

The MacLomain Series
Viking Ancestors



Boxed Set
By
Sky Purington

Viking King

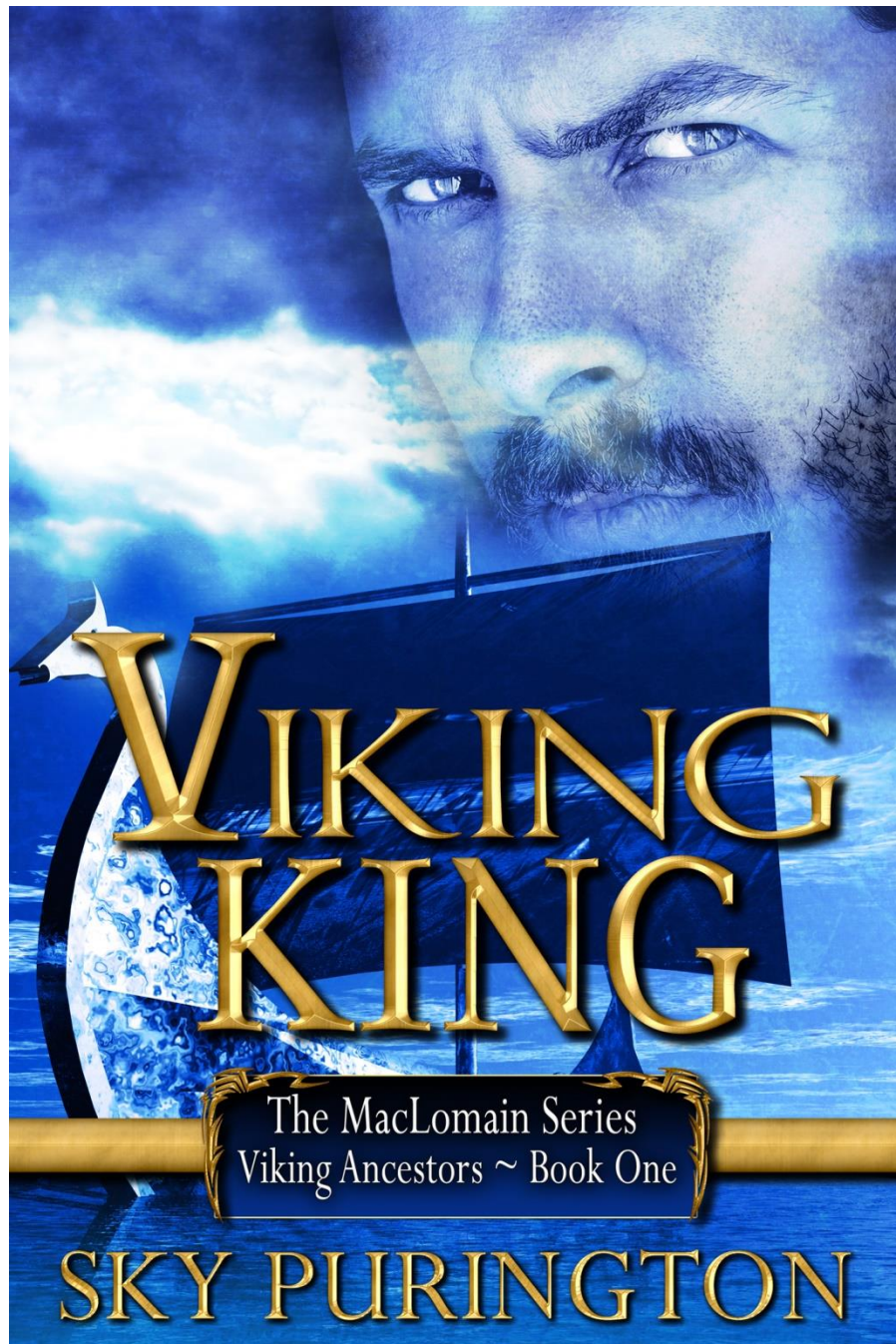


The MacLomain Series-Viking Ancestors

Book One

By

Sky Purington



CHAPTER ONE



Winter Harbor, Maine

2014

MID-OCTOBER NEVER held so much appeal. Some might say it was the picturesque sunset splashing over Frenchman Bay at high tide. Others might say it was the riotous autumn colors surrounding her house. Or, those who knew her best might guess it was the nearly finished boat in her garage.

