

An
*Untamed
Heart*

LAURINE
SNELLING



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Lauraine Snelling, *An Untamed Heart*
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With joy and delight I dedicate *An Untamed Heart* to my aunty Inga and to my mother, Thelma, who are my heroes and who became Ingeborg. What a wealth of love and encouragement they have always been for me.

An Untamed Heart is also dedicated to my Norwegian friend Gunlaug Noklund, who not only helped me with the accuracy of this book but allowed me to use her name as Ingeborg's cousin and dearest friend.

1

SPRING 1878

VALDRES, NORWAY

“Oh, Gunlaug, you are so funny.” Ingeborg Strand grinned at her cousin, who was not only her best friend but her only real confidante. The two had been born within days of each other and had always shared a crib or blanket on the floor when their mothers were together. They had grown up with a bond closer than sisters.

“But, Ingeborg, you can’t marry someone just because your mor thinks he is perfect!” Sitting on the still slightly damp earth, Gunlaug locked her hands around her knees and rocked back, at the same time raising her face to the sun.

“And I will not. Perfect is in the eyes of the beholder—my eyes, not hers. I think Per Tollefson is worse than scraping the bottom of the apple barrel.”

“Well, you have to admit, he’s not rotten.” Gunlaug snorted behind her hand.

The two giggled again. “No, not rotten. He is almost a man of honor, but he can’t string two words together without

stuttering, stumbling, and blushing. Why, a conversation comes to a halt when he tries to talk.”

“‘Almost a man’ is surely right. And you love words, so you would go so crazy you’d run screaming out the door on a long winter’s night.”

“Or curl up and die of boredom.” Ingeborg shook her head. “Surely there is a man somewhere who is no longer a stumbling boy and can make decisions and carry on a decent conversation.”

“Tall and good looking would help.” Gunlaug closed her eyes and smiled with the dreamy, dopey gaze that told Ingeborg she was thinking of Ivar, her current man—er—boy of the moment. He was not nearly as ideal as Gunlaug thought, but Ingeborg had not the heart to smash her cousin’s latest dream.

“Come along. Mor is going to be wondering where we are.” Ingeborg stared east across the valley to the mountain peaks still wearing their winter finery, glistening white in the brilliant spring sun. Here it was her twentieth birthday with no marriageable man in sight. Her mother was growing frantic. She often accused her daughter of deliberately offending all the young men the entire community paraded before her. It seemed every mor in a five-mile radius knew of someone who would be ideal for Ingeborg.

The call came across the crystal air. “Ingeborg, Gunlaug, where are you gone to?” It was her mor. Hilde’s voice carried the oft-disgusted sound she used with her oldest daughter.

“Picking dandelion leaves,” Ingeborg called back, pointing to the patch of dandelion leaves out beyond the barn that she and Gunlaug were supposedly harvesting. The two covered their snickers with hands not full of green leaves, nor were their baskets. This first gift of the growing season was prized

both as a tonic and a vegetable and, when dried, a medicinal tea that carried healing properties to a people starved for something green. Serve something fresh, and everyone sighed in bliss.

“I can’t wait for the dance.” Gunlaug clipped leaves as she dreamed. “I can see Ivar again.”

Ingeborg rolled her eyes and tossed some leaves into the bent-willow basket. With the back of her hand she pushed the strands of wheaten hair off her now perspiring forehead. How wonderful the sun felt on her back. If a storm didn’t come roaring in and surprise them all, they’d all be able to strip off their woolen undergarments and bask in the freedom of lighter clothing.

“I think I won’t go.”

“You’re crazy. Your mor will never forgive you.” The shock on Gunlaug’s face made Ingeborg laugh again. “Besides, you know how you love the music and dancing.”

“I know.” Whirling around a dance floor did indeed make her feel light as a butterfly. At five feet seven, Ingeborg was plenty tall and not willowy like one of their other cousins. *Sturdy* and *wholesome* were two words she frequently heard. But she never lacked for dance partners, since dancing with her made her partners look good too.

She sat back on her heels and studied their baskets. Did they have enough? “Did your mor want some of these?”

