

CHAPTER 1

An Enigmatic Runestone

“Vidar...come over here quick, I have uncovered something!” My eyes narrowed, my breath shortened, and my voice quivered – my vital signs could not deny such excitement as my blood pumped furiously through young English veins. With my heart about to explode, I realized that the quest for the mysterious runestone was within my quivering fingertips.

Our expedition had been searching for weeks on end enduring a cold and damp Scandinavian springtime to locate an enigmatic runestone fabled to be the one created by Havarr, the stonemason of the mighty Thor, son of Odin. The legend from the brave Norsemen of old clearly stated that a person had the ability to create their own future, nevertheless, the pantheon of gods must agree among themselves that such a person was worthy of such an endeavor. If that soul was unworthy, damnation would descend from Valhalla itself and seek justice, the ruthless kind of justice only known to the brave warriors of the past. Still, I was willing to tempt the mighty gods and the Muses in order to fulfill my destiny.

Vidar literally flew to my side as his excitement gushed through his Nordic veins. “Nathanial, let’s take a closer look to determine if this is indeed Havarr’s Runestone.” After a brief look, the verdict was in. “While I’m able to read the top half of the imprisoned stone, we can’t be sure of the bottom inscription since the only known record of the complete message was partially destroyed in the Fyrkat Abbey fire centuries ago. The lower section is only conjecture at this point; still, let’s hope this is what our souls want it to be.”

As an expert in the ancient Norse language, Vidar took up the challenge of translating the hallowed message that had been passed along to the future from the past. With his full attention upon the task at hand, I looked at a man who carried his Nordic heritage upon his back. Being six foot seven inches tall, blue-eyed, and with blonde hair, he epitomized the legendary gods who lived in Asgard. It was easy to visualize this Nordic giant wielding an axe to overcome his enemies and earn a victory for his tribe. After what appeared to be hours, although only a few minutes of scrutinizing the stone that lie before his eyes, a wide grin crossed his face.

“Congratulations, surely I can’t attribute your good fortune to luck or chance or fate...I know you too well Nathanial to speak those particularly sacrilegious words to explain what has happened here today. I know that it is your planning, preparation, and a positive attitude backed

up by an honest work ethic, which the gods admire, that has brought this amazing find to fruition.”

I blushed with such praise. “Please, there is no need to venerate me as one of the ancients. Do not mention my name in the same sentence as the sacred ones or elevate this mere mortal to a place occupied by your pantheon of gods. It was their will and their will alone that allowed me the honor of discovering such a wonderful relic from the past in the present as a gift to our future. I read in that sacrosanct manuscript, *The Poetic Edda*, about the warning to anyone who approaches the stone since they must be cautious of the energy emitted by the rune and channeled through this piece of history. What does the stone say about such matters?”

“The runes are truly sacred energy...found in the words inscribed on stones, rings, sword hilts, cups, fingernails, and on the rudders of their ships. Yes, your eyes and your memory hold true...there is magick in this relic. The sole purpose of a runestone is to permit the reader to interact with the primordial energy of the rune. As you connect with this revered energy that surrounds the inscribed stone, you experience firsthand the will of the rune carrying you where you should be carried; travelling how you should travel; and ending up at where you should end up. No man, whether rich, brave, or wise has the ability to transgress the will of the rune that occupies the stone.”

I explained to Vidar. “I did feel a presence, an unexplainable presence of positive energy that flow around, above, and through me when I located the stone. I swear on my grandmother’s grave that my inner soul felt the reverberation of chanting voices and melodic humming in an ancient language. Sacred notes, hallowed tones. Surely, this is a sign of good things to come for us and this divine mission for our future generations.”

“Indeed, that is how the shamans of old summoned the spirits, the energy which was harbored in the rune, and therefore, inscribed upon the stone or weapon. My friend, I’m pleased that you felt the will of the gods and that will was only of the good. If you would have felt the bad, based upon the folklore of this runestone, at this moment we would be preparing your funeral pyre, stacking the wood high to the heavens since the powerful gods would have taken you to a sacred place without any remorse. According to legend, the one who attempts to fool the gods sacrifices their mortal body and their soul. Only a white heart shall survive this divine meeting; a black heart is a lifeless heart. Now, let me examine what’s been written in the past.”

I was in shock that I could have been nothing more than a pile of grey ashes smoldering on my funeral pyre. But, I was also relieved since I stood among the living and not viewing the living

from another plane of existence. I was alive...and thanked the wise ones for my good fortune. After having such thoughts, my mind and soul came back to the moment. “What has been shared with us from your noble progenitors?”

“First, what you see Nathaniel is not what they saw. My forefathers painted such stones in a variety of colors that symbolized specific purposes. For example, a green painted stone was to open the sluiceways for prosperity while a blue colored stone was to conjure up happiness. As you see before you, the paint is worn off, and after fifteen hundred years or so its colorful façade has been stripped away to leave a grey monochrome message to those who may find it. Although, there are just a few slivers of paint left on the top that help me identify it. Look, here...see, it’s yellow, and that means offering intuition, psychic powers, as well as a strong mind to a much deserved soul. Finally, there’s another clue to its identity - with the stone facing East...towards the Air gods – I believe so far at least that we have the real deal Sir!”

I was elated; enduring the damp days and cold nights was worth every minute of discomfort and hardship. Here it was! Eddic Lore clearly stated this sacred runestone was originally painted golden as the summer sun and faced the East to honor the Air gods. “All right, now the message?”

My dear Vidar kept me in suspense for a few more excruciating minutes as he ran his hands over the ancient engravings written in the script known as The Elder Futhark alphabet. “Here’s what my glorious ancestors wanted us to know about the rune, and the sacred energy that exists within and around this carved stone relic:

Brave wanderer, behold the serpent

It coils around Havarr’s blessed hammer

The reptile intent upon slaying a dark heart

The unjust shall remain at their wife’s bosom

As those foreboding words from the inscription echoed within the tissues of my mind, I could sense a revered presence peering over my shoulder. This startled me and I whirled around quickly to see what shared our time and space. Nothing...