

Vengeance of a Viking



The MacLomain Series: Viking Ancestors' Kin

Book Two

By

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Chapter One



Winter Harbor, Maine

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“WHY AM I so drawn to you?” Samantha whispered as she stared at the photograph hanging at the end of her bed. Taken by her sister, Cybil, it was large and expensively framed. Titled, *Vengeance*, it was one of four in a collection called *Dragons of Winter Harbor*.

Dragons.

As it turned out, they weren’t just mythological creatures caught in cloud-swept ocean landscapes by her talented sister, but living beasts. She had learned that first-hand when she was recently catapulted back in time to tenth-century Scandinavia. When she saw men shift, then take flight.

When she saw her sister do the same.

Only then did she *truly* believe everything she had been told. Dragon-shifters existed. More than that? It seemed she was one too. If that wasn’t one for the ages, everything else that happened was. From the seers to her unbelievable family lineage, to the men she’d met...Vikings. Tall, fierce, brooding...or at least one of them. And hell if she could get him off her mind.

“Sam?”

She blinked, snapped out of her reverie and glanced at Sean standing in the doorway. “Yeah?”

“You were a million miles away again,” he said softly. “Still thinking about Cybil?”

“Of course, I am,” she replied automatically. Because the last thing anybody needed to know was that she was mulling over a man who lived over a thousand years in her past. A gruff, moody, bearded stranger who was *so-not-her-type*.

“You’ll see her again,” Sean said. “You said so yourself.”

“I did.” Her eyes met his. “And I will.” Though she wanted to rant, rave and release a variety of emotions, she winked, patted his shoulder in passing and headed downstairs. “Hungry?”

“Naw, I ate a few hours ago,” he said.

She knew he was eying the shore beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Frenchman Bay. Better yet, the impatient blond pacing the dock and scowling at the old ash tree.

“Sure you ate,” she muttered, not believing him in the least. She stared blindly at the refrigerator’s contents, not hungry but just as edgy as Sean.

Everything had been off-kilter since she returned with Sean’s long lost best friend, Megan and her daughter Svala. For some reason, time went by differently between the present and the past so though Megan had been gone under two years she had aged more than twenty-five.

Sean checked his watch. “I wish Megan had let me go to the doctor’s with her.”

“Mema Angie’s with her so she’ll be fine.” Samantha mustered up a smile and tossed him a beer. “I’m glad to see you two reconnecting so well despite...”

When she trailed off, unsure how she should phrase it, he perked a brow and twisted off the beer cap. “Despite the age difference?” Sean shrugged. “She’s still the same Megan I knew on the inside.” His brow edged higher. “And she still looks great.”

“Very true.” Samantha opened a wine cooler.

The truth was Megan *had* to have changed. She'd been the Queen of a Viking tribe for well over two decades. Yet the change Samantha referred to had nothing to do with age or looks, and Sean knew it. Megan had returned to the twenty-first century to seek treatment for cancer. Her husband, Naðr Véurr, had begged her to from his deathbed.

"I take it Lauren already left?" she said.

"Yeah, a while ago."

"Damn it." Samantha shook her head, as always, exasperated by her younger sister.

Despite what Sean told Lauren, she remained unconvinced that Cybil traveled back in time. It didn't matter that Sam, Megan, and Svala had materialized before her very eyes beside the ash tree. Her sister just refused to believe it. She *must* be overtired, she said. It had been a long few days. And Megan and Svala? They must've come from some medieval party. Friends of Sam's. That explained it all. Because anyone friends with Samantha was undoubtedly strange.

Now Lauren had flown home to convince her ex-husband to come save the day. To help find Cybil because the boats she'd hired couldn't locate her and she had to be here somewhere.

"You don't think her ex will really come do you?" Sean said.

"And leave his new bimbo?" Samantha snorted. "That'd be the day." She shook her head. "Lauren just wants an excuse to see him."

When Sean glanced out the window again, Samantha frowned. "You'd do good to steer clear of Svala, hon."

Sean muttered something under his breath that sounded a lot like, "She's about as crazy as they come," before he took a swig of beer.

