

Soul of a Viking



The MacLomain Series: Viking Ancestors' Kin

Book Three

By

Sky Purington

Chapter One

Winter Harbor, Maine
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“SORRY, CYBIL,” LAUREN muttered under her breath as she took down the picture at the end of her bed, turned it around and leaned it against the wall. “I *refuse* to look at this anymore.”

Naturally, her older sister didn’t respond because she wasn’t here. Supposedly, she had traveled back in time to tenth-century Scandinavia to be with Heidrek, a man she fell in love with.

Lauren scowled and threw a sheet over the picture for good measure.

Called, “Soul,” it was part of Cybil’s, *Dragons of Winter Harbor* collection. Taken by camera about an hour or so before the sun set over calm seas, shades of yellow and gold twirled with the sun and seemed to create a dragon at peace.

Figure the odds.

There was nothing peaceful about the annoying picture. And there certainly wasn’t anything peaceful about her life since it had been hung there. If anything, it was in complete disarray for two very good reasons.

The first? She was trapped in this chalet. Everyone else could leave, except her. Some unseen barrier kept her prisoner.

The second—and everybody thought her insane because she found it the more alarming of the two threats—was Tait. A flirtatious biker who had ended up here alongside all the other riffraff her sister Samantha had dragged in.

It didn’t matter in the least that he was evidently a Viking just like Cybil’s mysterious Heidrek. She simply did not like him. Because one way or another, he was at fault for her being trapped. How else could it be considering when she got locked in, he got locked out? Then there was that shared vision they had. Lauren shuddered with disgust at the memory of a horse’s head impaled on a pole outside.

The bikers who called themselves Vikings said it was a Nidstang.

A curse.

And because only she and Tait had seen it, the curse was on them.

Ridiculous. All of it. Yet as she scowled one last time at the picture then headed downstairs, the same unease that had plagued her for months returned. Of course, some of it had to do with Cybil vanishing, then Samantha. But there was more. Something she couldn’t quite put her finger on. Yes, strange things kept happening, but so far she had been able to explain them away. Still, something kept eating at her.

“I made fresh coffee if you want some, Lauren,” Sean said. As usual, he sat at the kitchen island going over paperwork for his business.

“Thank you,” she murmured and headed that way.

He nodded but didn’t look up. She had never related less with a man than she did Sean. While she could admit he was handsome in a rugged, sea-weathered way, they came from different worlds. She was the wife of the state’s attorney, and he was...well, a *fisherman*.

“*You were raised on a lake and used to love to go fishing so stop being such a prude, Lauren,*” Samantha would have said if she were here.

But she wasn’t, and it was starting to wear on her. Why, she couldn’t imagine.

“Where is everyone?” she said as she poured coffee then eyed the living room warily. “Where is that *obnoxious* woman?”

Sean glanced at her with surprise, likely because it was the most she had ever said to him.

“If you’re referring to Svala, God only knows.” He chuckled and returned to his paperwork. “Probably romping around in the woods again. It keeps her entertained.”

Svala was Megan’s daughter. And Megan was Sean’s former best friend. Right now, sadly enough, Megan was fighting cancer.

If Lauren were to believe the stories, Megan had traveled back in time to Scandinavia a few years ago where she fell in love with Svala’s father, a Viking King. Cast beneath an evil spell and fighting grievous wounds, he remained on his deathbed as Megan traveled forward in time to seek twenty-first century medical care. Unfortunately, however, time passed differently between the two eras.

Or at least it had until recently.

That meant when Megan returned she was over twenty-five years older with a full-grown daughter and son. Lauren had already met her ‘supposed’ son, Bjorn when he arrived with Samantha. She also met Tait and Sven, a teenage boy who should be at school not wandering around with a bunch of bikers. She was sticking with that premise. Bikers. Nothing more.

Time travel didn’t exist and neither did bloodthirsty Vikings.

Somehow, it was all one big elaborate tale.

