
BOUGHT BY THE WARRIOR

Vikings and Vixens
Book 3

JUDITH FALCON



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Prologue

North of England, 1023
Now what?

The man by her side was so heavy, and the arm wrapped around her waist so thick, that Cwenhild had as much chance of escaping as she had of sprouting wings and flying back home. Not that she wanted to get there, of course, but still...

She couldn't be sure the situation she was in was much better. The man holding her tight against his hard body was a total stranger, seemingly in possession of a fiery temper, and of course, she was naked. Even if she managed to escape from his iron hold, she would then have to locate her clothes and boots, get dressed and open the door, all of this in complete silence. Somehow, she did not see it happening.

She tried to shuffle to the side. Perhaps if she took her time, he would not wake up... After all, he was still probably drunk.

As she worked at freeing herself, she tried to imagine where she would go once she was out of the hut. Her

options were limited. If she wanted to avoid Osmund and Alwyn—and she desperately did—then she had to avoid town. She could not stay too near the village either, or it wouldn't take the Dane long to find her. Could she go to the coast, board a ship and go south? Easier said than done. The coast was miles away and she didn't have any money. Besides, she did not rate her chances of making it to shore unscathed. A woman alone aboard a ship would be the object of all men's attention and she would in all likelihood have to fend off unwanted advances. Without a champion by her side, she would not last a day. That she was no longer a virgin, did not mean she wanted to become everyone's bed mate.

It was then that the man stirred.

Cwenhild closed her eyes in resignation. It was no use fighting the inevitable, she might as well give up. All night, she had tried to escape, and every time, her efforts had been thwarted.

For better or for worse, she was now married to the Dane warrior.

Chapter 1

Thorsten woke up with a pounding headache and the sickly taste of mead in his mouth. That wasn't new. In fact, it was what he had come to expect of a morning. His arm was draped across a soft, naked, sweet-smelling woman. He let out a groan. Nothing remarkable in that, either. He was no stranger to nights of debauchery with women he hardly knew, even if he usually didn't take them back home. But... He frowned. Something was odd. Usually, his evenings consisted of either a bout of drinking or unbridled lovemaking, rarely both, as the former made the latter rather difficult to achieve.

Whoever she was, the poor woman in his bed could not have had the night of her life. He would probably have to make it up to her later or she would spread the word of his incompetence. It should not matter, but Thorsten had his pride.

He turned to his side, deciding that he needed more sleep before he showed her that he had more to offer in bed than a half-erect member and mumbled, drunken ramblings.

By his side, the woman stirred and tensed, clearly readying herself for conversation. He gave a sigh.

Here it comes. Recriminations, questions, followed by requests for more. I am not ready for this.

"Good morning, husband."

Thorsten's eyes snapped open. Now *that* was most definitely unprecedented. Had the woman really called him 'husband'? Slowly, he turned to face her. She was a small, pretty thing who seemed too fragile to sustain a man's assault, never mind that of a great beast like him. Nevertheless, she appeared unscathed. So he was right. He had been incapable of doing much more than get her naked, before passing out. Because there was no doubt about it, she was completely, gloriously naked. His cock instantly manifested its approval but he ignored it.

"Did you just call me husband?" he asked, scarcely believing what he was saying.

"Well, y-yes," the girl stammered. "I had no other choice. We are married, but I don't know your name."

Thorsten did not know whether to laugh or shake the girl to demand an explanation. In the end, he decided to laugh. His head hurt too much for physical exertion, and anyway, an explanation was sure to come. People did not claim they were married to someone without providing at least some details.

"Of course, we are married," he said, stretching lazily. "I wedded and bedded you last night, sweetheart."

She answered without missing a beat. "Yes, you did."

He stared at her. The poor girl was delusional. Or drunk, like him. Yes, perhaps that was what it was.

"Tell me. How much of the mead did you drink last night?"

"None." She sounded nonplussed.

He massaged his temples. "Well, I did drink more than

my fair share of it by the looks of things, and I'm telling you, there is no way I could have performed in bed after having drunk that amount of alcohol. I most definitely did not consummate anything or bed anyone. I couldn't have if my life depended on it."