“No, she sent Hamme out to our patch. She thought I was going to help, but I told her Tante Hilde had asked for me.”

“Well, she did, sort of. She said, ‘You two girls,’ and she was looking at us.”

“Right.” The two exchanged a look that would do a conspirator proud.

When Hilde called again, Ingeborg reluctantly rose to her feet, glancing around at the green carpet with bright yellow suns sprinkled throughout. “We pretty well cleaned this patch out, so let’s take our bounty up to the house.”

Swinging their baskets, the two strolled across the rapidly greening pasture. Several lambs were nursing, while others gamboled beside the ewes or chased each other. The ewes kept grazing, pretty much ignoring their offspring until one got too near the fence. Then the mother sent out a warning bleat. The lamb scampered back, making the girls look at each other and laugh. Spring lambs could always make them laugh; their antics were such a delight.

Ingeborg clasped her basket handle with both hands and swung it in a circle. “I love spring.”

“Me too. Spring, the time of love.”

“You’re in love with *being* in love.”

Gunlaug stopped, her face suddenly turning serious. “You really think so?” She shook her head. “I know you don’t like Ivar much, but—”

“Do not fret, my dear cousin. I just don’t think he’s good enough for you. Surely there is someone more grown up. Ivar is such a mama’s boy.”

Hjelmer, her brother, came running across the pasture. “Ingeborg, Mor said to come quick. The Gaard baby is on the way, and she is afraid there will be trouble.”

Ingeborg and Gunlaug broke into a run. “Has Mor left yet?”

“She is waiting for you. Give me your baskets.” They handed them off and ran on.

Ingeborg knew that unmarried young women usually weren’t allowed at a birthing, so if Mor told her to hurry, there would surely be trouble. Hilde Strand had a special sense for

that, which was one of the reasons she was in such demand as a midwife. The girls were both out of breath by the time they reached the house, where Hilde met them at the door.

“Gunlaug, you go home and ask your mor to pray for this baby. She can pass on the word.” As she spoke, she was shaking her head.

“Ja, Tante.” Gunlaug set off for home, heading north while Ingeborg and her mother turned south at the road.

“Why did we not take the buggy?” Ingeborg asked, as they walked so fast they were nearly trotting.

“Because we can cut across the south field and get there more quickly. We might have to turn this baby, and that will take both of us. Her mister is worthless in the birthing room, as are most men.”

Ingeborg nodded. She had already learned that. The busier the husband kept, outside preferably, the better for all concerned. “What about the children?” The Gaards already had three youngsters, with the eldest a girl of six. Her mother had delivered all of them, because their mother was slim hipped with a definite lack of elasticity. “Has she already been in labor for a while?”

“Ja. She should have sent for me before, but Greta ran over, calling my name, and when I answered her, she turned back to help with the younger ones. She acts so much older than six, but that is often the case when the mother does poorly. It takes Trude a long time to come back to health after the baby is finally born.” Hilde shook her head. “I warned them both that having babies so often like this, one of these times she might not make it.”

Oh, please Lord, don't let this be the time. Ingeborg had already watched one mother slip into a comatose state and

then death, and there didn't seem to be anything any of them could do. Mor had been morose for days afterward.

“How will I help you?”

“Remember how you turned that lamb inside the ewe? If it's the same problem, we will try the same thing. Your fingers are longer and your hands more slender than mine. And you are strong.”

Ingeborg remembered the lambing like it had happened yesterday. The crying ewe, her far and brother holding the ewe still while her fingers searched for the lamb's nose amongst what seemed like all legs. How she did it one handed, she would never know. When the ewe gave another heave, the pressure on her arm was excruciating, but she held on somehow and the two front feet and the nose presented. Mother and baby did well. Her arm had bruises for a week, but she would never forget the immense welling up of joy she had felt when the lamb began to breathe and shook its head. Her far had been compressing the rib cage and muttering, “Breathe, little one, breathe.”

Ever since, when there was any trouble in the lambing pen, Far called on his oldest daughter. When he said she would make as good a midwife as her mor, Ingeborg had been floating above the ground. Compliments from him were rare and to be treasured deep in one's heart. Why, once she had splinted a lamb's broken leg and fashioned a bandage that went over the shoulders and kept the splint and wrap in place. Now the lamb walked with nary a limp.