"She sure is," Samantha agreed, eying her. The Viking woman was Megan and Naðr's daughter. Not only did she hitch a ride forward in time at the very last minute but she was a ferocious, bitter little thing.

But she was also very beautiful.

And Sean had noticed.

"Seriously, Sean," Samantha reminded, tempted to lean her hip against the island and flirt with him to divert his attention, but she wasn't in the mood. "Svala made Cybil's life a living hell and has done the same to her own parents. She's mad at her mom for not seeking treatment sooner, and now she's upset because coming here left Svala's father alone. If that isn't enough, she disobeyed her dad at every turn." She shook her head. "Trust me, she might look all grown up, but she's got a long way to go."

Sean nodded, tore his eyes from Svala and started sifting through paperwork. Born and raised in Winter Harbor, he now ran his own fishing business. With black hair and more of an eternal five-o'clock shadow than usual, she'd always found him overly attractive. But then most women did.

She cocked her head and fought the urge to touch his face. "Are you growing out your beard?"

"Nope." He rubbed his chin as he studied a sheet. "It's too warm right now."

"Does it really keep you that warm out on the water when it gets cooler?" She plunked down and rested her chin on her palm as she studied him. "I mean it's just hair."

"Sure, yeah," he said absently as he made notes.

"Nobody grows a beard as well as my brother," Svala said. "Especially not men from *this* era."

Startled, Samantha and Sean's eyes shot to the deck side doorway. Svala was so light on her feet they hadn't heard her approach.

Sean shrugged and returned to his paperwork. "Good thing beard-growing isn't a competition around here then."

"Maybe it should be," Svala spat as she strode inside. Refusing to wear anything modern, she still wore Viking garb, complete with a cotton tunic, brown leather pants, multiple small braids and of course, several daggers tucked around her waistline.

Sean chuckled and shook his head, not giving Svala the attention she clearly sought.

"I have no time for weak men who do not stand up for themselves," Svala huffed, her eyes lingering in challenge on Sean before she redirected her attention Samantha's way. "Tell me, woman, do you look at *Sean* and wish he had a better beard? Do you wish he was my brother, Bjorn?"

"That moody bastard?" Samantha shot back, not backing down. "Hell no."

When Svala's eyes widened, and she pulled a knife, Samantha sat on the counter island and made a come-hither motion. "C'mon sweetheart, I'd like to see you do it." She patted her chest. "You take me out, and you're never getting home. Understand half-pint?"

Eyes wide in defiance, Svala was about to step forward when the front door opened, and her mother's voice flooded the hallway. Samantha hopped down from the counter and smiled in greeting as Megan and Mema Angie joined them.

"How did it go, Mother." Svala looked Megan up and down thoroughly. "Have they fixed you? Can we go back to father now?"

"Not yet, but they will, Daughter." Megan smiled at them all, squeezed Sean's shoulder, then urged Svala to follow her outside. "Let's go talk so that you might better understand things."

Svala narrowed her eyes one last time at Samantha before she strode after her mother.

"She's such a—" Samantha started before Mema Angie cut her off.

"Not only is she a woman caught in an era she doesn't understand but she's the daughter of parents who are sick, perhaps dying." Mema Angie cast Samantha a stern look as she plunked down a folder labeled *Cancer Center of America*. "Remember that."

Samantha frowned and nodded. She might not like Svala, but she did like her parents.

"So what did the doctor say?" Sean asked. He frowned at the folder but didn't touch it.

Mema Angie put a hand over his in comfort. "With treatment, Megan has a good chance."

Samantha bit her lower lip and got busy making tea for Mema Angie. She knew what 'a good chance' meant, and there was nothing good about it.

"No, no, dear," Angie murmured and held up Samantha's wine cooler. "If you don't mind, I'd prefer one of these?"

"Absolutely!" Samantha hoped she sounded upbeat as she grabbed another. Yet as afternoon turned into evening and they went over the details of Megan's appointment, she barely touched her drink. None of them did.

Sean and Mema Angie had been staying at the house round the clock since Samantha, Megan and Svala arrived so Sam thought nothing of eventually saying, "Goodnight all, see you in the morning."