Unease spiked through her again. It had to be a tale. It just *had* to be. Yet deep down, being trapped inside this house aside, she knew it probably wasn’t. Because there were things about herself she refused to acknowledge.

Things that were easier to run from than accept.

Repressing any emotions that might try to surface, Lauren sipped her coffee and eyed Sean, unsure what to do next. Usually, someone was here, so she didn’t feel so *alone* with him.

As if he sensed her discomfort, he glanced at her. “Are you okay, Lauren?”

It was on the tip of her tongue to say, “No.” To finally share with someone how lonely she felt. “I am fine. Thank you for the coffee.”

“Sure.” She felt his curious eyes on her as she headed into the living room, sat on one of the big couches, crossed her legs and looked through messages on her phone.

There weren’t any.

Not one.

Lauren swallowed, set aside the phone, continued to drink her coffee and stared out over Frenchman Bay. What had she hoped for? She knew how busy Charles was. She knew he would get back to her when he could. Taking care of state business was his priority, and she had long ago accepted that. More so, she understood it.

“I don’t have to be down at the marina for a few hours,” Sean said. “Want to watch a movie? The news? Whatever?”

He knew if she watched anything it was strictly the news. “No, thank...you,” she said, her response stunted because he had never asked her anything like that. Anything at all, really.

“Okay,” he said. “If you change your mind, let me know.”

Lauren nodded and sat up straighter. He wasn’t hitting on her was he? But she knew better. If Sean was interested in anyone, it surely wasn’t her. If anything, he wanted Cybil. Or so she had initially thought before Svala arrived. Now she knew differently. He might act like he wanted nothing to do with the crazy little biker woman, but Lauren saw the way he looked at her

when Svala was unaware. He desired the obnoxious, loud-mouthed creature. For the life of her, she couldn't figure out why but supposed it was none of her business.

"We're *back!*" came a small cry followed by a cold gust of wind down the hallway.

Lauren almost groaned. It was one thing to be trapped in this chalet with the unfortunate variety of people who came and went. It was another thing altogether to be trapped with her niece, Emily. It wasn't that she disliked children. She simply did not understand them...or want to. But she loved her sister, Shannon, Emily's mother, so she suffered through.

"Hi, Uncle Sean." Emily hugged him and looked her way. "Hi, Auntie Lauren."

"You may call me Lauren," she reminded.

"Oh, stop it, Sis," Shannon said as she helped Emily with her jacket. "You're her aunt, so I insist she address you properly."

"Of course," Lauren murmured, uncomfortable as Emily smiled and proceeded to plunk down next to her.

"I got something for you while we were out, Auntie Lauren," she announced.

It took everything in her not to slide down a little and put some space between them. "That's nice."

Emily kept grinning at her. She smelled like some sort of sweet candy. "Don't you wanna know what?"

No, not at all.

"Here." Emily pulled something out of her pocket and handed it to Lauren. "Seeing how I can't carve like Sven, I had to buy you something to give you strength instead."

Bjorn's son, Sven had carved Emily a wolf out of driftwood to lend her strength. Why he thought the little girl needed strength, she couldn't imagine. Then again, she had lost her father in a car accident a few years ago. So perhaps that explained his reasoning. Yet the child seemed just fine.

Lauren stared at the object Emily plunked in her hand. It was a snow globe keychain of Winter Harbor.

"I figured because you couldn't go out I would bring outside inside to you," Emily informed, her eager eyes on Lauren as she waited for a reaction. "Do you like it? Does it make you less sad?"

"I am not sad," Lauren said automatically, surprised by the amount of emotion the trinket invoked. Emotion she could not afford. "Thank you for the gift, Emily. This was very thoughtful."

"You're welcome, Auntie Lauren." Emily pointed at the globe. "I got it especially because of those little trees and plants next to the houses," she explained. "Mama says you used to love trees once upon a time."

She shook her head sharply, but Emily didn't seem to notice as she gave Lauren a quick, unexpected hug then bounded off.