He made a grimace because that was hardly a glorious thing for a man to admit. But he knew full-well that when he started to drink, he became useless. He forgot everything, which was why he drank in the first place, and once he had numbed his senses, he could not bestir himself to do anything to jeopardise the blissful oblivion he had achieved. No. He knew from past humiliating experiences that he could not have emptied the casket of mead and bedded this girl, lovely though she was.

He frowned when she carried on looking at him expectantly.

Her attitude was starting to make him uncomfortable. She seemed so certain he would eventually remember her that he could not help but be shaken in his belief. With another sigh, he racked his brain for memories of the previous night. He could, he supposed, have done something stupid under the influence of alcohol... It wouldn't be the first time. But usually, his poor decisions involved fighting and betting money he did not have, not marrying women he did not know!

Besides, how could he have married her, or anyone, when out of his mind with drink? Who would have consented to performing the ceremony in such circumstances? And why would the woman have agreed to it even if he had been so foolish as to suggest such a thing?

He crossed his hands behind his head and started to think. Something wasn't right. This woman he did not know claimed he had married and bedded her. It could not be. Not only was marrying the last thing he would ever do

but bedding her seemed like a physical impossibility. Yet she was here, in his hut, naked, and in his bed. These were no mere claims, but inescapable facts.

Perhaps something had happened, even if it had not involved his cock. After all, drinking did not prevent him from using his mouth or his fingers.

"Did I... Did I force you?" He could restrain any woman one-handed, but this one was so small he could probably have done so with two fingers.

"No," she answered quietly. He grunted. That was something at least. "I was willing."

So she was sticking to her story...

Slowly, he turned and brought his head to her, stopping only when his mouth was brushing against her cheek. He heard her inhale at the proximity but she did not move an inch. A groan escaped his lips. She smelled good, and there was no trace of alcohol on her breath.

"You're not drunk," he murmured, allowing himself to nuzzle against her soft, sweet-smelling skin.

"No, I told you, I did not drink last night." She sounded breathless. "I never do."

He drew back, ignoring the pulsing in his groin. His cock had most definitely woken up by now and thought he was about to roll her under him. Could he possess her now? Definitely. Should he?

No, not yet.

"I need to understand," he said after a moment, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Exactly what happened last night?"

Cwenhild let out a breath at the man's question.

A moment ago, she had been sure he was about to roll

over her and possess her. Her whole body had tensed in anticipation. The heat of him, the feel of him, the *sound* of him even... How he had growled in her ear! Like a big, furry animal about to pounce and devour her. She could still feel the echoes of the ripples it had provoked within her.

But he had not made her lie on her back. He had not kissed her or even touched her.

Instead, he wanted to be told how she had ended up in his house. Considering how much he had drunk, she had fully expected that she would have to explain herself but now that the moment had come, she was oddly intimidated.

The man by her side—her husband, whose name she did not even know—did not seem to believe her claim that they were married, which was hardly surprising. Once he had taken her back to his hut, he had proceeded to drink himself to oblivion. No wonder he could not remember a thing.

Still, it hurt, because even though he did not believe her, they were indeed married, and the union had been consummated. There would be no going back. God knew she had tried to escape him but it had been impossible. It was as if everything conspired to ensure she remained married to this stranger.

The evening had not gone the way she had imagined—or rather dreaded—it would go.

Osmund had meant to take her to his friend Alwyn. A visit to an old man hardly qualified as an exciting evening but for all that, it had been a welcome novelty. Since her father's death, their neighbour had insinuated himself as her protector. It had not taken her long, however, to see that he did not have the same idea of protection as she had.

For two weeks, she had been a prisoner in her own home. Her door had been guarded at all times, more to ensure she did not leave than to prevent any wrongdoer from entering, as had officially been the reason.

That was why she had been surprised when he had told her he was taking her to his friend's house.

"Alwyn was recently widowed. He is looking for a woman to manage his household," he announced as they drew in front of an imposing town house. "And keep him entertained at night. He's ready to pay a handsome sum for the privilege and he was struck by your dark looks when he visited last month."