Three days had come and gone since she returned to the future yet as she lay in bed and stared at Cybil's photograph it felt like years. Did she miss her sister? Yes. Did she want to go back? Yes. But what bothered her most was that it wasn't for her sister.

No, it was for something else...or should she say, *someone*.

Bjorn.

But why?

He clearly wanted nothing to do with her, and typically she would feel the same way. Still. Something about him drew her. Maybe because she could empathize with him about his mom being sick. Or maybe it was because she felt responsible for his current distress. She had been in some sort of magically induced state and told him beforehand that he would wreak havoc because of what happened. That he would seek vengeance after his father ended up on his deathbed.

Samantha released a long breath and continued to stare at the picture. It depicted an angry sea and a deep purple sky at dawn. The clouds and water seemed to overlap, creating the visage of a sweeping dragon that roared toward land. She pressed her palm to her forehead and closed her eyes but the dragon was always there. And she knew who it was...*he* was.

Bjorn.

She had no idea how she knew but didn't doubt it was him for a second. For some reason, Cybil had captured images of dragons in nature that tied in with men from the past. Viking men. The Sigdir's. She just *knew* it.

But she sure as hell didn't want it...or him.

As usual, she tossed and turned all night, unable to sleep. The next morning, she watched the sun rise over the Atlantic from beneath the old ash tree. She looked up through its seemingly normal branches and tried to see what her sister had seen. Cybil. Her oldest and favorite sister. A mystery until recently.

Until she learned they were all half dragon.

And that Cybil was a prophet amongst other things.

The tree, a Yggdrasill, was brought to life by Kjar, a demi-god who was family to the Sigdir's. He had created it to connect his world with theirs. A gateway between Cybil and her new man, Heidrek. It was only supposed to be a means for Heidrek to warn Cybil and her sisters away. To keep them safe. But Unfortunately, Kjar didn't know the most important fact about Cybil. And that changed everything. Like Heidrek and Kjar, she was also a demi-god. So instead of keeping them all separated, the tree became a conduit between then and now.

Between tenth-century Scandinavia and modern-day Maine.

Samantha still had no idea how it worked. Better yet, how she had tapped into it and was able to transport people through it. Because as of right now, she was the only one able to do such a thing.

She rubbed her hip when her tattoo warmed.

"Your tattoo's been bothering you since we arrived, hasn't it?" Megan said as she handed her a cup of coffee and sat down beside her.

Samantha shrugged and thanked her. "On and off. Nothing major."

Apparently, Sam's tattoo was a depiction of a Gungnir, a sword given to Odin by Loki. She had been dreaming about the symbol to the point of distraction. So she decided to get it out of her mind and onto her body. After that, no more dreams. Peace.

Until now.

Megan considered her. "I think we both know that tattoo means something. That it's somehow linked to all of this." She squeezed Sam's hand. "Just like you are."

"I know," Samantha murmured, grateful for Megan's comfort yet troubled by the connection between the tat and her strange, blossoming abilities. "But it doesn't seem like it's a good thing..." Her gaze went to Megan. "Except for being able to get you here. That was good."

When Sam first traveled back in time and again when she had transported Megan here, the tat burned something fierce. So she knew it possessed magic. It also burned before she told Bjorn

he would seek vengeance because of his father. According to Cybil, her exact words were, "*Vengeance, terrible vengeance. Sought by a Viking King's son over a broken heart.*"

That sounded pretty damn ominous.

Now the tattoo was warming on and off again, and she had no clue why.

"I'm grateful to be here, but I worry about you, Samantha," Megan murmured. "You've changed since we first met. You've become more distracted. Less...enthusiastic."

She liked Megan and the friendship they'd formed. The woman was remarkably insightful and easy to talk to.

"You're worried about *me*? Please don't be. I'm okay." Sam shook her head. "You need to focus on you and getting better. We need to focus on that because I'll be there every step of the way to help."

"That's kind of you to say but what about your life?" Megan smiled. "What about your career and all the newly divorced people you could help?"

"They'll just have to manage," Sam said. "Thanks to Jackie's inheritance, I don't need to worry about money. So I can focus on being here for you."

