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LEIF'S DISCOVERY

From high overhead Briana O'Toole heard the cry of a seagull. Pushing aside her reddish-blond hair, Bree looked up to a flash of wings. In that moment the dangers of the past week seemed far away.

With one swoop the gull landed on the rocky ledge in front of her. Beady eyes upon her, he tipped his head, and shrieked again. A moment later, he lifted his wings and was up and away.

Bree watched him go. Would she ever feel that free again?

Ignoring the uneasiness she felt, Bree watched the gull fly across the water. Early that morning she and others from Leif Erikson's ship had climbed to the top of this island in the great open sea.

As she started back down the steep side, Bree felt the sun on her face and light entered her heart. Then she glanced toward Mikkell.

My *enemy*, Bree thought out of long habit. But this time she wondered something more. Could he ever become a friend she respected?

Only one year older than Bree, Mikkell had led a raid that carried off rich treasure from the Glendalough Monastery in Ireland. During that raid, his men also captured Bree, her brother, and other Irish from the surrounding countryside.

Nearly four years had passed since that day late in the tenth century, and Mikkell was now eighteen. At a wider place between rocks he turned. "Let's make a new start," he said.

"A new start?" Bree felt the surprise of it. It was his fault that she had become a slave. "Do you really think we can?"

Mikkell looked her straight in the eye. "I'm sure of it." His voice spilled over with confidence. "All we have to do is trust each other."

"Trust." Bree stared at him. Like a storm ready to break, the word hung in the air. How could any trust between them possibly last?

"That's all?" she asked. "Can't you think of something a bit harder?"

Mikkel's grin lit his face. "I'll help you. I'll prove I'm worthy of trust."

Of all the things Mikkel could promise, that was the hardest to imagine. Yet he stood his ground and didn't even blink.

Watching him, Bree wondered how he could feel so sure of himself. Especially now, when they were about to enter a new world. A world where no one, not even Leif Erikson, could know what would happen.

"You'll see," Mikkel promised.

There it was again. The confidence in his voice that he could win. That he could really be trusted to do what he promised. Maybe, just possibly—

If there was anything in the world that Bree wanted, it was being able to believe in Mikkel. If that happened—

For a moment Bree dared to hope. Maybe Mikkel would even take her and her brother Devin home.

Far below, surrounded by the blue waters of the sea, Leif's ship lay anchored in a cove. Some of the men had stayed behind to guard it. As Bree looked down upon them her uneasiness returned.

Leif knows the dangers we face, she tried to tell herself. *Danger to Mikkel and to all of us*. Like the others around her, Bree had learned to value the wise and strong leader of their expedition.

Just then Mikkel spoke again. "Leif's calling."

Leaping between the rocks, Mikkel led the way back

up the steep west side of the island. When they reached the top, Leif stood on a high point, looking across a great expanse of water.

With blond hair and a beard trimmed close to his face, Leif stood taller than most men. Though still a young man, he had earned the respect of everyone who knew him, including the Norwegian king.

"There's something I want you to see." Leif's voice was filled with excitement.

When his crew gathered around him, Bree remembered that as a slave she should stand apart. Instead, she moved forward, wanting to hear every word that Leif said.

But Mikkel left the others behind. Walking out on a rocky ledge, he looked in every direction.

Behind them lay the great expanse of water they had crossed when sailing from Greenland. To their right the blue coast of a rocky wooded land. And ahead of them—

When he turned to Leif, Mikkel's face shone. "A fjord! A waterway leading into the land!"

Leif grinned. "A gateway that will help us explore."

"And good markers!" Mikkel pointed off to his left. Like a gigantic ball of rock, the round head of a cape loomed against the horizon.

To Mikkel's right was another cape. Between that and the round head was a large island with high vertical rock rising from its shore. Beyond lay a long, low point that turned like a beak as it reached into the sea.

"Landmarks no good Viking would miss. And there—" Leif pointed beyond the large island. Though far distant, the rocky ridge of a headland offered another marker.

For a moment Leif turned, looking back to the great open sea over which they had traveled. On the way here they had gone ashore twice as they sailed south. Now in the strong current along that coast an iceberg rose from the water. Though the beginning of July, ice from northern glaciers still offered danger to any ship that passed.

But Leif's face showed only his excitement. "When Thorstein comes—"

Leif and his brother had planned to travel together. While sailing up the coast of Greenland, Leif had learned that Thorstein was delayed.

"He'll follow the same directions from Bjarni that I had," Leif said. "If we're able to use such a good location, he'll find us easily."

As Leif faced the channel again, his voice held the satisfaction of discovery. "It's a gateway, I'm sure of it. A fjord that will open up this new land. Where ships can sail, explorers will come, and settlers, and merchants!"

Once more Leif pointed across the water, this time to a bay between the rocky ridge and the long point of land that extended like a beak into the sea. With his keen eyesight he had seen more than the rest of them.

"That's where we're going," he said. "Ships will not

only be able to see us. Whether friend or enemy, we'll be able to see them."

Friend or enemy. Again Bree felt a warning. Like a bad memory, her dread returned. What about the enemy inside their group? The man who had tried to hurt Mikkell during the trip here?