They would all be wrong.

Megan sat down at her sturdy oak desk. She didn't bother with the view of the rocky, windswept shoreline beyond multiple floor-to-ceiling windows. Instead, she plunked her feet on the desk, took a sip of icy cold locally brewed beer and eyed something she hoped would shed light on a mystery.

"Is that what I think it is?"

So Veronica made it after all. She hadn't heard the front door open. Megan looked at the clock. Five forty-five. "I gave up on you hours ago."

"You give up on everyone who's a few minutes late," her sister pointed out as she strolled over, heels clicking on the hardwood floor.

"Hours late," Megan muttered.

"Hug hello then?" Veronica prompted.

Megan hugged her sister. "Good to see you. Wine's in the fridge." Then she looked down and frowned. "You're not in New York anymore. Lose the stilettos."

Veronica blew her salon-perfect bangs out of her eyes. "That'll be the day."

Never had three women been more different than her and her sisters. Not to say she didn't love them. She did. With all her heart. But right now she was regretting having them up for the week. A *whole* week. What was she thinking? Yet when she'd made these plans, she didn't know she'd be getting ahold of this manuscript. Or most of it. For some reason, parts were missing.

"You never answered my question." Veronica headed for the kitchen. "Is that stack of papers what I think it is?"

Megan quickly pocketed the item her sister clearly had not seen. "Sure is."

Veronica arched a delicately plucked eyebrow as she poured a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. "I'm always amazed at how many connections you have. Not easy getting manuscripts like that pre-publication."

Before semi-retiring, Megan had a knack at investing in real estate and currently owned various properties and businesses all the way from Manhattan to upstate Maine. Now thirty, she was an exceptionally wealthy woman. Which, thankfully, allowed her considerable time to do what she loved best...boat building.

Realizing it was unlikely she'd get more details about the origins of the manuscript, Veronica continued. "Have you heard from Cadence?"

"No." Megan frowned and took another sip. Cadence was a close friend who had vanished a few months ago. All she left behind were legal papers granting the ownership of her bookstore to Megan. That was the sole reason she was determined to get her hands on this manuscript. The

agent behind its publisher was none other than Cadence's sister, Leslie. Not only that but Cadence had been a ghostwriter for this book after her cousin, McKayla, its author, *also* disappeared.

"How did it go when you went to see Leslie?" Veronica asked, thumbing through the manuscript.

"Dead end." Megan put a hand on the papers and shook her head. "Leslie knew nothing. In fact, she's living in the old New Hampshire colonial alone now. Or should I say family free."

Veronica cocked her head in question.

Megan shoved her hands in the pockets of her hoodie and clucked her tongue. "She's got a Scotsman living with her."

"Scotsman?" Veronica mouthed.

"Mm-hmm. Tall, really good-looking. Brogue so thick I barely understood a word he said." She curled up the corner of her lips. "But I didn't miss the looks he and Leslie exchanged when I was drilling her about Cadence."

"What kind of looks?"

"Like they knew a whole lot more than what they were saying."

"Ah." Veronica eyed the manuscript. "And naturally she doesn't know you have this."

"Nope."

"Again, how *do* you have it?"

"Like you said, I have connections."

"Have you read much of it yet?"

Megan pulled her hair out of its ponytail to rewrap it. "Bits and pieces."

Extremely interesting bits and pieces.

Bone-chilling in fact.