As it turned out, Jackie was a family friend who traveled back in time to medieval Scotland and fell in love. In league with Grant MacLomain, or Grant Hamilton depending on who you asked, she had left Cybil and her sisters an astounding inheritance as part of a plan to lead them to this house and hopefully keep them safe from what lay ahead.

"You're sweet," Megan said. "But I don't think you're truthful with yourself, Samantha."

She frowned. "What do you mean?"

Megan eyed her for a moment before she said, "Since you arrived at the Fortress with my son, I sensed something was off. And I didn't know you in the least." She squeezed her hand again. "But I do know him. When he returned with you, he was different, and I soon learned why. It was because of you, Samantha."

Before Sam could respond, Megan continued. "Bjorn has never watched a woman so much...so closely, as he did you. It was unusual for him," she said softly. "Then you changed as well. You went from dancing, smiling and interacting with my people to spending endless hours alone watching the mountains behind our Fortress after Bjorn vanished up there."

Sam tore her eyes from Megan's and looked out over the sea, surprised she had observed so much considering her husband was on his deathbed. But then she had been a queen for a long time, and this *was* her only son they were talking about.

"I'm not sure what came over me," Sam said honestly. "He just seemed so sad over..." Her eyes slid to Megan, and she shook her head. "Never mind. You don't need to worry about any of that right now." She patted her knee and worked at a smile. "It's time to focus on positive thoughts and getting you better."

"It's okay to say Bjorn is sad over his father's illness. Because he is. We all are." Megan studied Samantha's face. "And it's okay to say you're worried about Bjorn. Because I am too."

Sam swallowed, confused by the emotions that washed over her. Confused by her increasing desire to return to the past to make sure he was all right. To make sure he hadn't vanished into the mountains never to return.

"I don't understand my draw to him," she whispered more to herself than to Megan. "Maybe it's guilt after all."

"No, it's not guilt," Megan said, having heard what happened on Mt. Galdhøpiggen and Samantha's strange, prophetic warning meant for Bjorn. She tilted Sam's chin until their eyes

met. "It is something else, Samantha. My guess is it's a connection between your dragons...between your hearts."

"What?" Samantha whispered before her eyes widened. "No." She shook her head and pulled away. "Definitely not." No way, no how. She stood as heat flared beneath her skin and red skirted the corners of her vision. "Sorry, I'm sure he's great, but he's just not my type."

She felt like she was about to go up in flames so she headed to the end of the dock, plunked down and dipped her feet in the cool water. Shortly after, she heard a splash and Megan swam past.

"Come take a swim with me." Megan smiled as she lay on her back and floated. "The water's wonderful."

"It's a little chilly. You shouldn't," Sam started but Megan cut her off.

"Shouldn't what?" Megan asked. "Be happy? Find contentment?"

"That's not what I meant." Sam splashed water over her legs, hotter than ever. "I just worry about...you know..."

"Samantha," Megan said, surprisingly lighthearted. "I have aggressive cancer. I'm sick. Very sick. You can say it because it exists." She closed her eyes and floated. "You said I should focus on positive things so I am. This is the first time I've swum in the Atlantic in years, and it feels amazing. Come join me."

Sam *had* said that. Not to mention she was ridiculously hot. To hell with it. She stood, pulled off her bathing suit cover-up and dove in. The water felt like sweet Heaven. Like relief from a sunburn. When she surfaced, Megan was still floating with her eyes closed and a smile on her face.

So Samantha did the same.

A few blissful minutes passed as she basked in the coolness of the salty water and gentle waves.

Eventually, Megan spoke, her voice soft. "I like you, Samantha. Very much. So I will tell you why you were so hot after we spoke. I will begin teaching you about *what* you are."

When Sam looked at her, Megan still floated, but her eyes were open.

"You mean...about the dragon," Sam said.

"Yes, the dragon," Megan replied. "The one inside of you, that is a part of you."

Sometimes it was easy to forget that though Megan was only human, her husband and children were dragon-shifters. She had raised, loved and understood them.

Samantha still found it difficult to wrap her mind around the fact that she herself *was* one. She had always known she was different. Unique. Something unusual. But half-dragon? That pretty much blew her away.

Yet she had no choice but to accept it.

That became blatantly obvious after what she had witnessed in Scandinavia.

