

I'M A SENIOR...



AND
I'M

JACKIE
ROSE

SAVAGE

The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

I'm a Senior and I'm Savage

ISBN: 1-55410-721-0

Copyright © 2006 Jackie Rose

Coverart by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books 2006

Look for us online at
www.extasybooks.com

I'm a Senior...and I'm Savage

By

Jackie Rose

To all those friends I have never met, in our Internet discussion groups, most notably our very own www.extasybooks.com. Thank you all for giving me the idea...and lots of lively hours as well. And for all the rest of you readers...come on down and enjoy the fun. Even though you might not enjoy it quite as much as my savage seniors do.

"How long do you think you can keep me here, oh son of the frozen north?" Starlight the Skrayling demanded. "Do you not know that I am the only daughter of the great chief? He will send a hundred...nay, a thousand, brave warriors to save me!"

"The chief may be your father, but I am your master now," he told her. "I am the one who is gazing at you tied to yonder birch tree, your great black eyes like burning lakes flashing defiance, and your bonds thrusting your bosom forward, veiled only by your long and lustrous midnight hair. You can see your reflection in the lake beside us.

"At the same time, you can see me looming over you, pressing my fists against my powerful thighs, and tossing back my lion's mane of golden hair in mockery, against my mighty shoulders."

"Now I will unbind and feed you. See, I have roasted the slain buffalo in the savory spices that grow in this world, filled my drinking horn with honey mead and torn down your ripe sweet berries."

"It has been a long time since I have eaten or drunk, so as proud and brave as I may be, I must

yet admit to feeling great hunger and thirst."

"Then I will give you food and drink. Can you not smell the fragrance of the roasted meat with its aromatic spices and our fermented honey drink? But you must kneel to take them from my hand. Will you kneel before me?"

"I will...because I must."

Actually, she would...because she was only doing so in an on-line instant messaging group. Otherwise, she would have had to grasp her dresser to help her down to her knees, and then grip it even more firmly to pull herself up again.

For that matter, she could only enjoy his feast in cyberspace. Anyplace else, the meat and spices would have been pure poison, between her high cholesterol and gastritis.

In real life, he was evidently in much better shape. His User Profile had told her that he was merely a 47-year-old Texan software designer, but he was certainly a true Viking in this on-line Chat room. Adele Jacobson had discreetly declined to describe herself at all, and certainly not as a 70-year-old retired social worker living in a seniors' home, so he knew her only as Starlight.

"But none of this will save you, when my father learns where I am," she told him, getting back into character again.

"When he does, he will look at me and see a giant. He will never dare to attack."

"The Skraylings have struck before...and won." Which was true enough. The Native Americans had, indeed, driven the Vikings back to the sea. This detail left Carl undaunted, probably because he was not supposed to know that the Native Americans would eventually succeed.

"They could never defeat a man like me...standing almost seven feet tall and able to crush his horse between his thighs. And other things as well."

That thought sent her to her bathroom for yet another glass of cold water, and she had to run it for several seconds before it was cold enough. It must have taken longer than she thought, because as soon as she was back, he asked her, "Where have you gone?"

"I was praying to our gods," she improvised. He could not very well force her to go hungry for that, even on line.

"I will unbind you, then. But you must kneel at once. Now I am removing the bonds... you must fall to your knees."

"I have so fallen," she told him, even though she shuddered for a moment as she realized what it would have done to her fibromyalgia if she tried to do any such thing in real life.

"And after you have eaten, I will lift you to your feet again..."

"And set me free?"

“And ravish you.”

For a long moment, she simply stared at the words in deliciously shocked delight. Then reality interfered.

“But first I must pray to my gods again,” she told him.

What she really had to do at the moment, was go downstairs to lunch. Otherwise, a whole squad of Skraylings could not have dragged her away from her computer screen.

But the residents always looked forward to mealtimes, here at the Springtime Senior Living Center. If she had not come down to the dining room, someone from the staff would have come up here looking for her, and she would have found it hard to explain her absence. “I was waiting for a Viking to ravish me” would have caused a lot more problems than it solved.

After the meal, she expected a visit from her famous niece, the romance writer, Rose Jacobson, but she would cut that as short as she could. Neither activity could have hoped to compete with her upcoming love scene...all right, sex scene...all right, the forceful seduction, which was a nicer way of saying rape...with Carl the Conqueror.