Starting down between the rocks, Leif led the others. As though he had no thought of the harm that could come to him, Mikkell followed. Son of a Norwegian chieftain, Mikkell often took his rightful place with pride. When the rest of the crew followed, Bree and her brother Devin dropped back.

With all her heart Bree felt excited about the new land they had seen. Yet the possibilities of such a place also made her wonder about her own future. Soon it would be four long years since she had been captured and became a slave. What could she do to change her life?

Partway to the ship, Devin stopped and turned around. Though Bree had inherited their mother's brown eyes and reddish-blond hair, Devin had the black hair and deep blue eyes of the dark Irish. Like Mikkell, Devin was also eighteen.

As though understanding how Bree felt, Devin offered a brotherly wink. "Remember," he said. "Don't forget who you really are."

In her heart Bree added the words she knew well. *The daughter of a wise and powerful chieftain who loves me very much.*

"Yes, Dev, I know," Bree said aloud.

Even when most angry with Mikkell, she had not blurted out the truth. Afraid that her ransom would go even higher, she had never told Mikkell about her father. Only Bree, Devin, and the Irish captured with them knew the well-kept secret.

Now Bree hugged it to herself. When she entered this new land she would remember. *Though I seem to be a slave, inside I am free. And I won't let anyone take that from me!*





Finding one narrow foothold after another, Mikkel followed Leif down the west side of the island. Far below, strong currents flowed around the coast. Leif's ship lay anchored in a rocky cove.

With a high curved bow and stern, the trading vessel had one mast and a large red-and-white sail. From where he stood, Mikkel could see the crew Leif had left behind to stand watch.

Among them were two men, twins who looked exactly alike. Of average height they had broad shoulders, muscular arms, and powerful hands. Though very strong, both moved as quickly and silently as a cat.

One of the men was Mikkel's good friend. The other

was a dangerous enemy. Watching him, Mikkell's hands tightened into fists.

Then Leif stopped. Again he looked across the expanse of water to the new land. "You see it the way I do, don't you?"

Mikkell nodded. "I think so."

Deep inside, Mikkell knew the possibilities of such a place. For years he had thought only about the wealth and fame he could gain through such a trip. When he overcame danger, stories about his mighty deeds would be told in the great halls of the North. He would be honored as one of the great Vikings—master of his own ship and a merchant who crossed the far seas in order to trade valuable goods.

"Those who are first will gain much from the land before us," Mikkell answered. "But now—"

"Yes, now." Leif's gaze was still on the distant shore. "We understand the wealth of this new world. The reward it will bring to us. But we also dare to dream, don't we?"

Feeling the surprise of it, Mikkell agreed. He didn't know Leif's dream, but he knew his own. In his thinking Mikkell had started to go beyond his desire for wealth and fame. *What will this land offer the people who someday live here?*

As he followed Leif onto his merchant ship, Mikkell looked up in surprise. The strong leader was one of the tallest men Mikkell knew. Walking with shoulders back and a long stride, he commanded attention from all who

saw him. Yet in that moment Mikkell realized something. Where once he had tipped back his head to look up at Leif, he now stood closer to the leader's height.

Mikkell seldom thought about how much taller he had grown during the three years he lived in Greenland. Today, instead, he felt glad for the strength he had gained and looked forward to using it. *A new world. A new land. A new life?*

He could hardly wait to set foot on the land they had seen from the top of the island.

A large trading vessel, Leif's *knorr* was a wide-body ship with an open hold in the center and small decks at the bow and stern. Approximately sixty-six feet long, it was richly painted above the waterline. Though a *knorr* could carry animals, Leif had instead filled the sturdy ship with cargo—enough trade goods and supplies to last for a long time.

Mikkell's friend Garth was among those pulling up the anchor. But Garth's brother, his twin—

As Mikkell glanced that way he saw the hate in Hammer's eyes. Like a fist closing around his heart, Mikkell felt the danger. What might that hate cause Hammer to do?

Now his hands were tied behind his back and his feet were tied together. A strong walrus-hide rope lashed him to the ship and kept him from jumping up or over the side. But what if Hammer had one moment of freedom?

Lifting his head, Mikkel looked straight ahead and passed Hammer as if he didn't see him. Yet Mikkel watched out of the corner of his eye. When Hammer shifted his feet, he tried to extend one foot enough to trip him.

Paying no attention, Mikkel walked to the front of the ship. Unlike his own *Conquest*, the smaller longship he had left in Greenland, Leif's *knorr* had places for only twelve oarsmen. Six men sat at the front with three on one side of the bow and three on the other. The remaining six men rowed in the area back of the cargo.

Today Mikkel felt glad that he could row, glad for the strength that had given him this spot. As master of his own ship, he usually stood at the tiller. Since being with Leif, Mikkel had watched and learned from his great skill.

Taking the rowing seat farthest forward, Mikkel sat down on the port, or left side of the ship. Bree's brother Devin sat in the seat across from him. Since leaving Greenland both of them had let their beards grow. With their backs to the bow, each rower waited with his hands on a long oar.