“Come quick. Please hurry.” The older boy met them at the road. He was five and also grown up.

In spite of their puffing, Ingeborg and Hilde broke into a jog again, Mor carrying the basket with the necessary birth-

ing accoutrements and some medicinal herbs for a tisane, a drink to help the mother regain her strength faster.

Ingeborg hung back so Mor could go into the house first, as was proper. After all, Mor was the midwife, not the lowly assistant. Hilde turned to her daughter before they entered the bedroom. “You keep praying until I call for you. We need our God to see us through this.”

“Ja, I will.”

Hilde closed the door behind her, then opened it again almost immediately and beckoned Ingeborg to join her. The room felt overwarm as Ingeborg entered. An older woman was sitting off to one side keening, with an apron over her head. The pregnant woman lay on the bed, clutching a rolled towel and clamping her teeth down on it when a contraction made her groan and weep. Hilde went to the head of the bed and spoke sternly.

“Now, I know you are miserable, but listen to me. I am here to bring you through this, but you must do as I say. Just like you have all the other times. We are a good team, you and I. Right?”

The woman on the bed nodded and fought against another contraction that rolled over her. “Ja, I know,” she ground out. “But this one . . .” She clamped her teeth on the rag, and panted. “Something . . . is . . . wrong.”

“I will see where you are.” Hilde checked for the dilation, keeping her hand on the woman’s huge belly. “You must get up and walk. You are not dilated far enough yet.”

“You cannot be that cruel.” The mother-in-law dropped her apron. “See how in agony she is.”

Hilde turned to the woman. “Could you please go heat us some water? And bring me a bowl or jug of boiling water for the tisane. It needs to steep.”

The woman muttered her way out the door, leaving her obvious feelings of dislike in the room behind her.

Hilde nodded to Ingeborg. “Come. We will walk her.”

Ingeborg jumped to the other side of the bed, and together they lifted Mrs. Gaard to her feet.

The woman swayed between them, so Ingeborg wrapped an arm around her back to hold her up. They walked the length of the room and back, back and forth. Ingeborg glanced at her mother, who she could see was praying with each step. She knew her mother had learned to do that, but so far she was not able. Her mother said to ask God for help and to thank Him that He is God and able to do far beyond what they asked or believed. How could she pray that when she wasn't really sure God was listening? Sometimes she felt He did, but other times she was not so sure. Like right now. Could not He see the agony this woman suffered and come to their assistance without continuous prayer?

“No more. I cannot go on.”

“Yes you can. You must, if you want to deliver this child.”

Ingeborg tightened her grip on the woman's waist as another wave rolled over her. How long could this continue? She looked over at her mother, whose serene face belied everything that was going on.

Mrs. Gaard stumbled and became a dead weight between them.

“Trude, come, you will lie down now so I can see if the walking is helping you.”

The mother-in-law brought in a jug of steaming water and set it on the table, her tongue clicking against the roof of her mouth, her frown enough to scare children.

“Takk.” Hilde helped their patient back to the bed and

lowered her to sitting, then swung her feet up. She rolled onto her side, moaning, tears streaming down her face.

When the contraction had passed, Hilde rolled the woman onto her back and checked for the dilation. “The baby should be presenting by now, but even with all our walking, there is not sufficient change.” With gentle fingers she pressed all around the mounded belly, searching for any information she could gain.

“Does the baby need to be turned?” Ingeborg whispered.

Her mother nodded but kept moving her hands. The woman groaned, so faint as to rather be a moan.

“We will have to turn her over.” Hilde looked to her daughter.

Ingeborg nodded and sucked in a deep breath. “Ja.”

Hilde leaned close to Trude’s ear. “You must get up on your hands and knees.”

Trude rolled her head from side to side. “No. No, I cannot.”

“You must. We will help you.” Hilde nodded to Ingeborg. “We will roll her your way.”

Ingeborg nodded, her stomach clenching along with her teeth. Together she and her mother rolled Trude over.

“Stiffen your arms, Trude. And your knees. We will help you.”