* * * *

Planning her part in the big love scene...all right, the big sex scene...all right, the forceful rape...was enough to keep her cheerful, as she took her place across the table from George Stone.

That, in turn, was almost enough to ruin her good mood. With his constant scowling, he looked to her like a skinny bald old baby, always on the verge of a tantrum. He seemed closer than ever today.

"Low fat cream of mushroom soup again!" he complained. "I hate mushrooms and always have. Nothing but eating fungus."

"You know I've got gastritis, so it's just fine for me," Adele told him. "I could not eat anything spicier. And I've got high cholesterol, so I appreciate the low fat part, too."

"They should have separate meals for people who can still eat decent meals," he snapped, pouring the oyster crackers into his bowl. "Like food with salt, for instance."

"I used to make broiled chicken every Sunday," ventured Lucille Meadows, who sat at Adele's right. "With asparagus. My children always came to eat it, even if they made fun of my greasy chicken. I only wish I had some of it now."

And I only wish that one of her five children would come to visit her, Adele thought. If they are ashamed of her, they have no reason to be. Even at eighty, she kept her hair blond, her makeup subtle

and flattering, her body still trim and her scent a pleasant lavender. You'd think they would be proud of her.

If Adele stayed tactfully silent on the subject, their fourth tablemate did no such thing.

"Your children should be caring for you now," Emma Golden snapped. "And, Adele, you should be living with your famous niece. It isn't as though you needed nursing home or even assisted living care. This is a place for active seniors, who can pretty much take care of themselves, so you don't really need to be here."

"Who wants to live with someone else?" she retorted. "And who asked you, anyway? Your own niece Tiffany is a countess married to the Romanian ambassador...so you should be living with them!"

"Me, live with those decadent aristocrats?" the veteran revolutionary demanded. "I would never even go to see them! I have never even spoken to her, since she married a nobleman!" She spat out the title as though it had been "pimp." Not that she saw any difference. "My brother is her grandfather, and he won't even say her name. He lives with her parents in Florida, but even they dare not talk about her in front of him. He could have a coronary on the spot, the way he almost did after the 2000 election, when he learned he had accidentally voted for Pat Buchanan."

"Don't you prefer our independent living here?" demanded the director, who was suddenly looming over their table. He always seemed to show up at just the right place and time to head off a quarrel this way. With Emma Golden, that was harder than it seemed, since she was ready to start an argument on almost any subject...even if she would have called it a spirited debate.

"Independent living?" she sneered. "Why are we any more independent, because our insurance and savings are paying off some capitalist, who is making a profit by taking care of us and exploiting the workers, rather than living with our children?"

"At least they can't outsource your jobs here," George muttered.

"Well, I guess that's a lucky thing for me," the director assured them, in his heartiest tone.

"A strong young man like you could always get something else," George told him.

"Well, I'd hardly call myself a young man, since I'm closer to forty than thirty."

"And we are closer to ninety than eighty," Lucille put in. "That means you look like a boy to us."

For this...as for any talk about aging...Nate Waterston had a practiced, professional reply.

"We're all only as old as we feel," he proclaimed.

"That's easy for you to say," Emma retorted.

"You feel about thirty-five because you are. You're like those rich parasites who kept telling us that their money did not buy happiness...just as though our poverty did!"

"And we keep young by keeping busy," Nate plowed on. "This afternoon we'll have our book group discussion...of *Gone with the Wind*. And then we'll see the movie." Seeing Emma's hostile glare, he added feebly, "With Clark Gable."

"And a bunch of happy slaves!" Emma snarled. "How can an African-American even stand the thought of talking about that book...and then seeing it on the screen. 'I say when it's quittin' time at Tara' indeed!"

"Well, it's an American classic," Nate answered, even more timidly. With desperation entering his voice, he added, "But we can talk about *The Great Gatsby* instead. Or *Wuthering Heights*. Or *Pride and Prejudice*." Warming to the topic, he went on, "That one has a new movie version out, it got great reviews, and I can get the DVD to show you."

"They all sound very nice," Adele said. "But I was planning to spend the afternoon with my own book." Which, in a manner of speaking, was perfectly true.