"Allow me." Veronica took the hair tie, shook her head and pulled back the thick, unruly curls. "I know I've said it before, but women would pay thousands for your hair."

Megan grumbled under her breath and started flipping through the papers. Her hair was a curse. Golden with wisps of white blond, it had a mind of its own. All it needed to spread its frazzled wings was a humid day. "The gods only know why I was given this mess when I've a love for the sea."

"Right, your Norse gods." Veronica chuckled. "I'll bet they've already labeled you a Valkyrie. All crazy warrior woman with the wild hair."

Megan sighed. Her sister tried, but she'd never gotten the hang of Norse mythology. "The Valkyrie chose who would and wouldn't live after battle. Those who were lucky enough to go on to Valhalla. Not so much warriors themselves."

"Either way." Veronica tied up her hair with one fluid motion. "There. Gorgeous as always."

"Says the part-time model." But Megan grinned. She wasn't the jealous type. Her looks got her by when she needed them to.

"And this coming from our infamous tigress," Veronica admonished.

"Ugh. Going to grab some candles. There's a storm brewing."

Megan shook her head and went upstairs. Her sisters had taken to calling her tigress years ago for two reasons. The first, her cut-throat, my-way-or-the-highway attitude in business. The second, her almost unnatural eye color. Most men had trouble holding her gaze. Like her locks, they were golden. In truth, they were pale chestnut mixed with even lighter tones. Some called them wild, untamed eyes.

No matter, nowadays she wasn't overly worried about holding any man's gaze, nor did she particularly care what they thought of her. Married once. Divorced. Done. She dated on occasion but was by no means looking for Mr. Forever. That boat had sailed.

"Oh, you got the manuscript!"

By the time Megan made it back downstairs, her sister Amber was already leafing through it.

"Hey, sis." Megan spaced out candles on the wide mantle.

Amber instantly wrapped her up in a heartfelt hug, words warm. "Good to see you. Sorry I'm so late."

Veronica was already on the massive suede couch, legs curled under her and wine glass in hand. "It wouldn't be you otherwise, sweetie."

"You should talk." Megan lit the candles.

Amber's multi-layered chocolate brown eyes flashed at Megan. "Traffic."

"Sure." Megan shrugged. "Just glad you both got here before the bad weather."

Veronica pointed one long fingernail at the window. "Doesn't look it."

"Trust me. It's coming."

"If Megan says it is then it is." Amber headed for the kitchen. "She's never been wrong."

Megan grabbed her beer, the manuscript and sat on the opposite facing couch. After a quick sip, she set aside her drink and started thumbing through the pages. The truth was she'd already looked through it once. While she found it interesting that Cadence and Leslie's names were used in the book, it didn't explain in the least her disappearance. Maybe the missing pieces did.

"I couldn't help but notice there are several Scottish heroes in that," Veronica mentioned. "Interesting considering Leslie now has a Scotsman living with her."

Amber spoke from the kitchen island dividing the open-concept living area. "Does she really? That aside, was she able to shed further light on Cadence's disappearance?"

"Negative." Megan kept leafing through. "The whole thing's fishy."

"Well, if Leslie isn't concerned then you shouldn't be either." Wine in hand, Amber sat next to Megan. "So what's this book about anyway?"

"Time travel. Fantasy. Modern day women traveling back to medieval Scotland."

"Not really your cup of tea, eh?"

"Actually, some of it is," Veronica said softly.

Megan met her eyes. "You were busy while I was upstairs."

"Enough to figure out there was a Viking in there."

"Ohhh." Amber grinned, eyes twinkling and dark brown hair glistening beneath the recessed lighting. "Pray tell?"

Where Veronica was the willowy one with perfect lines, Amber was the one that dripped sensuality. Slender but curvier than her sisters, Amber attracted all men, young and old. And she adored every last one of them. Where Veronica made an enviable living magazine modeling, Amber was the struggling artist with an unequivocal talent at painting and playing numerous instruments.