Ingeborg strained, assisting to lift the woman who was so weak she could barely move her arms. Once they had her upright, Hilde braced. “See if you can turn the baby like you did the lamb.”

Ingeborg closed her eyes. *Please, Lord. Please, Lord. Jesus, help me.*

“Trude, you must breathe and do what we say.”

“Ja.” Her head hung. The sound of her panting filled the room.

Ingeborg felt with her fingers. A leg. An arm. A shoulder. She concentrated and imagined that she was working on the ewe. Slowly, gently. A contraction squeezed her hand. The head, she felt the head, like the baby was swimming. And turning. And . . .

“The head, the baby is turned.”

“Thank you, Lord God. Thank you.” Hilde sang her litany over and over. Trude fell on her side and rolled onto her back. An anguished cry ripped from her throat. Her body convulsed and the baby boy flowed into Hilde’s hands.

“Usually we lay the baby on the mother, but . . .” Hilde handed the baby to Ingeborg. “Hold him while I cut the cord.”

With the cord tied off and severed, she returned to her patient to stem the blood flow. “Help him.”

Ingeborg shook the baby gently. “Breathe, baby, breathe. God, make him breathe.” She tipped the baby up and down, then blew in his face. She remembered her father squeezing the lamb’s ribs. She pushed on the baby’s chest and released. Again. She covered his nose and mouth and blew. The tiny chest heaved, and the baby stiffened in her hands. Then relaxed. And cried, a mewling that sounded more like a kitten than a baby. He flailed his hands and cried again.

Ingeborg grabbed the flannel cloths Trude had laid out and wrapped one around the tiny body. Holding him close, she watched as her mother worked to stop the bleeding.

Mor kept up an even pace, speaking in a singsong to encourage the woman in the bed.

Ingeborg held the tiny body close to her and grabbed a small blanket to wrap around him. Would the bleeding never cease? How could her mor remain so calm? Her own heart seemed ready to leap out of her chest.

After what seemed forever and the pile of bloodied cloths growing by the bed, the flow slowly eased, and Hilde nodded.

“Thank you, Lord God, thank you.” She packed clean cloths against the woman’s body and heaved a sigh. “How is he?”

“Alive.”

“Lay him on his belly on his mother’s chest.”

Ingeborg did as told. “I have not cleaned him yet.”

“Call the older woman to bring us hot water and a tub, so we can get these sheets soaking.”

Ingeborg crossed the room and found the older woman sitting just outside the door. “Can you bring in a tub and plenty of warm water? We need to clean her and the baby.”

“Alive? The baby is alive?”

“Ja. They both are.”

“Praise God.”

“Ja, praise God.” Ingeborg waited until she returned, then took the hoop handle to carry hot water in to pour into a dishpan. She added some cold until it was just warm.

“You may wash him,” Hilde said.

Very aware of the honor, Ingeborg took the baby in both her hands and lowered him into the water. So perfect. Tiny fingers and toes, a button nose and pink lips. He no longer looked blue. Perfect. This baby. She had helped this baby so he was able to be born, when he could so easily have died. She couldn’t stop the tears that dripped off her chin. He waved a perfect little hand, swishing it in the water. With a cloth she washed his face and over the top of his bald little head. Was there anything else in this world that could be even close to feeling like this?

She glanced up to see her mother watching her. The two

smiled and together dried the little baby and wrapped him again, to lay him at his mother's side. Her faint smile as she held him close brought more tears.

"Tusen takk." The words came faintly from the mother.

"Thank our God. I will tell your husband he can come in now." Hilde glanced around the now straightened room. All the bloody sheets and cloths were soaking in the tub. Ingeborg had been cleaning while Mor settled the baby with his mor.

Later, mother and daughter walked toward the east and home. Behind them the stars still hung in the cerulean sky, but to the east, a band of faint yellow heralded the new day. A breeze picked up and lifted the strands of hair that had pulled free from their braids.

"I want to learn it all."

"Ja, I am not surprised. You too have been gifted with the desire for healing."

"There can be nothing like this . . . this . . ." Ingeborg's heart felt like it was bursting.

"New life."