He was not deceived.

"And going on your computer," the director accused her. "Really, I think you spend too much

time alone in your room."

"I am expecting a visit from my niece," she answered defensively. "Of course I am looking forward to that. And besides..."

She stopped herself just in time from answering that, even when she was sitting in front of her laptop, she was not really alone at all. Instead, she added, "And besides, I am looking forward to seeing that new movie of *Pride and Prejudice*."

That was, she felt sure, exactly the kind of thing that older people were supposed to love seeing...and Nate's approving grin told her that she was right. The poor man always tried so hard to please them, Adele saw no reason to tell him that *Pride and Prejudice* left her cold.

Wuthering Heights, on the other hand, had its moments, especially when Heathcliff digs up Catherine's body and makes out with it. Not even Orgazm Books would ever have allowed a modern author to write a scene like that.

Anyway, it did not offer half as many memorable moments as their own fan fiction story, *Captured by Carl*. The thought made her smile cheerfully again, to the point where her tablemates stared at her curiously. "This soup is really delicious," she quickly said.

* * * *

"So I thought I was having chest congestion, but it turned out to be gastritis instead. Although the congestion seems to make it worse." Adele touched her chest, as the seat of both problems. "I think the asthma medication does the same thing, and then the allergy pills cause urinary difficulties, so what can I do?"

As she listened...or tried to listen...to her aunt's slow, dragging and incredibly depressing voice, Rose Jacobson tried hard to avoid glancing at her watch. Instead, she gazed at the cabbage rose upholstery and draperies that did their best to brighten up the sitting room at the Springtime Adult Living Center.

When it really was springtime here in the Minneapolis area, they would be able to admire the elaborate formal gardens through the floor-to-ceiling windows when she came to visit her aunt. Although, of course, Rose hoped to do so as seldom as she decently could, while still being a good niece. No matter how inviting the setting was, her visits here were always incredibly depressing.

On the other hand, Rose told herself, how cheerful could she expect her poor old auntie to be? A few years ago, she had still been a busy, bustling and very fast-talking social worker who could solve every problem—except for her own marital difficulties, of course, which had led to her

early divorce.

Now she could not even live by herself, without someone to clean her room and prepare her meals. She was just lucky that her social service agency had given its employees such good health insurance benefits.

Since her meals had to be low in cholesterol, high in calcium and bland in seasoning, feeding her would have been no mean task for even a gourmet chef.

Still, the springtime staff did its level best to meet every resident's needs. It even provided mental stimulation, from book discussions to computer lessons to bridge games to ceramics classes to embroidery sessions, even water aerobics.

Needless to say, the books that Nate chose for the discussions did not include the ones that Rose herself had written, for her Vikings-and-Vixens series. It had started with *Enslaved by Eric* and most recently had its climax in *Seized by Swen*. Several climaxes, in fact...one or two for each chapter.

Rose had proudly brought the first published novel for her aunt, in the vain hope of livening things up for her, because goodness knows the stories were lively enough. They might, in fact, be too lively for the elderly lady, but they would hopefully give her a few happy moments before

she figured that out.

"Have you had a chance to read my book yet?" she asked, hoping against hope to change the subject from her aunt's latest medical adventure. As always, it proved to be a vain hope indeed.

"I read it in the doctor's office," Adele answered. "I believe I was waiting for the blood test at the time. It was normal, thank the Lord. Or within normal limits, anyway. Anyway, your book let me forget how hungry I was, since I had not been allowed to eat that morning." Her plump fingers patted her niece's slim hand.

"You look very healthy," Rose assured her.

And...partly thanks to all those doctor visits...that was perfectly true. Adele was generally in pretty good shape for seventy. Her only really bad feature was the pair of immense white bags, resembling boiled eggs, beneath her eyes. She blamed it on all the Prednisone she had taken, when her chronic sinus infections were especially bad, although Rose secretly suspected that advancing age was to blame.

Despite that, Rose felt that her aunt was a handsome woman, with a marked resemblance to her niece.

Aunt Adele still boasted the same great, compelling black eyes, above those giant saddlebags. Her black hair still fell over her forehead in long, thick bangs, even though they

now stayed that color only with the aid of Revlon.