When all was ready, Mikkel leaned forward, lowered the oar, and pulled with the others. Like the rhythm of a song he felt it. Lean forward, lower the oar, pull. Lean forward, lower the oar, pull.

As the ship moved out from the cove, wind filled the great square sail. Soon the men eased back on the oars, and Mikkel turned around to look beyond the bow. The

iceberg he had noticed earlier had drifted farther south. Now it lay close to the fjord, near the end of the long wooded coast. Like a blue-white mountain, the iceberg towered above the water.

Facing the stern again, Mikkell looked toward Leif. Tiller in hand, he stood far back on the steering board side of the ship. With steady eyes and a calm face he gazed ahead, watchful and ready.

Seeing him, Mikkell felt relieved. Leif knew what it took to keep a ship safe. He had been the first to warn Mikkell about icebergs. An ice cap—a thick layer of ice and snow—covered a large part of Greenland. When a piece of that glacier broke off, it slid into the ocean and became an iceberg.

While sun and wind melted the top of an iceberg, the ice beneath the surface of the water took longer to melt. Often the jagged points reached out far beyond what could be seen and pierced the hull of a ship.

Nearby, Devin was also watching. “I don’t like the look of that iceberg,” he said.

“We’ll be all right,” Mikkell told him with a confidence he didn’t feel. But in the next moment he remembered Bjarni, the merchant who had seen these lands, but never stepped foot on them. More than fifteen years later, he gave directions to Leif. And Leif bought this very ship from him.

Mikkell knew the large merchant ship was harder to

handle than his own smaller longship. On their way from Greenland, Leif had often stayed out at sea to keep from being driven against the shore. Now he set a wide course around the iceberg and sailed back in the direction from which they had come.

We'll be safe, Mikkel told himself again. *Leif knows what he's doing.*

Just the same, Mikkel looked for Bree. Standing near the stern, she hung on to the upper edge, or rail of the ship. At her feet lay the black dog that had followed her from Norway to Iceland, then to Greenland and onto this ship.

Trust, Mikkel thought, still watching Bree. "I'll prove I'm worthy of trust," he had promised. But Mikkel felt sure that she didn't believe him.

More than anyone, Mikkel knew the countless ways he had hurt Bree, Devin, and the other Irish. Could he ever leave all that behind? Proving that he could be trusted would take courage—more courage than he might have.

Sailing across the upwind side, Leif entered the area between the iceberg and the rugged coast. From where Mikkel sat he looked beyond Leif to the open sea. Here and there smaller pieces of ice drifted far enough away to offer no danger. But then Mikkel caught sight of the sky. A black cloud lay along the horizon.

Soon the cloud moved up, spreading wide. A cold wind tore at their clothing. As clouds blotted out the sun, the blue ocean turned green, then black. Smooth seas

became choppy water and then long swells. Mikkel's muscles tightened with dread.

Mast creaking, ropes taut, men worked to lower the sail. From the long open sea to the north, gusts swept down upon them. High overhead, Leif's banner whipped in the wind.

When the sky grew as dark as a night without stars, Mikkel saw fear in the eyes of seasoned sailors. Every man on board knew what could happen. Needing to run before the wind, they could be driven far off course. Would the squall send them against the rocky coast? or into the iceberg?

Like Mikkel, the other oarsmen were rowing again. Rowing into waves that sloshed over the sides of the ship. With every sweep of the oars Mikkel looked for Bree. With waves high around them she clung to the rail.

Panic filled Mikkel. In one instant she could be swept overboard. "Lie down, Bree!" he shouted. "Hang on to something else!" But Bree didn't turn his way, and Mikkel knew she couldn't hear above the storm.

Tiller in hand, feet braced against the roll of the ship, Leif peered ahead. When the rain came, it slashed against them. Carried on gusts of wind, it pelted like ice.

As the ship dropped into a trough, Mikkel looked up to towering waves. Rowing with all his strength, he and the others worked to turn the bow into the wind. But the

wind and current drove them between the iceberg and the land.

Then a gigantic wave crashed into the ship, ran across the deck, and into the cargo hold. Men scrambled for buckets, bailing as fast as they could. On hands and knees, Bree was among them, pouring water over the rail.

Mikkel swallowed hard. *No place for water to run out.* If the ship filled with water, it would sink straight to the bottom.

Dread in his heart, Mikkel felt the current send the ship sideways. What would he do if the iceberg ripped the hull apart?

The next powerful gust picked up the ship, hurling it toward the great white mountain. Forgetting everything else, Mikkel pulled on his oar. With each wave he struggled to head the ship into the wind. With every ounce of strength he rowed to keep the ship away from the iceberg. With every breath he prayed.

As the ship dropped into another deep trough, Mikkel met his greatest fear. Off the end of his oar the water parted. A jagged piece of ice pointed up like a knife.

"Ice to port!" Mikkel shouted as he pulled with all his might.

Around him, the men pulled together. Lean forward. Lower the oar. Pull with all your strength.

With a rhythm born of desperation they rowed. Desperate to win they pulled. Working for their lives they pulled.

Then in one moment it was all over.