Lauren stared at the globe and frowned before she set it next to her phone. Though small, it would tug at the material of her designer slacks if she put it in her pocket.

"I'm making lobstah chowdah tonight," Mema Angie announced, pouring on her New England accent as she set a bag of groceries on the counter. "Anyone who wants to hop in and help is more than welcome."

Lauren stiffened yet again. While she was an excellent cook, lately she had grown to dislike it. In fact, she had grown to dislike anything that had to do with what she surmised must have been her failures. The truth was, though she tried to convince herself otherwise, Charles wasn't

simply putting distance between them but punishing her for not doing things as well as she could have...should have.

Sean added wood to the fire then said, "I'm gonna go check on Megan," before he headed upstairs.

"Meanwhile, we'll help Mema Angie cook, won't we, mama?" Emily said as she rolled up her sleeves.

"Of course, sweetie." Shannon glanced at her watch. "I've got to go make a phone call then I'll join you, all right?"

Emily nodded, her smile wavering as Shannon headed upstairs. Lauren sniffed with indignation. She knew exactly what her sister was up to. She was calling Cameron, the brother of her deceased husband. A man Lauren was convinced she had been having an affair with before Anthony died. It was awful. Scandalous. Not only that but up until recently, Shannon had all but separated herself from her own family because of it.

Lauren conveniently set aside the fact that Anthony had died in a car accident while pulling out of her sister, Erica's, apartment complex. Erica was one of her five sisters and Shannon's fraternal twin.

The whole thing was shady and unfortunate.

Not sure what to do with herself, Lauren decided to head back upstairs and watch the news where it was less likely she would be roped into cooking. That thought in mind, she headed into her bedroom only to freeze.

The dragon picture was hanging at the end of her bed again.

"Who on Earth?" she started to say before not just mere aggravation, but fresh fury overcame her. Had Svala come in here when she wasn't looking and rehung it just to goad her? To shove the whole dragon idea in her face yet again?

Dragons.

Another awful part of all this.

According to Megan and Sam, the Viking men they were all meant to be with were half dragon. She didn't believe it. She refused to. Yet she knew this was at the root of her occasional unease. Something so preposterous and absurd, it was beyond acknowledging.

But she was acknowledging it.

Slowly but surely.

A part of her she could not avoid, that would not let her escape.

"Who did it?" she roared as she tore down the picture, tossed it aside and headed back downstairs. Lauren barely recognized her own actions. It was almost as if she was outside her body. "Who?" She looked at Mema Angie. "Was it you?"

"What are you talking about, dear?" Mema Angie said, truly alarmed as she tucked Emily behind her.

"Only one thing would make Auntie Lauren this upset," Emily whispered as she peered around Angie's leg and up the stairs. "That picture."

Lauren barely computed the child's astute observation as she yanked on her jacket and headed for the deck. "It had to have been that miscreant, Svala. *Where* is she?"

As always, when she flung open the door and tried to head outside, she ran into the same infuriating barrier. She started to curse but stopped herself. She was the state's attorney's wife and didn't behave this way.

Still.

She wanted to.

Not only that she wanted to scream every curse word she could think of at the top of her lungs.

“Svala’s nowhere near here, Lauren,” Sean said from the balcony above. “I’m pretty sure she’s on one of her nature hikes.”

“How do you know that?” Lauren spun on her heel and tried to reign in her rage. A rage she had long ago learned to repress. “You do not know that.”

“But I do,” Megan said as she joined Sean. “My daughter’s not here, Lauren and she hasn’t been for a while.” A frown settled on her face as she headed downstairs, clearly weak. “Mema Angie, why don’t you pour Lauren a glass of wine?”

“Absolutely,” Angie murmured as Lauren trembled and eyed everyone. One part of her still felt anger while another part felt foolish. *Someone* had hung that picture again but who?

Lauren’s eyes met Megan’s. If she were to buy into the whole tired tale, Megan had been a Viking Queen for well over twenty years. If that were true, then all these *Viking* men were part of her community, her family. And those pictures Cybil took supposedly represented each man in dragon form. So would it not stand to reason that Megan would rehang the picture if she saw it had been taken down?