The same company provided her Certainly Red lips and nails, which provided a striking contrast to her ivory complexion. Elizabeth Taylor's Passion perfume completed the effect, while successfully competing with the pine-and-ammonia cleaning-fluid scent that filled the room. The result was enough to encourage her niece to play matchmaker, when she saw a presumably eligible male enter the room.

"But look, there is one of your neighbors," Rose said, with relief. "Won't you introduce us?"

"What for?" Adele demanded. "You already have a husband...and if you did not, he would want a girl like you, who could be his granddaughter, not an old broad like me. And there are four of us old ladies for every old man here anyway."

"It's still good to be friendly," her niece soldiered on. "And he looks like a nice man."

Actually, she thought, he looked like an old crab, as he shuffled towards them, leaning heavily on his walker. Her aunt obviously felt the same way.

"Of course, he does not look very happy right now," Rose admitted.

"And why should he?" her aunt demanded. "He was managing a clothing factory, which they moved to China. He was already retired of course,

but a lot of his friends lost their jobs. Now he's lucky that he still has the insurance to pay for this place."

"But he's still someone to talk to."

"What makes you think he wants to talk to me at all? I certainly don't want to speak with that bald old man, anyway...he looks like a big baby. All he ever wants to do is tell me about how he hates the food and the activities and everything else around here. You would hardly call that a stimulating conversation."

About as bad as listening to your constant bulletins about your latest medical tests, Rose thought rebelliously. Unfortunately, her aunt saw her annoyed expression.

"But you have spent enough time with your poor old auntie," she said, patting her niece's hand again. "You'd better get back to your nice husband...and I'll go practice my computer skills."

By going to those medical information sites to ask about some more of your symptoms, Rose thought. But at least she herself had tried to distract her, for an hour at least. No one could have expected her to do any more.

* * * *

Actually, Rose Jacobson had done a lot more for

her aunt than she could ever imagine. Whether or not it was helpful to the older lady must remain a matter of opinion.

After her niece had brought her a copy of *Enslaved by Eric*, the proud auntie had placed it in the building library. There, the slim volume fit discreetly between last year's Tom Clancy and Danielle Steel. The residents kept snatching it off the shelf, before the staff could figure out that Rose Jacobson made Danielle Steel look like Jane Austen.

Adele had gone on to search for the title on her laptop and been impressed by the number of entries she had found. Most were devoted to the lawsuit that the Viking Anti-Defamation League had brought against Rose Jacobson and Orgazm Books...for showing their revered ancestors as a pack of ravaging rapists...under their anti-war cry, "I'm a Viking...and I Protest."

The suit had ended happily when the defendant had married the plaintiff...namely, the founder of the V-ADL. In the ensuing rush of publicity, the book had unleashed a torrent of reader reviews. To Adele's amazement, some of her niece's most faithful fans had launched their own role-playing sites...where they could not only talk about Rose Jacobson's Vikings and Vixens, they could pretend to be them as well.

Now she went to her favorite, Vikings and

vixens. Asked for her name, she entered it as fast as her fibromyalgic wrists would allow... "Starlight the Skrayling."

A Skrayling being, of course, a Native American maiden who had just been Captured by Carl. Not that Rose had written any such title...but role players preferred making up their own stories and characters.

It was a lot more creative, as they all agreed...and a lot less likely to get you sued for plagiarism, by Rose and her husband acting together.

For the same reason, Rose's old auntie had been especially careful not to mention her little pastime to the authoress. In fact, she had done her level best to be sure that the visit would be short, just to make sure that nothing slipped out about her little computer game. There was nothing like talking about your own medical symptoms to drive visitors away, especially if you did it in the slowest possible voice.

For Adele, that topic came all too easily, since her symptoms were all real... at least in the real world. They tended to vanish... or at least to be forgotten... when she entered Vikings and vixen land.

Her fibromyalgia would have made her type even more slowly than she talked...except that she found herself speeding along at a hundred and

twenty words per minute online, and ignoring the resulting wrist pain, when she was really carried away. In more ways than one.

* * * *

When she returned to her bedroom, he was waiting on-line for her.

“Are you not frightened, girl?” he demanded. “You kneel helpless before me, as you gaze up to see me glaring down at you with my brawny arms folded over my massive chest and my golden mane flung back in arrogance.”