"Okay," Sam finally relented. "I don't run from things, and I don't intend to start now so tell me why I was so hot a minute ago. Because it happens often. Not quite as bad but still."

"All right." Megan dipped her head beneath the water then started floating again. "Is it safe to say you've always been a night owl, Samantha?"

Sam didn't have to give it a second thought. "Yes, but what does that have to do with being hot?"

"The sun." Megan's gaze swept over her. "Your skin's very fair, and your hair is red, so the sun is not your friend. Therefore it stands to reason your dragon prefers night to day. Anything to get away from solar rays."

Well, that made sense. The sun had never done her any favors. She went from white to red then back to white again. Forget a nice, sexy tan. Her skin was all about how many freckles it could gather.

"You are stunning, Samantha," Megan said, almost as if she could read her thoughts. "And I imagine your dragon will be too."

Her dragon...a creature that would reflect her looks? "I noticed Cybil's dragon was closer to the shade of her eyes when she shifted, but everyone else's seemed to match their hair color. Why is that?"

"It varies from dragon to dragon. Though more common, their coloring does not always match their hair. As to Cybil, she is unique regardless," Megan said. "Special in ways I suspect we don't even know about yet." Her eyes stayed with Sam's. "Good ways. *Strong* ways. So do not worry."

"It's hard not to worry about her," Sam said. "Or any of my sisters for that matter."

"I understand," Megan said. "But I also connect with Cybil and can tell you with assurance that she will be okay. She has a good heart and an inner strength that will protect her well. And she has an astounding man who will always stand by her side."

"Right," she murmured. "Heidrek."

She hadn't known him long, but she liked the new king. He seemed to treat everyone well and unquestionably loved the heck out of Cybil. Sam smiled as she recalled the way he looked at her sister. The absolute worship and devotion in his eyes. Cybil deserved that. She had spent her life devoid of love protecting her sisters from what they were. *Dragons*.

In fact, to this day, she and Cybil were the only ones out of their five sisters who actually *knew* what they were. But she couldn't focus on that right now. Honestly, how was she ever going to tell Lauren of all people that she was half dragon? Her prissy, stiff, stuck-up sister might actually crack. Because God knows she was overdue to totally lose it. How else could it be considering she had yet to acknowledge she was served with divorce papers six months ago.

"Your fair coloring is not the only reason you grew so hot just now," Megan said. "Because that alone would not make you feel like you were going up in flames."

Samantha's eyes shot to hers. "How did you know it felt that strong?"

Megan touched the corner of her eye then tread water. "I think you know, Samantha."

"You can call me Sam," she said, trying to detour the conversation even though she wanted answers. "Everybody else does."

"Okay, Sam," Megan acknowledged. "If it will make you feel more comfortable with this conversation."

"I'm not uncomfortable."

"Sure you are," Megan said. "Because your dragon eyes came out when you spoke about my son. And you know that only happens when you feel very passionate about something or someone."

Samantha thought about the endless times she'd hidden her eyes from her family and even Rick over the years. Her douche bag ex. "Okay, busted," Sam admitted. "My eyes get a little crazy when I'm overly emotional. And in Bjorn's case, it's because I feel like I somehow caused his distress." She frowned and started treading water as well. "I wish I could undo what I said. Hell, I wish I could remember even saying it."

"You will eventually. When you come into and embrace your dragon," Megan said, compassion in her eyes. "Until then, you must not grow angry when things don't make sense."

Trust it. Know that your dragon has your best interest at heart which means it will protect those in your inner circle first and foremost.”

“My inner circle?” She frowned in confusion. “But I just met Bjorn.”

“And yet your dragon was already connecting with him at Galdhøpiggen’s peak.”

“How do you know it was my dragon?”

The corner of Megan’s mouth curled up. “Because you were in a place of great power. Had it been anything else controlling you, Kjar and his wife, Aella would’ve known.”

“Yet we’re facing an evil demi-god dragon enemy more powerful than any other,” Sam reminded. “What’s to say he wasn’t somehow influencing me?”

“Not in the heart of the seers’ home.” Megan shook her head. “Not at the heart of Mt. Galdhøpiggen.”

