

Chapter Five

Dakota 1916

Cursing her life, Kaja stood by the stove and rubbed her back. She tried to smother the bitterness she felt for her husband, but his insatiable lust fueled the fire within her. She was much larger with this baby than she had been with Martha, and had spent most of the first three months vomiting day and night. Even though the war was still raging, Kaja was overcome with anger when she realized another baby would make a trip to Norway impossible. Her passion destroyed, she vowed after the child was born her husband would never touch her again.

Smiling down at the eighteen-month-old child playing at her feet, Kaja murmured, "When you become a woman, you, too, will learn that men only think of their own pleasures."

Pouting, Kaja walked to the window and gazed out at the cloudy sky, wondering how soon Hans and William would be through with the milking. She wished just once the sky could be blue like the clear skies of Norway in

the daylight months. Her only consolation living in America had been her baby girl and the new son she seemed to have acquired. Thoughts of William made her smile. He had been so kind to her those first months, helping her with dishes, even doing the laundry. *She wondered how long it would take before he becomes a selfish pig like all the other men in the world.*

Kaja rubbed her stomach, silently thanking God the horrible nausea was past. She was even feeling hungry herself this morning. She had already fried the bacon and kept the grease hot to cook the eggs. So deep in thought, she neglected to notice the stillness of the room.

Suddenly sensing a danger in the silence, she spun around.

“Martha, no! She watched in horror as the child's hand reached for the hot pan of grease. Screams of pain echoed through the room as the scalding grease poured onto the baby's hands and arms.

Grabbing the child, Kaja rushed to the wash basin, trembling as she listened to Marty's shrill cries. While fighting the child's flailing arms, Kaja frantically ripped off her tiny dress. Hot tears stung her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. “Please, God, don't punish me anymore. Don't take this child, too.”

A familiar hand touched her shoulder.

“Kaja, move away,” Hans commanded. “William, get me some egg yolks while I hold the child.” With one hand Hans held the screaming baby and with the other he opened the reservoir and scooped some water into the basin. “Kaja, a towel -- quickly!”

Hans carefully dampened the towel and wiped the residue of oil from the child's body. “William, go for the doctor,” Hans said as he turned to Kaja. “Woman, come help me hold the child.”

William kissed Kaja on the cheek. “Don’t worry, Momma, I will hurry with the doctor. Martha will be all right.”

Kaja's eyes flooded with tears. It was the first time William had called her Momma and she didn't deserve to be one.

“William, go quickly!” Hans repeated.

As William ran out the door, Kaja stood speechless, watching her husband apply the raw egg yolks to Martha's burned skin. She vowed to God that if He spared her child she would never have hateful thoughts about her husband again.

Two weeks after the accident, Martha's fever was over 102 degrees. Fearing infection, Kaja applied ointment to the baby's swollen arms. As Martha screamed in pain, Kaja's anger festered. Even though Hans was adamant there was no money for a hospital, Kaja had refused to listen to her husband and sent William for the doctor once again.

When the doctor arrived, Kaja could see the anger on her husband's face but nothing mattered but her child.

The doctor spoke bluntly. "Mrs. Berglund, I'm afraid the child has blood poisoning throughout her body. If we don't get her to a hospital to drain the infection, she will lose her eyesight and perhaps her life."

Glowing at Hans, Kaja stamped her foot, "This I can never forgive, Hans Berglund! You must let me take the child to the hospital."

For a moment, the silence in the room was deafening. "Take her to the hospital then," Hans said, nodding curtly. "The time for you to deliver comes soon, and the child needs to be well by then."

Kaja forced her nipple into her son's mouth. Still exhausted from a lengthy labor, she could barely feed the child. She guessed it didn't much matter as little Hans was two weeks old but still didn't have much of an

appetite. This pregnancy was so different from all the others. *She should have known the baby would be a boy.* A man could make a woman's life hell even from the moment of conception.

The past few nights had brought an early frost and Kaja feared it meant another long winter. It had been four months since Marty's accident and it was certain now her arms would be scarred for life. She had lost all her baby teeth and it was doubtful she would ever have a full set of permanent teeth.

Kaja tried to control her anger when she recalled the doctor's words. "If only the infection hadn't gone so far."

Little Hans began to cough and Kaja brushed her hand across the baby's forehead.

"Hans come quickly," Kaja screamed, jerking her hand away from the baby burning skin. "He is hot with fever!"

Hans placed his ear close to the baby's mouth. His face paled. "Why did you not tell me this sooner? We must send William for the doctor!"

Astonished at his accusing tone, Kaja wanted to unleash the terrible anger she felt inside, but she bit her tongue in silence.

William didn't return for over an hour. "Doc's out to the Larsens, Papa. Mrs. Larsen is in labor and it's real bad.

Lars says the baby is turned wrong and they may both die.”

Kaja had already started boiling water, and Hans was holding the baby over the hot steam. Little Hans was wheezing and coughing while his fever increased.

“Then we will do what we can until the doctor comes. Help your mamma with the water. I will tend to my son.”

As Kaja watched, she wondered how many other sides of this man she would see. She had seen his strength in crisis, his unrelenting authority, his passion as a lover, and now his tender nurturing as a father. If only he had shown enough love and compassion for Martha, perhaps the child would not be scarred for life. Kaja began to weep.

“Do not worry, the child will survive,” Hans spoke with conviction. “I will see to it.”

Kaja's heart was breaking. *If only he knew her tears were not for her son but the little girl that had taken all her love.*

Kaja knelt at the feet of her husband. “Hans, you can't sit in this rocker all night. Please come to bed.”

Only two hours before she'd watched this strong man hold the small baby next to this breast and weep

uncontrollably. Little Hans had died in his arms. He hadn't spoken a word since.

The doctor had arrived only minutes later but he said it wouldn't have mattered. Kaja felt sick inside. She had never wanted the child and now God was punishing her again for her selfishness.

"Hans, the doctor said there was nothing to be done. The pneumonia had gone too far."

She felt his hand touch her hair, and she looked up into his eyes.

"Finally, I understand your pain, my Kaja. To lose a child is to lose part of oneself. I promise you as soon as it is safe to travel, I will see that you have the money to return to Norway for your children."

As tears rolled down her face, she reached for his hand and covered it with her lips. How long she had waited to hear the words. *Perhaps her punishment was finally over. Perhaps God had forgiven her at last.*

To discover how Kaja continues to struggle and how her daughter Marty must face her life with the deformity caused by her severe burns, be sure to get your copy of **Rubies – The Curse Begins**.

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