Thinking about that, she decided to forego the cold mead and roasted buffalo, which would have played havoc with her gastritis and cholesterol anyway. Having just had lunch in real life, she was not all that hungry...for food, that was. But how could she tell him so without seeming to be all over him like a cheap loincloth.

“You are not too proud to gaze down at the round, firm globes of my bosom, thrust upwards by my clinging buckskin garment, and barely concealed beneath the veil of my midnight hair.”

Now she had plenty of time to fetch her cold water, knowing it would take him a little while to answer that one. Sure enough, she returned to see that her posting was still the latest one on the board, while Carl searched for a reply.

"And why should I not stare at them, since they belong to me?" he demanded, rising to the occasion in more ways than one. "You are my captive, at my mercy. You have aroused my desire to ravish you, so who is to say me nay?"

"nay," she entered...but in all small letters, as a way of telling him how feeble her protest was.

"You speak but faintly," he told her, thus letting her know that she had gotten her real message across. "Your words beg me not to ravish you, but your tone almost begs me to go on...to throw you onto the green fallen leaves and have my way with you."

Fallen green leaves? She wondered for a moment. It was always springtime here in Vikingsandvixensland, when the green leaves were still firmly attached to the trees. Besides, even if they had fallen, they would have been dry brown rather than soft green. She saw no reason to mention that, though, knowing that in a moment she would be very glad to have those soft green leaves there, cushioning the hard ground.

Her niece, of course, would not have made such a mistake...but then, Rose Jacobson was paid good money for writing down her fantasies. It was only a hobby for her old Aunt Adele. Therefore, she obediently pictured the fallen green leaves, forming a natural cushion for the coming encounter.

And she *did* use the word 'coming' advisedly. She was very close to doing so now. To bring herself even closer, she went to the bathroom again, pulled open the mirrored cabinet door and took the Vaseline down from the shelf.

"Starlight?" he had entered the question by the time she returned. "You did speak softly, did you not, when you begged me not to ravish you?"

She had to think about that one. Starlight was a reluctant maiden, but she could not afford to protest too much, lest he took her at her word.

Then the exact phrase came to her...the one that was sure to serve as a bright green light, telling him to go ahead with whatever he had in mind...even though it was cleverly disguised as a stop sign. She had not read all those erotic romances for nothing.

"You would not dare!" she entered, more quickly than ever, her fibromyalgia entirely forgotten. Expanding on that sure-fire signal, she went on, "Even you would not be bold enough to ravish the great chief's daughter."

Almost at once his words appeared on the screen. They were all in caps, too...showing that her message had come through loud and clear, but his would be *louder and clearer*.

"*I would dare anything!*" he exclaimed, then added in a more reasonable way, "especially against as feeble a challenge as yours. You will

learn that now, as I fling myself on top of you, hold your arms above your head and plunge my long, hard, mighty oaken Viking spear into your quivering sheath."

To be completely accurate, she would have called it a "warm, moist, throbbing sheath" right now, especially since she kept rubbing it with layer after layer of Vaseline. Not that she was in any condition to argue with him about that or anything. Her hands were trembling so hard, she could barely make sure that the jelly was spread over the most strategic spot of all.

"Now you are struggling beneath me, desperate to escape, as I thrust myself deep into you," he informed her. "But even as you fight me, I can feel your slim bronze body yielding and your legs spreading wide to receive me. Now you are writhing with passion as your arms fight for just enough freedom to reach up around my neck."

"My sheath is also reaching up to welcome your spear," she wrote, her fingers flying surely now, following the pace of her gasping. "It is drawing you deeper and deeper into my very depths, closing and opening ever more swiftly, until we explode together in a burst of ecstasy."

Explode? In the eighth or ninth century? Where would these Vikings and vixens have gotten hold of any explosives anyway? Rose's editors at Orgazm Books would never have let her get away

with that.

So who cared? her Aunt Adele decided. I am not, again, getting paid for this, and if I want to explode, I will. And I do.

They would not have let her get away with a rape scene, either. That was a definite no-no for Orgazm, and therefore in Vikingsandvixensland as well. But this was not rape, she assured herself. It was merely forceful seduction, and any erotic romance publisher would have to allow that. Not that she could have explained the difference. Something about deciding that she wanted it, after all.