Amber tapped Megan on the shoulder. "Still waiting."

Right. Vikings.

While she might have an unmatched admiration for Norse shipwright skills, it was purely in a non-fictional sense. A Viking in a manuscript held no interest for her.

Not really.

“The Viking’s just a character in a nonsensical book,” Megan answered. “And we never actually meet him. He’s just a picture in a tapestry and then a voice in one of the heroine’s head.”

“Well, well,” Veronica said. “Sounds like you’ve had time to really look through this.”

No. Not until she realized there was a Norseman in it. Then she’d just skimmed looking for him.

Naðr Véurr.

She’d never heard of such a name so looked it up...nearly a year ago.

“Serpent protector,” Veronica murmured.

When Megan’s brows shot up, Veronica held up her cell phone. “Googled it.”

“Serpent protector?” Amber grinned. “Now that *does* sound fantastical.”

“And he’s a king,” Veronica’s lips hovered over the edge of her glass as she eyed Megan. “He definitely sounds like your kind of guy.”

“Very funny,” she said dryly and continued looking through the book. Her sister, of course, was referring to the type of man Megan typically attracted...or at least had before she tucked herself away in Winter Harbor. “They were just the sort who ran in my circles. Now it’s all about fishermen.”

“Quite the leap,” Veronica shook her head. “From power hungry men to—”

“Decent, hardworking men who wouldn’t rip your throat out to get ahead,” Megan interrupted.

“Or heart out,” Amber murmured. “How is Nathan?”

“I’d imagine he’s sitting in his high-rise office looking down on the rest of us little people.”

“I read he’s buying up a lot of marinas between Massachusetts and here,” Veronica’s deep green eyes watched Megan closely. Some might think her stunning features meant a dull mind, but few were as brilliant as her statuesque sister.

“So it seems,” Megan said.

Her ex-husband was ridiculously successful, his handsome face splashed in the newspaper far too often. She’d always had a certain type, and he fit the bill. Tall, chiseled, driven and in-control. But those were back in the days when she’d preferred Dom Perignon and black-tie affairs to a cold beer and good, down-to-earth company at the local bar.

Back when getting ahead was more important than pursuing her dreams.

“Well I think a fictional Viking king sounds much better than that jackass any day of the week,” Amber announced.

Megan raised her beer. “Heck yeah.”

Yet Veronica wasn’t quite ready to join the party train. “I also read that Nathan bought a monster of a house across the bay in Bar Harbor.”

Megan buried a growl in a swig.

“Not surprising,” Amber said. “We all know he’s not good at rejection. Still.” She frowned at Megan. “I can’t say I like this move considering it’s been three years since you left him. What gives?”

“He’s just reminding her that he’s still around,” Veronica narrowed her eyes. “But be careful nonetheless, honey. No offense because you married him, but there’s always been a little something off about that one.”

That was an understatement.

Nathan was nothing less than a hedonistic, borderline sadistic bastard. Though he’d never hit her, there was a darkness in him that simmered just beneath the surface. Add in the whole total

lack of fidelity thing, and she'd be fine with never crossing paths with him again. So it was best not to waste time thinking about him when there were better things to contemplate.

Out of instinct, she clasped the stone in her pocket and wondered at the symbols carved into either side of its flat surface. On one side, a Spirit Ship. A Norse symbol often referred to as the Ship of the Slain. It represented the journey to the afterlife. The picture itself very much resembled a Viking longship. On the other side, a Vegvisir. A Viking rune stave, it was a magical device used to aid in sea navigation.

"Alrighty, why don't we lose the negative talk and focus on food." Amber's full lips quirked when she looked at Megan. "Our local hottie still deliver lobster to your front door?"

"I already told Sean to stop by with his usual." Megan snorted. "I'm sure he knew the minute you drove into town."

