down to collect it. I find I'm digging my nails into my hands again. I hadn't used that trick in years.

“The Jarl has a proposition for you. He thought it might sound better coming from me.”

I nod. My head hurts. What does he want from me?

"If you would like to go somewhere private to talk about it, you can come to my tent."

I instantly move to the other end of the bench. I can feel that my fear is written all over my face, the world is spinning. The pain in my head is blinding and I can't get enough air. It feels like I'm choking. I want to run, or lash out at someone but can't focus on anything.

"No. No, it's nothing like that." he said, "You don't have to. It was just a suggestion." He put his hand out to show he meant no harm but at that moment it was as good as raising a fist

I try to stand, to move out of his reach but can't. I see the Jarl approaching. He looks annoyed. People are staring at me.

"Have you told her yet?"

"Not yet."

"What have you said? She looks petrified"

"I suggested she come to my tent to discuss it in private."

"Yes, well that would frighten anybody." said the Jarl, casually picking at a chicken leg. He turned to me, "I've decided you've worked off your debt. You're free. Oh, and I'm selecting you a husband."

That was the last thing I heard before it all went dark.

I woke up in a strange tent. It was very dark but I could see daylight through the tent flap. I had no idea how long I had been out. I heard whispering outside and tried to sit up. My head pounded and I laid back down. The voices got louder.

"You granted her freedom in one breath and took it away in the next. How did you expect her to react?" Kveldulf said.

"I didn't sell her." said the Jarl, "Thought she'd be pleased."

"It could have been broken a little more tactfully than that." Kveldulf paused, "Why not just send her home?"

"It's not there anymore. Raiders took everything and burnt the place to the ground. No clue where her family are. Taken probably. Or dead, which is more likely."

"No!" I cried out. I hadn't meant to. It certainly got their attention though, and they came rushing in. I was trying to find my boots in the dark, momentarily forgetting that they had not been returned to me since I had tried to run away. "Where am I? Whose tent is this?"

"Mine." Kveldulf said as he lit a candle. "You've been asleep for hours." He held the light up to me. "You've got some colour back. Good."

"How long have you known about my family?" I demanded, fixing the Jarl with a defiant stare.

"Not long."

"How. Long?"

"A month maybe more. I had sent word to arrange your return shortly after you tried to run. When I got no reply, I sent a messenger to find out why. I got the news a few weeks ago." He looked genuinely sad to be telling me this.

"And just when did you plan to tell me this?" I stood and straightened my dress.

"When I deemed you ready." He snapped back "You might be free but you are still my responsibility. I decided you weren't strong enough to hear it."

"What makes you think I want another husband?" I asked. "I have managed this long without one."

"You really are the most difficult woman I have ever met! Your home is ashes. There is nothing left. I'm offering you a place with us. You'll be safe but that safety has conditions."

"How convenient." I folded my arms and looked away. I wanted nothing more than to march out of the tent and out of the camp. To go to my home and prove him wrong. Show him that my family were not gone. He did not say they *were* dead. I turned my face so they would not see my tears.

He pinched the bridge of his nose "You've been difficult enough to last me a lifetime and as your Jarl, I expect some respect." He stood in front of me and put his hands on my shoulders, "Please, Æsa, this once, just do as you are told without arguing. You will see, in time, that this is for your own good."

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The next week I was married to Leif. It was a quiet ceremony and I took no joy in it. I saw the practicality but the match remains loveless.

My feelings on the matter were not important. Leif was a rising member of the Jarl's court and had been promised a wife. So, he got me. He is not cruel, merely disinterested and I suppose that there are worse husbands. I go on here with the traders and I try to be dutiful and, in return, he expects nothing from me that I cannot give. Still, I can no more offer him love than I can grow wings and fly. My feelings lie in another direction. I can never let it be known where and even if I could it is unlikely that they are returned.