Cwenhild recoiled in shock. She had been brought here to be a servant by day and a whore by night! How had she not guessed Osmund would have a purpose in mind? And how had he even imagined that she would agree? The man was old enough to be her father and was buying her like cattle, for heaven's sake!

"I am not going!" she protested, turning to walk away. "And you need not consider yourself in charge of me anymore. I am old enough to manage on my own."

Now that she was out of the house, she was determined never to go back inside. Osmund quickly caught up with her.

"I am not asking for your opinion," he said, grabbing her by the elbow. "He's waiting for us. It has all been arranged."

"Not by me, it has not. I'm not going." She gave a yank to free her arm from his hold then ran.

It was a desperate attempt. Not only did she have no idea where she was going, but after weeks cooped inside the house with barely enough food to survive, she was not as fit as she had once been. Osmund caught up with her in

a dark alley. Panicked, she realised too late it was a dead end. She was trapped.

He saw it and grinned malevolently.

"Now, you are going to be a good girl and come with me, earn me a lot of money," he growled, pinning her against his chest. "God knows you've cost me enough in the last two weeks."

"A crust of bread every now and then and barely enough wood to keep me warm at night!" she spat, trying to disentangle herself from his hold.

"Do you really think you deserved..."

"What's going on here?" a disgruntled voice called out from the shadows. "Can't a man do his business in peace?"

Cwenhild watched in horror as a man staggered toward them, fastening his hose. Her heart plummeted. A drunkard, who had come into the alley to relieve himself, was the last thing she needed right now. Or... Her eyes darted back to the place he had come from in search of a woman. Perhaps they had interrupted something of a more licentious nature; there just was no way of telling in the dark.

Osmund seemed to think the same.

"This is none of your business. Go back to your whore," he snapped.

The man snorted, as if amused by the suggestion. "As if I'd need to pay to have my cock sucked! Now tell me, how is that girl going to earn you a lot of money? I'll admit, I'm curious."

As he walked forward, Cwenhild saw with increasing alarm that he wasn't just a disgruntled drunkard. He was a huge, disgruntled drunkard. His shoulders were as broad as an ox's and his head came a good five inches above Osmund, who was no weakling himself. As for her... She

knew she wasn't the tallest of women, but this was just ridiculous.

He towered over her and she found herself thinking that she wouldn't have to bend her head overmuch to swirl her tongue around his navel. She started. Where had that incongruous, indecent thought come from? Could she not focus on what was happening?

She was about to be sold to a man who wanted to rape her. Surely, under the circumstances, she should not be thinking about licking strange men's stomachs?

"I won't tell you again to leave us alone!" Osmund barked, doing his best to sound unimpressed by the man's imposing stature.

"I'm not going anywhere, not when the lady sounds so distressed."

This answer made Cwenhild look at the man in a different light. He might be drunk but he had read the situation correctly and he meant to help. Hope bloomed in her chest. If the giant came to her aid, she might have a chance to escape. At the very least, he could hold Osmund up while she ran. It would not cost him any effort.

"Please," she said, addressing him. "I am here against..."

A hand clamped on her mouth, silencing her. The man grunted, as if in protest at this treatment, then seemed to think.

"Is it money you're after?" he asked Osmund. "Well, then let me buy her. I have money."

She blinked.

Had the man just said he wanted to *buy* her? Judging from the incredulous snort in her ear, Osmund could not believe it, either.

"You're going to buy her? Why?"

The man shrugged. "Why do men buy women?"

He sounded almost bored which, considering what they were discussing, seemed incredible.

"Oh, I do know why men buy women and I am not going to sell my best friend's daughter to a man intent on using her ill. Alwyn, the man who will give me a handsome sum for her, at least means to marry her."

"Is that so?" The man gave a throaty laugh then shook his head. "Well, I can marry her if it sets your mind at ease. Why not?"

Cwenhild could barely believe what she was hearing. The two men were discussing her as if she was a piece of meat and didn't need to be consulted. That a drunken stranger wanted to buy her, was shocking enough, but hearing Osmund, who'd been about to hand her over to his vile friend in exchange for money, give lessons to anyone about the best way to treat a woman was just plain sickening. And now she was told that Alwyn wanted to marry her! Was this true or was Osmund simply trying to extract more money from the man who'd sprung to her defence? It was all too possible.