Sean was not only Megan's best friend and fellow devotee of all things nautical but was also her sister's part-time fling when she visited. Smitten since he met her; Sean would no doubt weather the dangerous waters off central Nova Scotia during a category five hurricane to spend time with Amber.

"Should I get my phone?" Megan asked.

"Nah." Amber winked. "I got this."

"So Cadence going M.I.A. remains unsolved because that manuscript can in no way, shape or form explain it." Veronica finished off her wine and went for a refill. "Are we all in agreement with that?"

"I can't say either way as I've yet to read it," Amber reminded. A wide smile split her face as a text came through. "Look at that. Sean's here."

Megan couldn't contain a small grin as her sister bounded toward the door. Men didn't love her sister because she played hard to get. No. They loved her because she never for a second held back exactly how she felt, which as it turned out was always rather lustful.

Sean had no sooner walked in the front door with an armful of bags when Amber threw her arms around him and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. Meanwhile, Megan took the bags from her discombobulated but very happy friend.

Veronica laughed and gave him a quick hug after Amber let go. "Good to see you, Sean."

"Same to you," he grinned at Amber, "both."

Tall and rugged, Sean had the bearings of a boat captain and the charm of a rock. Bless him, but charisma wasn't his thing. Gruff and handsome in a sea-weathered way, he'd been born to live life off the choppy shores of Maine and would likely die here. The same age as her, fine lines already stemmed out from the corners of his golden-flecked green eyes. But she always suspected it was his haunted gaze and the light layer of stubble forever on his square jaw that attracted Amber. The artist in her sister was endlessly drawn...especially to those she surmised might need saving.

A lot of good that did those in need when she left...because she always did.

Amber didn't do dependable.

That was Megan's forte.

"You already cooked them." Megan pulled out the lobsters and plopped them into a pan. "Nice."

"Yeah well, I knew you were having company." He hung his coat, eyes never leaving Amber. "Brought Mema Angie's homemade apple pie too."

"Sweet. Hand-picked apples I'll bet."

“Yup.” Sean made himself at home and set to lighting a fire on the hearth. Thunder rumbled in the distance. “Storm’s nearly here.”

Megan nodded and pulled more items out of the bag. “Oh! She made her potato salad too.”

“Anything for you, Sea Siren.” Sean lit the fire then returned. “Beer?”

“You bet.” She tossed him one. “See what I did to our boat?”

“*Your* boat.” His eyes warmed. “No. Show me later.”

“Though it’s sexy as hell, are you gonna wear that wool Beanie all night?” Amber said, voice an octave lower than normal as she eyed his hat.

Sean twisted off the beer cap and took a long swig, eyes never leaving her. “Depends, sweetheart. You want me to?”

Amber sidled over next to him and fingered the material. “I think maybe I do.”

“Even if he’s sweating his ass off in it?” Veronica echoed from the couch.

“True. I don’t want you sweating too much.” Amber trailed a finger down his arm. “Yet.”

Sean’s arm snaked around her lower back and pulled her against his side, promise in his eyes. “I’m looking forward to ‘yet.’”

“Me too,” she murmured, hiding behind her ridiculously thick eyelashes.

Megan chuckled. “Feel free to get ‘yet’ out of the way now so we can all enjoy each other’s company.”

Veronica nodded. “Agreed.”

Amber waved away their suggestion. “Half the fun is in all those moments leading up to ‘yet’ right?” She pulled him toward the couch. “Come. Sit. Let’s catch up.”

“And that’s my cue to help *you* out,” Veronica said as she joined Megan in the kitchen.

“Right.” Megan nodded at the cabinet. “Plates.” Then at the drawer. “Forks and lobster crackers in there.”

“So how are you doing sis?” Veronica set four plates on the island, sharp eyes swinging her way. “Really.”

“Let’s not talk about Nathan again.”

“I wasn’t referring to your ex.” Her eyes swept over Megan’s gorgeous house then out onto the bay. “I mean this life of seclusion you’ve chosen.”

