

May 2, 1936

It was an unusually warm day in May for southern Norway and I was sitting on the edge of the dock with my older brother, Thoralf. He was eight years old and I was seven. The air was damp, there was fog hanging over the fjord, and we could not see the other shoreline even though it was only half a mile away. Thoralf and I sat patiently on the wooden pier with our legs dangling over the edge because they were not yet long enough to reach the water just two feet below us. Bestefar, our grandfather on my father's side, had taken Mom and our younger brother, Odd—he was three—in the rowboat to the bus station just across the fjord. We were awaiting his return to pick us up so we could join them. Thoralf and I were talking about what we would miss the most now that we were leaving Spangereid. It was the only home either of us could remember.

"I am not sure why we have to go," I said. "I mean, I am very happy here. I know that Pop had to go back to the United States, but why couldn't he have taken all of us with him?"

"Mom said it's because he needs to get things ready, like getting us all a place to live and making some money so we can pay for the boat trip," Thoralf replied.

"Do you think they will have lefse and fish cakes where we are moving to?" I asked.

"I am sure they will because if not, Mom will show them how to make them. I just hope that they have fyrstekake there. I love helping Bestemor make it. The smell of the cinnamon and cardamom mixed in with all of that almond filling..."

Thoralf paused to take a deep breath as if it was right in front of him, his eyes closed. "It's my favorite dessert in the whole world!"

"Mine too!" I said, imagining the treat as well.

In the distance, I could hear the faint stroking of oars across the water, each a little louder than the last. Then, it was as if I smelled apples cooking, but it wasn't apples, it was Bestefar's pipe tobacco. I knew that smell from sitting on his lap as he told me stories about his adventures in the merchant marines. Bestefar was a great man of the sea and after each of his journeys to far away places, he would sit us both on his lap and tell us about the great places he visited and the amazing things he saw while at sea. He said that all good Vikings were men of the sea and that both of us would become one someday.

Moments later, I saw the small wooden rowboat that my brother and I had decorated with shields and a dragon's head break through the fog, now with only Bestefar in it.

Bestefar turned his head and called out to us, "Thoralf, Trygve, are you boys ready for your adventure?"

We looked at each other, confused.

"Aren't we just going to the bus station across the fjord?" I asked.

"Well, of course you are," Bestefar replied. "This boat trip is the first part of your journey to meet your other relatives, the ones from your mother's side of the family. It will be a great adventure with new

places to see and people to meet! You will have great experiences and new stories to tell just like I do every time I go to sea.”

“Oh, yes!” we both replied. If Bestefar thought it was going to be fun, then it was going to be.

He tossed us the bowline and we pulled the boat tight to the dock with a thud. Thoralf and I handed him our luggage, which was tied closed with some twine because the latches no longer worked. We climbed into the boat and sat where we’ve sat so often before when fishing with Bestefar.

As we pushed off from the pier, Bestefar said that he was getting tired from all the rowing and asked if the two of us wanted to take over. We moved quickly, excited to change seats with him. The small rowboat rocked abruptly as we both wanted to row from the starboard side. The seat on port side just seemed a little less comfortable and in everything we did together, Thoralf and I always seemed to compete over where we were going to sit. On this day I lost out and had to row from the port side.

Bestefar reminded us that it was not a race and that if we did not work together, we would only be going in circles. Thoralf reminded him that we had rowed this boat many times before and knew how to work together. We were brothers and with Pop gone, we had to. Pop had told us this before he left. He also told us that we were the men of the family while he was gone and that we had to be responsible and help take care of Mom and Odd.

Bestefar nodded, saying that our father was right and that he knew we would do a good job of it. Then he pointed us in the right direction and with a small course correction, we were on our way.

The further out we got, the foggier it seemed to get. Everything in the boat, including our clothes, was wet from the dampness in the air. Bestefar reassured us that he knew exactly where we were and then adjusted his hat, stirred the tobacco in his pipe with a match, and relit it. He puffed on the pipe a few times to make sure it was lit and said, “The two of you are the best crew I have ever had. I am going to miss you both.”

He turned his head and wiped his eye with a handkerchief and said, “Keep rowing. We will be ashore soon.”

As we approached the shore, I could hear what sounded like fish jumping out of the water and then I heard Odd’s voice call out, “Look, a boat!”

When I turned to look at him, I could see him and Mom waiting on the shoreline and he was throwing small rocks into the water, creating the noise that had sounded just like fish jumping. Thoralf and I stopped rowing and let the boat drift in. We heard the bottom of the boat scraping as it started to run aground on the small rocks near the shoreline. Thoralf and I jumped out to make the bow lighter and we pulled the boat ashore. Bestefar climbed out and tied the boat up to a big rock nearby before handing us our luggage.

With our belongings in hand, we all walked up the rocky shore to the road and then headed to the bus stop where we would wait for the bus to Vanse, the town nearest to where my mother grew up and the last stop for the bus. Mom and Odd were falling behind as Odd kept stopping to pick up rocks to throw into the water. As we got closer to the stop, I could see a small red wooden building with a few benches around the outside. It sat just after a bend in the road. When we reached the bus station, we all sat down, except for Odd who played with a stick he had found on the ground next to the bench.

Before long, I could hear the engine of a bus as it came around the bend in the road and pulled up in front of the station. The bus was not very big and was green with red wooden spoke wheels, a luggage rack on the roof, and mud splashed down the side.

When it came to a full stop in front of the station, the doors opened and an older gentleman got off and walked to the back. Then the driver got off and climbed up the rusty ladder that was attached to the rear of the bus. Once on the roof, he took down a bag and handed it to the man standing there. The man thanked the driver and walked into the bus station.

The driver called out, "This bus is going to Lyngdal, Farsund, and then on to Vanse. If that is where you are headed, please hand up your luggage so I can tie it down. We will be leaving in 10 minutes."

We all walked over to the back of the bus and Bestefar handed up the luggage as we handed each piece to him. Mom had the tickets in her hand and told us all to give Bestefar a hug and to thank him for letting us live with him and Bestemor and for all the fun times we had. Thoralf and I raced to give him a hug while saying we really did not want to go. He and Bestemor were the only grandparents we had ever known.

He hugged us back and then reached into a small burlap bag he had with him and pulled out two books and some pencils. He handed Thoralf and me each a book and three pencils and told us that Bestemor had bought both of us a journal. She wanted us to write about all the new people and places we saw and the things we did so that when we came back to visit, we could tell her about our adventures. We both promised we would do that and hugged him again. Next Odd came over and handed him the stick he had been playing with followed by a hug. Bestefar thanked him and reached into the bag once more and pulled out a small wooden boat that he had carved. Odd took it and started to walk back towards the water when Mom grabbed him saying, "We can see it float when we get where we are going."

As we said our goodbyes, Mom handed each of us our tickets and told us to get on the bus and save her a seat. Mom then gave Bestefar a hug and said that she was sorry that we all had to go. But, she explained, since Pop had gone back to the United States and hoped to make enough money for us to move back there with him, she wanted to spend some time with her family in Vanse. Her mom was alone now that her youngest daughter had gotten married and moved out and she could use some help with things.

Bestefar said that he really knew why she was going and that it was okay. Mom and Bestemor had been arguing more since Pop had left and at one point Bestemor said that she was the reason Pop went back to the U.S.