In any case, it made little difference. As a slave or as a wife, she would end up at Alwyn's mercy. She had often wondered why Osmund was keeping her prisoner. Now she knew he had been biding his time, trying to find a buyer for her. He would rid himself of a burden and make a profit at the same time... No doubt if she refused Alwyn, he had other men lined up for her, all just as unsuitable. Dear God. How was she going to get out of this mess?

In the blink of an eye, her decision was made. She would do whatever it took to escape Osmund, even hand herself over to a perfect stranger. After all, the man, big as he was, was drunk and unsteady on his feet. It shouldn't be hard to escape from him in the dark. What she lacked in speed and strength, she made up for in agility and presence

of mind. And even if she did not manage to run away tonight, all was not lost. Once he had sobered up, he would not remember he had offered to marry her to placate Osmund. If, by some miracle, he did remember, then she still might be able to explain her plight to him.

He seemed reasonable enough. Hadn't he remarked on her distress? Hadn't he taken exception to the way she was treated? Had he not come to her aid, after a fashion?

Yes, if she could just get away from Osmund, then surely everything would be all right.

Well, Cwenhild mused as she watched the blond giant sprawled next to her in bed, *how wrong could one get?* She had not escaped and the man had not forgotten his promise to marry her. In fact, he had thrown her over his shoulder as soon as Osmund had disappeared round the corner and brought her over to a priest who had been more than eager to marry them.

After a brief ceremony, the Dane had consummated their union, and she was now his wife in deed as well as in name. Everything had gone as he'd wanted.

Except for one small detail.

He did not remember any of it.

"So you claim that I wed and bedded you?" he asked, keeping his eyes on the ceiling.

"Y-yes..." she stammered, before kicking herself for her honest answer. Why had she not lied? If he did not remember she belonged to him, then he would allow her to go on her way. This was the chance she had been waiting for. But Cwenhild was too honest a person to ignore the truth.

Say what they will, they *were* married, and she knew it, Osmund knew it, the priest knew it.

And besides, well, being married to a big, strapping man intent on helping her did not feel like the worst thing

in the world. He was so handsome, so warm next to her, his strong body so comforting... She should not let it sway her but the appeal he exerted over her senses was hard to ignore.

"Well, there is an easy way to see if you're telling the truth," he said, turning to face her at last.

"Is there?" she asked stupidly.

"Lie back."

Her heart jumped in her throat. Did he mean to jolt his memory by taking her again? It would not work, for the consummation had not happened here, or in this way. She fumbled with the covers and looked around helplessly. What was she to do? Did she want him to take her? She didn't know.

"Lie back. You heard me."

The voice was so stern that she instantly complied. My... Who would have found the strength to withstand his stare or contravene a command spoken in such a manner? Not she.

"Take the cover off."

Cwenhild became crimson with confusion. Surely, he was not asking her to bare herself to him?

"I don't..."

"This is your last warning, take it off or I will do it for you."

It was a threat and yet... And yet her insides went liquid at the dark intent in his voice. No one had provoked half of the sensations this man was provoking inside her just by talking to her. How much better would it be if he looked at her—and then touched her?

Before she could think, she lowered the fur cover and exposed her breasts.

The man inhaled sharply and his blue eyes became almost as dark as hers.

"Take it all off."

This time, she did not even hesitate. Somehow, he had her utterly entranced. With a defiant gesture, she threw the fur to the side.

For what seemed like an eternity, she remained there, naked and shivering, watching him as he watched her. Her nipples puckered but she suspected that the hunger in the man's eyes was responsible for it, not the cool air in the hut.

"Spread your legs."

The three-word sentence had to be the most shocking thing Cwenhild had ever heard in her life. Instead of opening her legs, she bit her bottom lip. Baring her body was one thing, revealing what was supposed to be hidden quite another. When she hesitated, the man frowned.

"I am not going to ask again, but one way or another, I'm going to see you with your legs open."

Everything within Cwenhild dissolved. There was no doubting his determination. He would see what she was desperate to protect, what no other soul had seen.