“Fine then. But if I feel passionate about Bjorn it’s only because I think I wronged him,” Sam reiterated.

“You didn’t wrong him,” Megan said. “You just told him something nobody would want to hear.”

“And that sucked.”

“I can imagine,” Megan said. “But it’s not why you grew so heated before.”

Sam tried not to get aggravated. Megan didn’t need that. “Care to share?”

A wistful look entered Megan’s eyes. “Do you really want to know?”

“I do.”

“Okay.” Megan pointed to her eye again, treading water with one hand. “It was the way your dragon pupil flared.” The corner of her lip hitched up. “It wasn’t just responding to passionate emotions but to arousal.”

“Say what?” Sam managed, mortified that Bjorn’s *mother* had just said that. “Nope, I don’t think so. Sorry, but like I said—”

“I know. He’s great but not your type,” Megan said, a twinkle in her eyes. “Yet I know you have two eyes in your head.”

“And two ears,” Sam kicked in. “No offense but your son doesn’t say much. And when he does, it’s pretty stern...and grumpy.”

“True,” Megan conceded, the twinkle not fading in the least. “But what about your two eyes?”

“What about them?” Sam fought a grin. “The last I heard, they were busy being dragon-like.”

“So you find Bjorn unattractive then?”

“He’s handsome enough I suppose,” she allowed. “But too...” She envisioned his beard, those cobalt blue eyes, that stern brow, and then his thick black hair. “Hairy.” Sam touched her chin. “No offense, but I’m more into a clean-shaven face.”

“Ah.” Megan grinned. “So you’re wondering what he looks like beneath all that hair, are you?”

“No.” Yes.

“You could try to ask him to shave next time you see him,” Megan said, a wistful almost sad look in her eyes. “I’ve always said, the first woman who reveals my son’s face after all these years will be the woman meant for him.”

“Why is he so determined to hide his face?”

Megan was about to answer when she started coughing. Though she tried to hide it, there was no missing the fear in her eyes. Alarmed, Sam closed the distance. “Are you okay?”

“Yes,” Megan gasped, struggling for air as she worked to stay afloat.

“No, you’re not.” Sam didn’t think twice but wrapped her arms under Megan’s armpits and started toward shore. “Just relax, okay? I’ll get you to where you can stand.”

A splash resounded from behind them, and in an instant, Svala was there. “Mother,” she said, her voice firm yet panicky as she helped Sam. “What has happened?”

Megan tried to respond but only coughed more. By the time they got her to shore, she was coughing up blood into her hand.

Confused, Svala looked at the blood on her mother’s hand, completely clueless about how to handle the situation.

Seconds later, Sean strode into the water and scooped up Megan. “I’ve got you, sweetheart,” he murmured and headed for the house. “Get a warm cloth and a glass of water,” he said over his shoulder to anyone listening.

“What are you doing with my mother.” Svala stormed after him, pulling out several daggers.

Sam rolled her eyes and rushed to do as Sean asked, fairly convinced the Viking woman wouldn’t stab him quite yet. Even so, she made quick work of gathering everything and grabbed a butcher knife for defense before she headed upstairs. By the time she joined them, Sean was tucking Megan into bed. Sam handed him the cloth, and he wiped it gently over Megan’s mouth then cleaned her bloody hand.

Meanwhile, Svala, the utter twit, stood with her weapons ready and her eyes wild.

“What did you do to her out there?” Svala said, loathing in her eyes when they met Samantha’s. “You caused this.” She eyed her up and down. “How?”

“Stop blaming Sam for something she didn’t do, Svala,” Sean said softly, holding Megan’s hand as her eyes slid shut. He didn’t bother to look at her uptight daughter. “Your mother explained to you what was going on with her yesterday.”

“She explained that this sickness is in her lungs,” Svala said. “But that it would not hurt her. She would conquer it.” She gestured with disgust at the bloody rag. “Yet this wound hurts her.”

“Of course, it hurts her,” Samantha spat and sat on the other side of Megan. “She has stage three lung cancer. That’s no joke, dimwit.”