* * * *

When she had recovered enough from the forceful seduction to go down to the parlor and join the book discussion group, she tried to remember what *Pride and Prejudice* was all about. Five sisters trying to land husbands or something. She would just listen today. It would have been different, of course, if Vikings had carried them away. That, she would not have forgotten.

At least, the group was a way to get out and see some people whom she actually, like, saw. Not that any of them were as much fun as Carl, but she didn't want to be one of those people who spent all their time on line, talking to people they would

never really meet. Even more, she didn't want the director finding out how much time she did spend there. He was suspicious enough as it was.

As it turned out, she did not have to try to talk about *Pride and Prejudice* after all. No sooner had Nate Waterston said that it was about a family of five sisters, when Lucille burst into tears.

"It isn't a sad story," the director assured her. "It ends very happily, in fact. And when we are done with the discussion we can watch the movie. You'll love the beautiful costumes."

"Lucille's true story is sad enough for anyone!" snapped Emma, who had plunked her broad bottom on the sofa beside Lucille and put her arm around the blonde's slim, shaking shoulders.

"She was looking forward to seeing those five children at Christmas, or some of them at least...but now they have told her that they are planning a family ski trip...and of course it will be too cold for her. What's more, tomorrow is her 81th birthday, and she has not gotten a single card."

The others sighed in sympathy, the Bennet Sisters saga forgotten. Of course, that only made Lucille's tears fall more quickly across her skillfully painted face. The sight was enough to turn compassion to anger, at least where Emma Golden was concerned.

"Bastards!" she hissed, through gritted teeth, her plump pink cheeks quivering with

indignation. Jumping to her feet, she pounded her fist on an imaginary platform, as she proclaimed, "She has all their pictures on her dresser, even though they are never here to see it. Adele here was the lucky one, because she got divorced without having any children...for all the good they did Lucille. Bastards!" Her eyes glittered behind her wire-rimmed glasses, in a way that would have intimidated J. Edgar Hoover himself.

In this company, however, only the director bothered to look shocked. Everyone else was accustomed to her outbursts.

"Now, Ms. Golden, that is not a nice way to talk in mixed company," he reproached her. Then he flinched as she wheeled to face him, eyes blazing, as she must once have faced the National Guard in California long ago. Even her hair was the same style, with braids wound around her head...the main difference being that they were now rusty gray rather than bright red.

"You think that what they did is nice?" she demanded.

"Well, they must have had their reasons," he feebly replied.

"I am sure they did! They are no longer interested in an elderly lady who can't earn money for them, and who won't even have any left to leave them, after this place has taken it all."

"Actually, they are paying her bills here," Nate

felt compelled to reply.

"And that buys them the right to ignore her!" she crowed. "Capitalist pigs! As bad as the owners of this place!"

"I don't know about the owners, but we staff members earn our pay," Nate muttered.

"It is nothing against you," she assured him. "You are trapped in this decadent system, just as much as we are. You try to make it as pleasant for us as you can." Trying hard for a much more upbeat tone, she went on, "So, let us discuss *Pride and Prejudice*. It will tell us how society oppressed single women in the Georgian Age."

"I am sure that will cheer her up," Adele muttered, as she seated herself beside Lucille and fished for a Kleenex in the pocket of her own long floral rayon mail-order skirt. As she thrust the tissue into the other woman's hand, she leaned so close that she could scent Lucille's lavender fragrance and whispered, "I can think of something that really might do it."

As the author of another literary classic had so aptly put it... "It is a far, far better thing I do than I ever done." The book group had discussed that line at length a few weeks ago, but she had never understood it better than she did now. But, hey, she reminded herself...I *was* a social worker, after all.

* * * *

"The Golden One has heard of you," Starlight told Carl. The Adele part of her was kicking herself mentally, but it was too late to stop.

"She is the little girl who fell off your ships 20 years ago and was raised among our tribe. Now she is searching for the people of her birth, to carry her home again."

"Greetings, Golden One," Carl told her. "We have long searched for you."

Even though her fingers were turning into jealous claws, Starlight typed resolutely on, "Was she not your promised bride?"

"As you are my chosen concubine," he assured her. "But neither of you need be jealous. Surely I have enough for you both."