How was she going to survive this? But how could she refuse the man? It was not just that he was her husband... He was so impossibly forbidding, commanding! A shiver went down her spine and before she knew it, she had bent her legs at the knee and allowed them to fall to the side to reveal her most intimate parts. Unable to look at him, she closed her eyes and turned her head to the side.

What she really did not want him to see was the desire in her eyes. It seemed even more intimate than what she had just bared.

A finger landed on her inner thigh, brushing its way slowly up her leg toward the folds protecting her sex. Instinct made her squeeze her legs back together.

"Don't!" The sharp order was enough to make the

breath catch in her throat. Though he could easily have forced her thighs apart again, he waited for her to rethink her action. She realised that he did not want to see her intimate flesh as much as see her obey him. "Open."

She opened.

A warm hand came to cup her, spreading its heat through her veins. He stroked gently, with care, then parted her folds to ease a finger inside her. She gasped.

Heavens, how good it felt! No, not good, amazing, wicked, shameful, essential all at once, as if her body had been made for that moment, made to welcome him in.

The finger retreated, dipped in again, probing gently. She moaned. It was impossible not to; in that moment, her body had taken over. She might as well stop herself from shivering when she was cold as stop herself from melting under his caress.

"And what's this?" he asked, leaning over her.

"W... What's what?" she croaked.

He had stopped, damn him, and taken his finger away! Cwenhild almost took hold of his hand to force him to resume the caress. More, she needed more!

"It's nothing, it's what it is," he said, his voice cold as ice, a complete contrast to the sultry way he had spoken to her earlier. Her eyes flew open.

"What's nothing?" Cwenhild had no idea what he was talking about, or why he had stopped. She was dazed, ready for him to take her, ready for more. More of his lewd commands, more of his shocking caresses, more of everything.

He leaned in so as to speak in her ear. "Sweetheart, *if* by some miracle, I had managed to make love to you in the state I was in last night, then I wouldn't have been able to think straight," he murmured. "I wouldn't have stopped until I had reached my release. I would have filled you with

my seed, pumping into you until I had emptied every last drop."

Cwenhild opened her mouth in a silent gasp. The words, crude, and uncompromising, had sent her nerves in a tangle. How could he speak thus? And how could she react so wantonly to it?

Her body had gone hot and her folds slick, as if in supplication, as if to say "Take me! Now!".

"Dawn has barely broken," the man carried on, his mouth brushing against the sensitive flesh of her neck. "So this supposed encounter cannot have happened such a long time ago." He placed his hand back between her legs. This time, the hold was firm, not punishing exactly but not teasing, either. He meant to show his authority, not pleasure her, that much was certain. "And yet you are clean and dry... Well, no wetter than an aroused female at least." She thought she heard a smile in his voice. So he had felt how slick he'd made her! She bit her lip in mortification. "If we had really consummated our union, believe me, right now you would be dripping with my seed."

It was hard to know which of the emotions warring inside her she should give free rein to. Disbelief? Anger? Shame? In the end, outrage won.

Cwenhild scrambled away, or at least tried to. The man had her immobilised in the blink of an eye.

"Get your hands off me!" she cried out.

"What's the matter, sweetheart?" he snorted. "Disappointed to have been exposed for the liar you are? Sorry to disappoint, but I am not such a gullible idiot. You chose the wrong man to mess with. If there is one thing I cannot abide, it is liars." His voice had become harsh. "And I will not be made a fool of. I'm going to have to punish you for this."

Cwenhild stilled. He was going to punish her? Surely not... She'd done nothing wrong!

"I'm not lying! If I'm not..." She stopped in confusion. Nothing in the world would make her utter the words "dripping with your seed" out loud. "If I'm clean, it's only because after we came back to the hut, you—"

The door opened, cutting her sentence short.

With a cry of terror, she reached for a fur to cover herself. A man entered the hut, a man looking exactly like the one poised over her with his hand cupped possessively over her sex. A croak escaped her lips. Oh Lord, not another implacable, impossibly forbidding giant! Where on earth was she? And what was going to happen to her if they both decided to make the most of a naked woman in their hut?

"Oh, Thorsten," the man said with a sigh. "Not again."