“It’s not *that* secluded.” She pulled out a stack of napkins and frowned. “I’ve made good friends and keep busy.”

“But it’s so different than how you lived before,” Veronica argued softly. “So different than *who* you are.”

“Actually, it’s better. Before I was unhappy. Now I’m happy.” She met her sister’s eyes. “Sort of like you modeling when you have a law degree.”

“Bad comparison.”

“Is it?” Megan grabbed forks while Veronica pulled out lobster crackers. “I did one thing to make money but always loved another thing. You model to make money, but your great love has always been defending those without much money. Which, by the way, won’t make you much money either. So how are we different except that I’ve pursued my ultimate goal?”

“As long as I’m young enough I might as well keep making money,” Veronica said.

“Pfft.” Megan shook her head. “You already co-own one of the top magazines in New York and have made tons of money modeling. You’re in a good enough financial position to make a career move. If for some reason you’re not, I’ll give you the money.”

Veronica looked as though she’d been slapped. “You’ll do no such thing.”

Before she could respond, her sister started setting the table. The oldest of the three, it wouldn't be the first time Megan helped out her sisters financially. Whereas before Veronica may have accepted such an offer, things had changed over the past few years. Her sense of self-worth and pride had grown tremendously. Amber, on the other hand, had no issues 'borrowing' money on occasion.

If Megan had her way, she'd have both sisters set up in their dream homes doing whatever they liked for a living. She'd always made that clear. So when she joined Veronica at the table, she said, "Sorry, didn't mean to..."

When she trailed off, Veronica met her eyes. "It's all good. Just not this week, okay?"

She nodded and said nothing more. Her sister had rebuilt her life since losing a child nearly eight years prior. And though immensely proud of how far she'd come, Megan still worried on occasion. Heartbreak like that never truly went away.

Another rumble of thunder shook the ground, and the lights flickered.

"Not much longer then," Sean murmured from the couch, his words loud enough but still tucked into Amber's ever-eager ear.

"Food's here and ready." Not about to force anyone away from their moments of happiness she grabbed a fresh beer, drawn butter and sat at the table. "Eat if you're in the mood."

Amber grinned over her shoulder. "Be right there."

Megan smiled as she cracked her lobster. Not so much for Amber but for Sean. While most best friends would say a girl who came and went was bad for him, her sister always put a smile on his face. And smiling wasn't something he often did. While she'd gotten aggravated with her sister in the past, they seemed to have an agreement. One that she'd learned to steer clear of.

"Let's eat while it's hot," Sean said, a steady grin on his face as he pulled Amber after him.

Now that was unusual. Typically, he'd do anything to keep her couch-bound.

Amber seemed to sense the shift as well because she pouted as they sat. Regardless, she was gracious. "Thanks for all of this, Sean." Her eyes met Megan's. "And for having me this week."

"No need to thank me." Megan smiled and nodded at the potato salad. "It's your favorite. Eat up."

The conversation became common and comfortable as they cracked their lobsters and ate. All the while, though, Megan's eyes flickered toward the manuscript on her desk.

While she understood the flow of the story, she still couldn't wrap her mind around the Viking king, Naðr Véurr. He belonged but didn't. The manuscript was based around a medieval clan called the MacLomains and their love connections, the Brouns. Yet in the midst of all that was a Viking who claimed he possessed the blood of a dragon.

A dragon.

Yes, the mythological creature could be connected with the Orient, British Isles and maybe even Scandinavia but it bothered her. She wanted him to be a simple Viking king. A strong man who stepped away from all the fantastical nonsense that seemed to lace the pages of what Leslie was calling *The MacLomain Series: Next Generation*. She wanted him to be a seafaring man not made of magic and odd creatures but of brawn and honor as history suggested of the Vikings. If a man as renowned as Naðr Véurr was in a book, shouldn't he be appreciated for what he truly was?

