

FAR SIDE SEA

OF THE

BOOK THREE



REBECCA BURNWORTH

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*He replied, "Because you have so little faith.
Truly I tell you,
If you have faith as small as a mustard seed,
You can say to this mountain,
'Move from here to there,'
And it will move.
Nothing will be impossible for you."*

—Matthew 17:20

PROLOGUE

The Village of Fjallby

*Somewhere within the boundaries of medieval Scandinavia
(modern-day Norway), AD 807*

The mountains had grown cold, the snow on their tips thickening and waterfalls thinning with each passing day. Signs of winter crept down their steep cliffsides like spiders down a web, and still, Rúna's father had not returned.

Despite her worry, she kept herself busy, and while the rest of the village harvested apples or prepared for winter, Rúna worked on something far more important, at least to her: her father's gift, a woven tapestry depicting his ship sailing through the fjord to his yearly raids.

Streams of golden light poured through the door of their longhouse and onto her weaving, revealing rich threads of cobalt, emerald, and ruby that glistened under the sunlight. Clay weights clinked at her feet, releasing a chorus of bell-like sounds, and, lost in her work, Rúna hummed to the tune of them.

Taking a cobalt thread, she wove it through the tapestry and revealed gentle ripples under her father's ship. Once the thread was

through, Rúna glanced out her door and studied their mountains, determined to catch the way they sloped like a gateway into their fjord.

Her father often said the mountains around Fjallby were shaped by the gods to keep them safe—though from the stories her parents told, the gods did not seem at all interested in their safety.

The sun stretched into the sky, and still Rúna worked, oblivious to the outside world until a shadow caught her eye upon the fjord. Peering through her doorway, she saw crimson and white sails. A ship darted across the waters, and her heart leapt.

Faðir, she thought with a smile, and hurriedly, she grasped a large fur from nearby and draped it over her tapestry so he would not see it until its completion. Eager to greet him, she stoked their hearth, laid out blankets, and placed hot stones over the fire so she could grill some meat along with some flatbread to wrap it with. She knew from experience that the men always returned hungry and eager for a home-cooked meal.

Scurrying about the longhouse, she gathered some hulled barley and oats into a bread trough and poured water inside. She had just gotten to work kneading when she heard the pounding of horse hooves approaching.

“Rúna!” a woman’s voice called, growing ever nearer as the hooves came closer. “Rúna!”

A shadow passed over the doorway, and a woman with long charcoal hair stumbled inside.

“Anna?” Rúna asked.

The woman was out of breath, her eyes wide with panic as she dashed across the room, seized Rúna’s dough-caked hands, and

pulled her to the door.

“Anna, what is wrong?”

“No time! Come!”

Surprised, Rúna heard shouts from outside and caught the faintest smell of burning wood. Without an explanation, Anna dragged her into the light, and Rúna’s eyes fell upon two longships at the beach where her father’s should have been. Instead, a horde of unfamiliar men plowed through their village, setting multiple buildings alight and seizing the few people who had remained behind for the afternoon.

A screech echoed through the village, sharp and piercing, and a shadow passed overhead. Rúna tilted her gaze up and discovered a bird with feathers that glistened like copper in the afternoon sun.

“What is happening?” she asked, her limbs going numb as Anna dragged her to the horse and lifted her into the saddle. “Where is Móðir?”

“I am far faster than your mother.”

Men shouted as they caught sight of Rúna on the horse, and they sprinted across the village toward them. With little time to act, Anna smacked the horse’s rump right as two men seized her from behind. Her charcoal hair spilled in front of her fearsome brown eyes, and she yelled, “Ride, Rúna! Do not look back!”

Rúna clung to the reins, her heart racing and hands trembling as screams and shouts broke out around her.

Another screech rang out from above, and a man stepped in front of Rúna’s horse. The creature reared up, and the ground hung beneath her like a gaping maw. Time slowed as she fought to maintain her hold on the reins, but her hands slipped. With a

painful thump, she fell to the ground, the air bursting from her lungs as a shadow fell over her.

Hair as luminous and fair as stars caught the afternoon sunlight, and Rúna gazed into the wintry eyes of a man she knew well—a man even her father feared.

“Ragnarr?”

<CHAPTER 1

Malachy

*Early winter, the trade port of Kaupang in Scandinavia
(modern-day Norway), AD 807*

Ribbons of smoke curled above dozens of buildings as Stigand's longship curved along the coastline into the waters of Kaupang. For days Malachy had listened to tales of the place, most of which he found difficult to believe.

"The world's treasures lie in Kaupang!"

"You'll smell Kaupang before you see it!"

"You can hear the traders arguing from halfway across the fjord."

But as the smell of iron and pitch filled the air and the clang of hammers rang across a wooden maze of docks, Malachy discovered something he never knew was possible—a place so full of life that the structures themselves seemed to move with the commotion.

"Welcome to Kaupang," Stigand chuckled as he rested a hand on Malachy's shoulder. "You look like you've laid eyes on the realm of the gods, son . . . It's just a trade port."

"It's . . . I've never seen anything like it," Malachy sputtered.

The longship's hull scraped against the timber pier as they pulled into the docks, and Stigand's men leapt onto the wooden pathways, tying thick ropes around posts to hold the ship in place.

"Nothing like your little island, is it?" Stigand observed. "We have our own treasures in the North." He gestured for his men to get off and slung a sack of goods over his shoulder before nodding to Lúan at Malachy's side. "Keep your hound close, son. A beast like that is valuable here, and . . ." He paused. "Don't leave my sight." At that, he yelled to his men. "I want us back at the ship before midday! We sell! We buy what we need! We leave! Ragnarr is still a danger even if we have not seen him."

And they had not seen him. For the past week, the men had rowed until their hands bled in hopes of beating Ragnarr's ships north, but with such vast waters, there was no way of knowing if he was before or behind them. Malachy prayed he was behind.

While the men unloaded, Malachy scanned the docks for any sign of Ragnarr's ships, but out of all the ships present, only one compared to Ragnarr's. A single ship rose high above the rest, its dragon prow so magnificent that Malachy might have been able to sit comfortably in its mouth if he tried.

"Whose ship is that?" he asked.

"I don't know," Sven said, slinging a sack of goods onto his shoulder as he joined Malachy at the port side. "But it will not be a man we want to meet. The nicer ships never are."

Stigand leapt onto the deck and turned to help Sven and Malachy out of the ship while Bjorn lifted Lúan up beside them. As soon as Lúan was placed on the deck, Malachy slipped a rope around the wolfhound's neck and tied it snugly in place, holding Lúan close as

FAR SIDE OF THE SEA

BOOK THREE

Malachy sails into the northern lands with the Viking chief Stigand, desperate to save all they hold dear. With danger closing in, the Vikings are faced with an enemy they cannot defeat and must rely on their greatest weapon: faith.

Across the sea, Finn faces his own enemy. After twelve years of separation, and against the very Northmen who tore them apart, Finn's family must take a stand—one that will require a sacrifice they may not be willing to make.

With faith on their side, a family shows what it means to love from the far side of the sea.