"Ja. New life. Death was so near, hovering around our shoulders." She shuddered in the predawn chill.

"But God answered our prayers."

"This time. But what about the times He does not answer with life?" Ingeborg waited, expecting the usual curt reply. Why her mother seemed always angry at her she could never understand. But now they were actually talking.

"He always answers. But sometimes we do not like the answer."

"Today we helped that baby live. I have to know more." Ingeborg turned it into a promise to herself. She would learn

all there was to learn. Was this what God wanted for her?

“Will you teach me?”

“Ja, but it is not easy.”

“I understand. Takk.”

Besides, she didn't need a husband to become a midwife.

2

“So how did it go for Mrs. Gaard?” Gunlaug asked later that day when she brought over a basket of små brød, each little cake glowing golden. “Oh, and tell your mor this is a new recipe, and Mor wants to know her opinion.”

Ingeborg stared at her cousin. Still groggy from lack of sleep, she caught a yawn and shook her head. “Which do you want first?”

Gunlaug gave her a look of confusion. “Mrs. Gaard, of course.”

“We saved the baby, and Mor kept the missus from bleeding to death after the baby finally came.”

“I was afraid to ask in case one or both of them had died.”

Ingeborg closed her eyes, feeling herself back in that room where death had hovered in the corners. “So close.” Did she dare share with her innocent cousin what had gone on? “You cannot tell anyone if I tell you something.”

Gunlaug’s eyes widened. “Who would I tell?”

Ingeborg shrugged. That was true. The only ones they told were each other. “I . . . I turned the baby inside Mrs. Gaard

like I did the lamb. I felt the baby turn, and there was his head. He was born just a few minutes later, and his mother nearly bled to death. Oh, Gunlaug, he is so perfect. And then he wouldn't breathe and I finally breathed for him and he went stiff and then started to breathe and he sounded like an angry kitten. Mor let me wash him, and oh, Gunlaug, helping a baby come into this world has to be the most wonderful thing I can do."

"You can do? Tante Hilde is the midwife."

"I know, but she said she would teach me all she knows if I really want to learn, and I do so want to learn all that I can."

"I think your mor wants you to get married more than she wants you to take over her job as midwife."

"But I could do this and not have to even think about finding a suitable man and getting married."

"Tante Hilde is married. I think you have to be married to be a midwife."

Ingeborg felt like stamping her foot. Why was Gunlaug being so stubborn?

"Besides, that means you'd have to spend all your time with your mor, and you and she don't always get along."

Now, that was an understatement. Ingeborg stared at her cousin. Sometimes she made really wise comments, and this was obviously one of those times. Mor found more fault with her than all the others put together. She'd often wondered why and finally figured it was because she had more flaws than anyone else. She was headstrong, stubborn, and argumentative at times, and had a curiosity bump that couldn't be stifled.

It was a shame her mor couldn't be more like her far. He let her try things that most fathers wouldn't, like help-

ing birth the lambs and calves and learning how to notice and treat many of the animal ailments. While other fathers would not permit their daughters to study and learn all they could, instead consigning them to help their mors, her father encouraged her to think and question.

Through the years she and her oldest brother, Gilbert, had engaged in many discussions that sometimes grew rather heated. Gilbert, who was not only Ingeborg's older brother but was also the oldest of all the cousins, was a firm believer in doing things the same way they had always been done, and Ingeborg wanted them to try new practices she'd read of.

"Ingeborg. Ingeborg, come back from wherever you went." Gunlaug waved a hand in front of Ingeborg's face.

"Oh, sorry."

"I'm glad you were able to help Mrs. Gaard."

"Mor will go check on her in a bit. I'm hoping I can go along."

"If you do, I'd suggest you keep your torrent of questions to a minimum."

Ingeborg nodded. "You're right." She wrinkled her nose and made a face. "But how am I to learn it all if I cannot ask all the questions?"

"That's your problem." Gunlaug got that goofy look on her face again. "Just think, three more days until the dance. What are you going to wear?"

"Clothes."

"I will have my new blue skirt finished by then, and I am going to add some lace to that waist that is looking shabby."

Ingeborg grabbed her friend's hand. "Come with me. I need to check on the cow that is due to calve. She's out in the west pasture."