“It was you, wasn’t it,” she said softly, angrily, her eyes on Megan. “You rehung it.”

“I just got out of bed,” Megan said as Sean headed downstairs, frowning at Lauren.

“And I can confirm that so watch your tone, sweetheart,” he added.

“I am not your sweetheart,” Lauren bit out, shaking her head no when Mema Angie tried to hand her a glass of wine. “I am sorry, but I wish to get some rest.” She didn’t wait for a response but scooped up her phone, and keychain then headed upstairs.

When Shannon stepped out of her bedroom, worried, Lauren shook her head sharply, entered her room and shut the door. She didn’t slam it. She would not give whoever did this that satisfaction. Instead, she thrust a spare sheet over the painting lying on the floor and glared at it.

She did not want it here.

She did not want to look at it and feel like she was somehow looking in the mirror.

So she ignored it, undressed, neatly set aside her clothes, pulled on her matching silk pajama set and crawled into her perfectly made bed. She didn’t turn on the television but made sure the blanket was folded down over her chest evenly from crease to crease, checked her phone one more time then stared at the ceiling.

Minutes passed, maybe even hours, as she filtered through her angry emotions, bit by bit pushing them into a room in her mind. One she had created for just this sort of thing. Once every bit of paranoid rage and disbelief was shoved into the room, she shut the door and locked it.

Then she bolted it.

Then she envisioned welding it shut with fire.

Finally satisfied that she was free of those emotions, she breathed a sigh of relief. Now things were in perspective. Nobody had rehung that picture. If anything, she never even took it down. Rather she envisioned it. Made it happen in her mind. But she never really did it because that would be offensive to Cybil. Her sister worked hard, and that was one of her prized pictures.

Satisfied that it was all behind her, Lauren scooped up her keychain from the bedside table and studied it. The tiny village, the little bits of green that symbolized trees and shrubs. A town she had driven through several times, but was barred from now. A place, like many others, she wasn’t allowed to go.

Lauren released a well-measured breath and continued to stare at it, imagining what it would be like to finally walk outside again. Not to suffer from this feeling of entrapment and confusion. To be able to get in her car and drive home.

Back to Charles.

Back to the life they shared.

She continued to stare at the globe and tried to see their brownstone in it. The memories they had accrued. But all she saw were houses and trees...then just one tree.

The ash tree outside of this chalet.

A tree Megan claimed was not only created by a Viking demi-god but was a Yggdrasill. A mythological Norse tree that connected nine worlds. It was also a tree that seemingly transported her sisters and their Vikings back and forth through time.

At least it had until *Samantha* became so powerful she could do it for them.

Lauren made a sound of disgust and disbelief and opened another door in her mind as she stared at the ash. It spoke to her as it always did. The tree wanted her to push past the curse and get to it. She could nourish it. Care for it before it died. Only she had the power to do that.

"No," she whispered and shut the ash tree away.

Because she didn't trust it.

She clenched the globe, squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head. She had been housebound for too long, and it was truly starting to affect her mind. That, at least, she could admit and recognize given her unbelievable situation. It was the only logical thought that made sense as she inhaled deeply and tried to sleep.

Unfortunately, like most nights, that meant dozing for a few hours then bolting upright in bed when nightmares of trying to get out haunted her. Sometimes it was of this place but mostly other places. Rooms and dark corners she didn't recognize. Foreign places she had never seen before. But mostly she was trying to get out of one place.

The home she shared with Charles.

Lauren wiped sweat from her brow, tossed aside the blanket and pressed the tips of her fingers to her forehead. It didn't make sense. Why, out of everything—all the hell she had been thrust into—was she trying to get out of the one place she had felt safest? The one place she was trying to get back to?

"When are you finally gonna admit your husband served you divorce papers?" Samantha said into her mind, an echo of what Sam had said shortly before she vanished the first time. *"When are you gonna wake up and see the reality of things, Lauren? If I was able to do it with my husband, then you can too."*

"No," Lauren whispered and stumbled out of bed like she did every night.