"I'm glad to hear it," the Golden One told him.

"She has not yet learned the language of our people," Starlight explained. "She means to say that we Skrayling have been so kind to her, she will be glad to share her lord with our great chief's daughter...if your manly weapon is indeed as powerful as you promise."

"I promise not!" he exclaimed. "You may judge me when I prove my words...although you can sense that I speak truly, when you gaze upon my broad chest, massive shoulders, mighty arms and powerful thighs, beneath my golden mane."

"I'm a blond, too," the Golden One assured him helpfully.

"She is shy," Adele explained, wondering how long she would have to post on behalf of herself and Lucille both. "She means to say that she also wears the sun in her hair, as you do. And for that reason, she has been almost a goddess among our people."

"With me, she will be a woman. When I place my strong square hands against that ripe, full bosom, which presses so hard against her buckskin bodice...she will think of nothing else."

"That sounds nice," the Golden One replied.

"She means to say that her entire body is flowing towards you, like a river rushing toward the mighty sea," Starlight translated for her.

"It certainly is," answered the goddess, who was starting to catch on. "But..."

"But what?"

"I mean...can you make love to us both at the same time...or one after another, anyway? I mean, can your mighty arms embrace us both?"

Those arms are both mighty and muscular, Adele edited mentally. But at least she was getting into the spirit of the thing.

Carl obviously thought so, too.

"Ha ha," he typed. "I throw back my golden head in laughter. I will show you how well I can pleasure you, as I fling one of my arms around

each of you and draw you both against my broad chest."

"And then what?" the Golden One asked.

"Then you may press your firm, full bosoms against my powerful chest and your long, slim legs against mine."

"All right, so we are doing that now."

"What the Golden One means to say, is that we are thrusting ourselves against you in ecstasy and standing there gasping breathlessly as we feel your iron muscles."

"And now I am lifting you into the air, Golden One, ready to impale you on my mighty spear."

"Your spear? You mean, you're going to kill me?"

"He means his..."

"Oh, I get it now. Then shouldn't I be winding my legs around his waist?"

"Exactly!" Carl exclaimed. "While Starlight eagerly awaits her turn, all the more aroused by the sight of our passion, as I thrust myself into you and you press yourself against me. And then perhaps the two of you will perform together for my amusement."

"Well, perhaps," the Golden One said dubiously. "But that does sound pretty weird."

"Very well, we can talk about that later. For now, I am overcome with passion as I thrust into you and you push out towards me, in a steady but

rapid pace."

To Adele, those last five words sounded all too much like what she might hear in a cardiologist's office. Fortunately, the Golden One's question brought her back to the business at hand.

"But you will still have plenty left for Starlight?"

"It's nice of you to ask," Adele assured her. "But I can assure you that he will."

"Indeed I will!" the Viking roared, in bold italics. "I will thrust my mighty, knotted oak branch into your warm, moist burrows in turn."

"And we will both be ready to receive you!" the Golden One replied. "Our soft velvet sheaths are growing ever moister, while waiting eagerly for your long, thick, hard oak spear."

* * * *

"Surprise, Grandma! Surprise!"

Lucille turned quickly in her chair, to see three of her children, two of their spouses and seven of her grandchildren crowding into her room.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you..." they chorused.

"And many, many more!" her ten-year-old darling Lucy recited, as she ran over to plant a quick kiss.

Too late, her grandmother remembered what

the child would see on her computer, and reached for the on-off switch. If the machine had often frustrated her before by not starting up quickly enough, it left her completely confounded now by shutting down with agonizing slowness, at just the wrong time. And she had...as she realized with dawning horror...picked a fine time to be reading something other than the MSNBC news.

"What does this mean, Grandma?" the sneaky little snoop demanded. The fatal words were starting to fade away, but she managed to read Carl's response to the Golden One's latest posting.

"Just a game I am playing," she feebly replied.

"You call that playing a game?" her oldest daughter Donna replied, peering over her shoulder. "I would call it reading pornography...and answering it, too. How can my own mother do such a perverted, disgusting thing, especially with all of our photos up there on your dresser, looking down at you? And how could the staff here let you do it?"

To everyone's surprise... including her own... Lucille stood and faced her.

"In the first place, you don't have to talk so loudly," Donna's mother replied. "I might be disgusting and perverted, but I am not deaf.