All the way out through the three gates and skirting around an area that had gone boggy with the spring melt, Gunlaug talked about Ivar. Ingeborg tuned out her cousin's voice and let herself ponder what had gone on during the night. What might they have done differently? First, how could they have made the woman more comfortable? Second, was there a way to prevent a baby from going breech and thereby sliding into the birth canal like God ordained for it to do? When did the baby turn wrong? Was it something the mother did? Her mor had said it was an act of God, but why would God step in and make a baby do something wrong? If it was the mother's fault, what had she done and when? In between her thoughts, she nodded and smiled at Gunlaug as if she cared to hear about Ivar, her latest beau.

They finally located the cow off in one corner behind a stand of willow brush, already nudging her calf toward the teats dripping milk. She lowed and tossed her head, warning Ingeborg to stay away.

"Easy girl, you did a fine job. How about we go on up to the barn, where you two will be safer?" The smell of blood could bring in all sorts of predators, many of whom would be very pleased to carry off the newborn calf. Ignoring the threatening motions from the cow, Ingeborg broke off a willow branch and walked around on the other side of the disgruntled mama.

"Aren't you going to let the calf get stronger first?" Gunlaug followed Ingeborg's lead and broke off a switch.

"I suppose I should, but we lost a lamb out here earlier. The scavengers pick up on a scent quickly."

Gunlaug looked over her shoulder, as if expecting a wolf to leap out from behind the brush at the end of the field.

Ingeborg rolled her eyes, something she did often when her cousin's many fears got in their way.

Ingeborg spotted another mat of dandelions. "We can fill our aprons with those while we wait."

"Who do you want to dance with?" Gunlaug adopted the dopey look again.

"The king of Sweden and Norway."

"Ivar is such a good dancer. What if I could dance every dance with him?"

"You think it will snow today?" Ingeborg tucked her chuckle back under her chin and added more handfuls of green leaves to the apron she'd removed and laid flat for carrying the greenery.

Gunlaug glanced toward her. "I'd let you dance with him, you know."

"Right. You know his mother would be sending darts at you if he didn't dance with others too."

"I don't think she likes me very much."

"She doesn't like anyone who catches her sweet baby's eye. You know that no one, even the queen mother herself, would be good enough for her precious son."

"True. But I love him, and he needs to be loved. Maybe then he will be happier."

Ingeborg glanced up to see the calf nursing, his tail doing the metronome swish. *Enjoy your first meal of colostrum, little fellow. It is your last. From now on, we'll be milking your mor and giving you what's left.* She felt almost guilty about it, but it had to be.

She sat back on her heels. In the blue arch of the heavens, she heard the scree of an eagle. The mountain peaks gleamed white, and the greening of the pastures not only charmed her

eyes but tickled her nose. The smell of spring was one of her favorite scents. The pungent odor of the dandelion leaves only added another overlay of joy.

She mused, "Soon we'll be able to journey up to the seter. Freedom again. I can't wait."

Gunlaug wailed, "But then I won't see Ivar for weeks at a time, or even all summer."

Ingeborg ignored her and searched for the eagle. Wouldn't it be an amazing thing to find the eagle's nest in the crags of the cliffs? Her brother Gilbert had found one once and saw three hatchlings in the nest of sticks. He also found out that a furious mother eagle could inflict serious damage on a climber. He still bore the talon scars on one shoulder.

She picked up the corners of her apron and tied them together into a bundle. "Let's move her down now."

Together they drove the cow and calf down to the small fenced pasture behind the barn. The cow ambled over to drink at the water tank and didn't even notice that Ingeborg was shunting her calf off into the calf pen. Ingeborg made sure the gates were securely closed and took her bundle of greens up to the house.

"Mor said to tell you that you could have gone with her, but she couldn't find you." Mari, the baby of the family at ten, turned from checking the roast baking in the Dutch oven hanging over the coals of the fireplace. "She said that when you finally showed up, you should start the corn bread for supper." She wiped her hands on her apron. "You brought more dandelion leaves. Good."