Her situation was nothing like Samantha's. She and Charles had an agreement. It was politics, and she understood. He would serve the papers, and she would take her time signing them. That was the plan until the rumors of her affair had lessened. Something her sisters still couldn't swallow and never brought up because they simply refused to believe it. And they were right. The truth was he had the affair. But she would take the fall for it.

That made sense.

It would protect his career.

She understood that.

As always, when she opened the door in the middle of the night, Shannon was there to help her through. To keep her mind level and help her find a modicum of peace. To support how

committed she was to her life choices. She was the only sister who didn't seem to judge her one way or another for the decisions she had made...for being with Charles.

Lauren sipped her tea as they sat on the couch, and Shannon held her hand. Samantha had always called Shannon the creepy sister, but they could all admit that she possessed a level of calm the rest of them didn't. And the only real reason they thought she was creepy wasn't because of how she acted but what she decided to do with her life.

She owned her own funeral parlor.

Cybil had long speculated that she pursued such a career because of losing their mother when they were teenagers, but Lauren wasn't so sure that was entirely it. On occasion, she felt it had more to do with Shannon preferring the dead to the living in general. The dead didn't argue. There was no drama. Arguments. Heartache. All things they had experienced too much of with their parents before and during their mother's sickness. So it made sense Shannon would embrace such a low-key profession. One that would cultivate and maintain her unruffled composure.

Because she was, as a rule, unfailingly calm, cool and collected.

So her having an affair with her brother-in-law seemed downright nuts in light of how Shannon came across. Didn't it? Would something like that not have introduced unneeded tension into her life? The sort of tension born of secrecy and guilt?

Yet none of that mattered as Shannon smoothed Lauren's hair back into a tidy bun then watched as she enjoyed some soothing tea. While Lauren might be drawn to Samantha, Shannon understood her better. Or at least that's how she'd felt for a while now.

So maybe that was why Shannon thought Lauren had called her to the chalet in the first place. It made sense considering how much they had been connecting. The only problem? She never called Shannon. Yet she arrived. Maybe it was some sort of sisterly connection that transcended normal explanation.

Lauren squeezed her eyes shut and bit her lower lip at the thought. What was the matter with her? A sisterly connection that *transcended normal explanation*? For goodness sake, she needed to start opening more doors in her mind and locking these thoughts away.

What was she *thinking*?

"It's okay." Shannon squeezed her hand. "You're just dealing with really strange things right now, Lauren. Embrace it, don't fight it. Know that everything's going to be okay."

Her eyes shot to her sister and like every night Shannon visited, she asked, "How do I embrace this? How do I accept that I'm caged in by," her eyes rounded, "*nothing*."

And like every night, Shannon responded, "Because this isn't nothing, Sis. This is something. We just don't know what yet." As always, when Lauren tried to argue, Shannon squeezed her hand again, urged her to drink her tea and said, "Life is not easy to explain. You're meant to be here, and so am I." Shannon held her gaze. "You're not alone, Lauren."

But she really was. So alone it scared her. Yet another reason she wanted that picture in her bedroom gone. Because, oddly enough, she knew that dragon was as trapped as her.

Tait was as trapped as her.

Lauren set aside the thought. One she had done well to lock in a mental room day after day until she was bright enough to take that picture down. Yet even as it lay on the floor covered with a sheet upstairs, it haunted her.

She unclenched her fist and looked down.

"Is that the keychain Emily got for you?" Shannon said softly.

“Yes,” she whispered. Like earlier, a miniature version of Winter Harbor vanished only to be replaced by the old ash tree outside. “Oh no.”

“What?” Shannon asked, but Lauren didn’t answer as the tree in the globe started to brighten moments before a light caught her attention from beyond the windows.

Drawn, she shook her head and closed the distance between her and the deck side windows. A cold wind blew as she opened the door and narrowed her eyes. “Oh no.”