"And what is he again?"

"A man determined to win over my heart," Veronica said.

Megan blinked a few times. They weren't talking about her Viking king. Of course not. He didn't exist.

“And why is that?” Amber shook her head and shrugged. “Because he was good looking and said he’d make you a movie star.”

Veronica snapped her lobster claw so sharply juice squirted. “I only met the guy a few weeks ago and, by the way, I’ve no desire to be a movie star. *Please.*”

Amber rolled her eyes and arched a brow at the same time. “Of course not.”

Another clap of thunder rumbled, and the lights flickered again.

“I guess Thor is busy tonight,” Veronica said, eyes on Megan.

It had become a thing now. Her sisters had gone beyond teasing her for her love of Norse mythology and now often included it in conversations. While she usually thought it cute, tonight she was feeling edgy. About her sisters being here? Not really. About the incoming storm? Never. About the manuscript?

Definitely.

Sean nudged her elbow. “You okay?”

She met his eyes, calmed as always by his easy presence. “Yeah. Sure. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Here.” He plunked a few pieces of shucked lobster on her plate then grabbed her unshelled lobster. “Why don’t you relax and drink.”

Relax? Even he knew that was something she wasn’t good at. There was always something to get done. Mostly to do with her boat lately. “I can shuck my own lobster.”

“Sure.” The corner of his lip inched up a minuscule fraction. “But I can do it faster.”

Some things a girl couldn’t argue with. Offering a shrug, she leaned back and sipped her beer. Truth told, she wasn’t much in the mood for family, alcohol or good food but tried her best. And Sean knew it.

An hour later, they remained at the table. All of them had eaten and drank heartily but her.

“What’s the matter, sis,” Amber said, eyes concerned. “You’re not yourself.”

“Not in the least,” Veronica seconded.

Megan clenched her fist in her lap. They were right. She wasn’t. Something was niggling at her, and she couldn’t put her finger on it. Like a door hadn’t been closed. Or she’d forgotten to say thank you to someone. There was an uneasy feeling creeping up within her, and she simply couldn’t define it.

Sean handed her another beer. “You’ve barely touched the one you had. Drink a cold one and relax, okay?”

Was she tense?

Megan swigged the beer, eyes on the raging storm. The lights again flickered but didn’t go out. Soon, though. She could almost time it. “Two more minutes. Max.”

“Huh?” Amber started then stopped. “Right. Electricity. I forgot how well you had that figured out.”

“What?” she asked.

“The electricity.” Amber notched her chin down as she looked at her. “Megan, are you with us? You seem a little out of it.”

“She’s fine,” Sean muttered. “Just spooked.”

“Spooked?” Veronica frowned. “By what?”

“Nothing,” she assured.

Sean’s eyes narrowed, and he nodded out the window. “It’s back again.”

“Odin’s sacred bird,” she whispered.

Amber and Veronica looked out the window, eyes widening.

“Why is that huge bird sitting on your deck railing in the middle of this weather,” Veronica murmured.

“It’s a raven.” Megan shook her head and started clearing the dishes. “They’re getting confused lately. Climate change or something.”

“Climate change?” Amber helped her gather up the dishes, eyes to the window. “Sure. Fine. But that bird seems to be...”

A loud clap of thunder crashed overhead. The lights flickered then went out.

“Looking right at Megan,” Sean finished.

“Okay, I know you love Norse mythology and the Vikings sort of go hand and hand with your love for boats and the sea but,” Amber looked from the raven to Megan, “Am I missing something? Because this is sort of creepy.”

“No, it’s fine.” Megan turned to grab more plates. “It’s just the weather.”

Heavy gusts of wind blew yet the raven didn’t budge as it watched her.

The same couldn’t be said for the dozen or so ravens behind it.

Ping. Ping. Ping.

Birds started to slam into her windows in a rapid tangent.

God not again...

The ravens had come.

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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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