As if Mor had looked for her. She'd said she was going to check on the cow. Had Mor waited until she left to go back to the Gaards'? No matter how many questions Ingeborg

had, she'd not been able to ask them. The thought of Mor's frown warned her away.

"Bess had her calf way out to the end of the pasture. He'd just been born, so the walk down took awhile." She dipped water out of the wooden bucket into a basin and started washing the quickly wilting leaves. That was one thing about spring greens. It took a lot of them to feed the family even one meal.



Saturday blossomed under the spring rain that had been falling off and on for two days. The earth smelled fresh and new as Ingeborg carried the milk buckets up from the barn. She poured the milk through the strainer and into the pans to let the cream rise. She had enough cream already to make butter, and that was the next thing on her list to do for the day. Her mother had been called out again during the night but did not invite her to go along. Resentment nibbled at the edge of her thoughts like a mouse on cheese. How was she to learn if she was always left at home?

Berta and Mari were putting breakfast on the table by the time she walked into the house.

"Did you bring up the cream pitcher?" Berta asked over her shoulder from where she was lifting bacon from the pan to a platter.

"No. No one asked me to."

"We ran out." Mari headed for the door.

"Can you go call the men instead?" Berta swiped the back of her hand over her forehead. She sounded so much like Mor that Ingeborg did a double take. The same sound of dissatisfaction, as if Ingeborg should have known enough to bring up the cream pitcher without being told.

“I will, and I will get the cream pitcher.” She knew she sounded aggrieved, but hearing it from Mor was bad enough.

“You don’t have to get all cross.”

Ingeborg shook her head as she headed out the door. She retrieved the cream pitcher from the springhouse, called to the men working on a wagon by the barn, and returned to the house, reminding herself to just ignore tones and pay attention to words. The weeks to moving up to the seter were stretching longer and longer. Ah, the seter. That was the one place she was in charge, and no one whined at her or ordered her around. As Gunlaug had reminded her, at the seter they were free.

She resolved not to mention that she was disappointed not to be asked to go with Mor when she returned. She had plenty to do before they all had to get ready for the dance.

The dance. Such mixed emotions surrounded the dance. Many of the Christian families refused to attend dances. But it was a place for young people to meet and talk, so the Strands were among those who went. Quite possibly it was at Ingeborg’s mor’s instigation, for weddings were forged there. Gunlaug could not wait. Ingeborg could. She could read the looks her mor gave her well, and the most looks always came at dances. *Go find a husband. Be charming. Keep your questions to yourself.* Amazing how many different things could be read into one glance. Perhaps because she had heard them all so many times before.

Gilbert had not married yet. Why was he not getting the looks? Sometimes, really often, she wished she had taken Bjorn, the second son, eighteen months older than she, up on his offer to take her to Amerika with him, but then they’d never heard from him again. Mor and Far were sure he had

died, since he'd not ever written. According to records, the ship had made it to Amerika, but perhaps he died on the voyage, or he had landed and something happened to him. They'd all heard the horror stories of people disappearing in spite of the advertisements by Amerikan railroads promising a land of streets paved with gold. But free land—that was what emigrants could work for. And what made the long journey and the dark, unknown dangers possibly worth it.



Ingeborg sighed, for at last the evening of the dance had arrived. Her sisters were all getting dressed, and she was sure Gunlaug was also ready long in advance. If there were any way out, Ingeborg would take it.

“Are you not ready?” Mor asked one more time.

“Nearly.” Ingeborg wrapped her golden braid around her head and pinned it into place. Gilbert gave her a brief nod with an almost smile that showed her he approved. Gilbert and Ingeborg each picked up a basket of the food they'd prepared, as did their parents as they went out the door to walk the mile to the Geltlunds' place. The dance would be held in the barn loft tonight, for not only was it in town, it was nearly empty of fodder. Far had said they'd leave the horses to rest tonight.

The Strands met Gunlaug's family as they walked the road past their farm, and her cousin immediately fell into step beside Ingeborg.

“What if Ivar's mother gives me one of her looks for dancing too often with her son?”

“Ignore her.”

“You might be able to do that, but she makes me quake in my shoes.”