“Enough, Sam,” Sean murmured. “Svala’s just—”

“Svala’s just what?” Megan’s daughter interrupted. Her deep blue eyes were wide on Sean then Samantha. “You both think I am not smart. That I do not understand my mother’s condition or the medicine needed to cure her. But I do. And now I realize it will not help her...nothing will.” She puffed up and narrowed her eyes. “As I knew all along, she should have come sooner but was too much of a coward.”

Before Sam could respond, and it was going to be nasty, Svala stormed off.

“That girl seriously needs a reality check,” she said under her breath.

“A reality you’ve already lived and have a better understanding of,” Sean reminded gently. “Don’t forget that.”

Sam scowled. “You’re starting to sound like Mema Angie.”

Sean shrugged, his sad gaze on Megan’s face. “She’s right, Sam. Svala’s been raised in a culture far different than ours. One less advanced.” His eyes met hers and he took her hand. “Let’s cut her a break, okay?”

She might not like to admit it, but he was right.

“Yeah, okay,” she mumbled. “Just keep an eye on her, Sean. She’ll stab you in the back before you see it coming. And I don’t mean that figuratively.”

He nodded. “No worries, I’ll be okay.”

That was the last they spoke of it as they took shifts watching over Megan until Sean went to work. When Mema Angie returned in the early evening, she helped out too. She might be pushing seventy, but the woman had the energy of someone far younger as she whipped up dinner for Sam then saw to other things as well.

"Go get some rest," she told Sam around eleven PM. Sam had dozed off on the couch, her plate of food barely touched.

"I'll watch over Megan through the night," Angie assured.

"But you were up all day," Sam argued. "Wake me at midnight, and I'll take over."

"I'll wake you if I need you," Mema Angie consented, ushering her upstairs. "And no sooner."

"But—"

"No buts." Angie moved her right along. "Sleep."

"Okay, okay," Sam said as she plunked down on her bed. "Thank you."

"Anytime." Mema Angie closed the door, murmuring, "Sleep well, darling."

Wiped out, Samantha didn't bother changing out of her clothes but shut off the light and laid down. As always, her eyes went to the picture...the dragon. Sad and frustrated with her circumstances, she closed her eyes.

Seconds later, her tattoo didn't just warm but burned like a fire poker, and she shot straight up. Thunder rumbled, and lightning flashed as the pain intensified. Sam bit her lip hard and whimpered as she stumbled from her bedroom and down the stairs. Everything was dark so she assumed Mema Angie was in with Megan. Maybe some aspirin and medicinal tat cream might help. She clenched her hip and winced. Dear God, *anything*.

By the time she made it to the kitchen, she was in so much pain she skipped the other stuff and went straight for the Tequila. Bottle tipped back, she chugged it before a light flashed and caught her attention. By the time she lowered the bottle her eyes were wide. She couldn't be seeing clearly.

Could she?

But she knew she was as she leaned against the counter, gripped her hip and stared out at the ash tree...the Yggdrasill. There was no missing what she saw there. Her tattoo, the Gungnir, was carved into the entire length of the trunk and glowed brightly. But believe it or not, that's not what shocked her the most.

Nope. It was that Bjorn stood beside it. And he was angry.

Samantha would never know what came over her when her eyes locked with his. He might be outside, at least fifty feet away, but she saw him clearly. And she was suddenly raging mad. Or maybe she had been all along.

His father had been on his deathbed, yet Bjorn couldn't be bothered to go to his side. His mother had been heartbroken and ill, yet still no Bjorn. He'd been nothing less than a coward.

Tequila bottle still in hand, she stomped outside, crossed the wide deck and headed his way. "What are you doing here?" she shouted and flung out her hand. "Go away!"

Bjorn said nothing, just remained stoic as usual.

"Damn you," she muttered and ignored the blinding pain of her tattoo. "Go away!"

Furious with his lack of response she kept going, barely noticing that the Gungnir grew brighter and brighter. All she could see was Bjorn.

The hard set to his chin.

The unbending look in his eyes.

Then she saw something else altogether. Something out of her worst nightmare. A vision she couldn't escape. Cybil was being taken, hurt and there was no chance to save her. *Screw that.* Sam didn't think but raced forward.

Only when it was too late did she realize she'd run right into a trap.

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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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