“What is it?” Shannon said as she joined her.

“Don’t you see it?” Lauren asked. Her chest grew tight and her palms sweaty.

“See what?”

“Shit,” Lauren whispered, cursing for the first time in over ten years. “You don’t see the horse head impaled on a pole?”

“No,” Shannon said, confused.

Like before, as soon as Lauren saw the Viking Nidstang, it vanished. Unlike before, she knew without a shred of doubt that she was in big trouble. She felt it in the hallway of her soul where lockable doors were hard to come by. Where Shannon’s reasonable voice wouldn’t make sense if she tried.

So she politely thanked her sister and despite Shannon’s concern returned to her room. She didn’t bother trying to sleep but sat on the edge of her bed and eyed the covered picture on the floor. If she had seen the Nidstang again, had *he*? If so, did that mean Tait would be returning soon? And if he did, would it somehow free her from this place?

Lauren clenched her jaw and glared at the picture.

While part of her understood why she related it to Tait, another part continued to deny the concept entirely. Even so, something was happening. She had seen that awful horse head again. So it was better to be prepared then caught unaware. At least that’s what she always told herself over the years when dealing with Charles.

Therefore, she showered, dressed meticulously, tied her hair back tightly and made a decision. If Tait was somehow the only way to free herself from this prison, then she would not hide but look him in the eye. If she could not lock him away, then she would face him head on and get this over with.

So she rehung the picture, sat on the end of her bed, stared at the dragon and waited.

And waited.

What she didn’t expect was Sean at her door just before dawn. He didn’t seem thrown off that she was sitting there fully dressed. Rather, he appeared weary. “Megan took a turn for the worse last night. Me and Mema Angie are gonna run her down to the hospital.”

Caught in the silent war she’d been waging in her mind all night, his words caught her off guard. She meant to say, “I’m sorry, how can I help?” but all she could manage was a weak nod.

Yes, Megan was fighting aggressive cancer, but for the most part, she seemed so strong. Just like mother had been.

“Shannon and Emily want to come with us,” he continued, his eyes a little lost as they met hers. “One of us will stay if you need us to.”

“Why?” she said, confused by the question.

“So you don’t have to be here alone.” He looked at her oddly, as if she should have already figured it out. “Someone always tries to be around, so you’re not trapped here alone.”

Lauren swallowed. She hadn’t realized that. “No, I am okay.” She nodded. “Please go take care of Megan.”

As he nodded and started to walk away she meant to call out, "I am sure she will be all right, Sean," to lend him comfort but did not. Instead, her eyes returned to the picture.

"Let me out of here," she said between clenched teeth. "Let me go."

Yet nothing happened.

She sat there half the day, her back ramrod straight as she waited.

Eventually, sunlight hit the chalet just right and slid into the room. While she might not like to admit it, the photograph really was exceptional, and the sun's rays did nothing to take from that. If anything, they accentuated it as the dragon's eyes seemed to magnify in the clouds. It was almost as if they shimmered deep brown and looked directly at her.

Lauren narrowed her eyes.

She knew that color.

She had seen it once before.

That exact shade of dark, dangerous chocolate.

A shade she refused to lose herself in before, and sure as Mother Mary gave her strength, she would not do so now. But then, she was tired of this façade. She was tired of not facing it...him.

So she stared into those eyes and walked down the mental hallway of her mind until she found the door she had locked him away in. She undid the lock and deadbolt. This door, oddly enough, was one of few she had not fused shut. Maybe because she knew she would have to shove too much stuff in it.

Or maybe because she wanted to be able to open it at will.

So she did it.

She opened the door as she stared into those eyes.

What happened next, however, was the last thing she expected.

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About the Author



Sky Purington is the bestselling author of over thirty novels and several novellas. A New Englander born and bred who recently moved to Virginia, Sky was raised hearing stories of folklore, myth, and legend. When combined with a love for nature, romance, and time-travel, elements from the stories of her youth found release in her books.

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