Ingeborg shook her head. *Silly goose, you better listen to what you are saying if you want to marry that mama’s boy. His mother will run your life, or ruin it.* But she kept her thoughts to herself. Perhaps up at the seter, Gunlaug would get over this infatuation for Ivar.

They heard the music while they were still up the road a bit. Katrina, Ingeborg’s next in line sister, hung back, and Oscar Boll, her intended, fell in step with her as they passed his farm. He was a bit slow but not a bad catch. Right now, he and his far were building a house for the new bride and groom, so they might not have to live with his parents. Since he was the eldest son, he would inherit the farm.

Couples were swirling around the well-swept area to the beat of a tune played by an accordion, a fiddle, and a guitar, which its owner insisted was imported from Germany. Someone thumped on a homemade drum. Ingeborg’s feet seemed to have a life of their own. She never could keep still when the music played.

They set their baskets on the tables, and Gilbert grabbed her hand. “Come on, before you get told what to do.”

Gratitude for her older brother swept her along with him as they picked up the pattern and let the music take them away. Both of them were content to enjoy dancing and not talk.

Ingeborg glanced off to the side. She had attracted the attention of Asti, a sort of friend, since they both knew everyone in the small community of Valdres. Asti wanted to be dancing with Gilbert, Ingeborg knew, and she tucked a smile away. Surely Gilbert might like to know this, if he didn’t already.

Asti would be a good wife to her big brother. How could she work this out?

She stopped herself. Why would she work this out? She hated being pushed, hated being the subject of matchmaking. Surely Gilbert would like it no better. She missed a beat and shrugged up at him. When the music ended, she guided him over to where Asti and another friend were chatting. When Gilbert slowed down, she took his arm and kept him going. “Asti, how nice to see you.”

The slender young woman smiled back and up at Gilbert also.

“How’s your mor?” Ingeborg knew the woman had been having health problems.

“She’s better.”

The musicians picked up a polka, and Ingeborg smiled up at her brother. “Why don’t you and Asti go dance this one.” She pulled his hand out and placed it over Asti’s, ignoring any look he might be giving her and smiling at Asti, who was shyer than she needed to be. She watched the two of them move toward the dance floor and congratulated herself on a job well done.

A tap came on her shoulder, and her onkel Jonas took her hand. “Surely you’ll give an old man a chance to enjoy this dance.”

“Since you are not old yet, I’m not sure.”

She linked her arm through his, knowing they would not need to talk. Of her mother’s brothers, he was her favorite.

Later on she saw Gilbert and Asti together again, and this time they were both smiling. And talking. Maybe he wouldn’t be put out with her after all.

After the dance, Ivar asked Gunlaug if he could walk her home, so Ingeborg fell in with her family.

“Why did you not dance with that nice Garborg boy?” her mor asked. There was the slightest tinge of disapproval in her voice, as if she considered it Ingeborg’s fault.

“He didn’t ask me,” Ingeborg answered, bringing her mind back from something Onkel Jens had said.

“Did you even meet him?”

“No one introduced me.”

“I am sure if you had made any effort, you could have arranged it.”

I was too busy helping Gilbert and Asti. But she kept that thought to herself too. If only she could remember to keep her mouth closed more often.

She wished someone would ask her mor a question, make a comment, anything.

“He seemed a very nice young man.” Mor pressed forward. “He is working in his father’s store in Hallingdal.”

“Oh.” What could she say? She would spread gossip, that’s what. “Did you know that Onkel Jonas wants to go to Amerika?”

“He can’t. He is the eldest son and has inherited the land.”

“What if he chose to give that land to a younger brother, or even a sister?” *Ingeborg Strand, do not ask questions if you don’t want to know the answer, or in this case listen to your mother talk down to you again.* As if she didn’t know the primogeniture rules also.

“That just isn’t done.” The tone of finality should have warned her to stop.

“But what if he doesn’t want the land?”

“The law is the law.”

“There must be a provision for a situation like this.”

“Mor, my heel hurts. I think I must have a blister.” Mari,

the youngest of the children, tugged at her mor's skirt on the other side.

Grateful for the reprieve, Ingeborg dropped back and walked by herself. If only the time for the seter would come soon.