"In the second place, what else did I have to do? You were going on a family ski trip and leaving me all alone here. I'm just glad I had a

friend who cared enough to find me something to do...even though it meant sharing her own Viking. On line, I mean."

"We thought it was too cold for you," Donna answered defensively.

"Then you should have chosen a warmer place, shouldn't you? Like Walt Disney World."

"That's exactly what we did do," Donna's husband Harry put in. "When Donna told me how you had begged us to let us come with you, no matter how cold it was, we felt guilty and changed our plans. Disney World will be more expensive, but we decided you were worth it. And we came here to tell you on your birthday, as a special surprise, before we take you out for dinner, too."

"But it seems you prefer going to porn sites!" his wife accused.

"Why can't I do both?" Lucille demanded feebly.

"Because even reading that stuff is against the law!"

"Actually, dear, it is not," Harry, the attorney, put in mildly. "Porn means that it is all sex with no story. This series has a very strong plot line...as I learned from the original lawsuit trial record, of course."

"Well, then, it should be illegal, story line or not! And it certainly should not be permitted here. What are they running, anyway...a retirement

home or a bawdyhouse? It was a fine thing for our daughter to read...and your granddaughter, too."

"And bawdyhouse was a fine word for her to hear! Anyway, it is *my* home, not yours," Lucille spoke up again sharply, surprising them once more. "I don't see why it's any of your business what I do here anyway. Even if you thought it *was* your business, you still should have knocked before you came bursting in."

For a moment, they all stared at her, dumbfounded...at least the ones who were old enough to understand. The tension was so thick that even the three-year-old sensed it and burst into tears, thus making it even thicker.

"Mother, you are obviously not yourself," Donna told her sternly. In fact, Lucille looked more than ever like her daughter, since both now had the same cold glare in their pale blue eyes. The younger woman was forced to lower her own gaze first, before she went on, "Obviously, that porn has done something to you. I am going to put a stop to it now."

To Lucille's own surprise, fear made her even bolder...namely, the fear of losing Starlight and Carl's company. Not even a week at Disney World could make up for that.

"I don't see how you can do it," she said firmly. "As I said, this is my home, not yours."

"But we are paying for it," Donna said grimly.

"And we have a right to decide how our money will be spent. I think that the director will agree with me, too...especially when I tell him that I will take this story to the press, if he does not."

"You would expose your own mother to scandal?" Lucille whispered, her pale blue eyes wider than ever now.

Donna had to think about that for a moment, before she stormed ahead.

"No one could blame you," she assured her. "You *are* eighty years old."

* * * *

"That isn't even the question," Nate assured her in his most soothing tone, while feeling glad that she was on the other side of his desk. Not only did he feel safe there, he also knew she could read the many framed commendation letters above his head, from both senior citizens' groups and patients' families. I mean residents' families, of course, he reminded himself hastily. At any rate, a big part of his job was conflict resolution, and he needed all of those skills now.

"Not the question?" Donna demanded, drumming her fingers impatiently on the desktop. "My mother is writing to a porn site...and even worse, those perverts are answering her...and you say that is not the problem?"

"Not entirely," he answered, leaning back, with a great show of calmness and reason. "Of course, that IS a problem...but it isn't the basic issue. The truth is, I think that some of our residents are spending much too much time on their computers, rather than interacting with each other.

"We knew that seniors are the second largest group of computer users, following only teens, so we were glad to offer computer lessons and we were pleased when so many residents wanted to take them. Now, though, I think the best thing for all of them might be to shut down our computer access entirely...except for some supervised sessions, of course."

He hardly needed to add that the supervisors would not allow them to enter any sites where they talked about spears and sheaths, unless it was devoted to historical battles.

* * * *

He made the announcement at dinner...and his cheerful, positive, upbeat expression was enough to tell Emma Golden, at least, that he was not bearing good news at all.

Her suspicion grew to a certainty when he said, "I have good news for you all! From now on, we will have more activities than ever...where you can really interact with each other. Just to start

with, we are planning a bus trip to the Mall of America. Those of you who use wheelchairs can borrow them there."

The general gasp of excitement was interrupted by Emma Golden's loud demand, "So what's the catch?" The director found himself staring through her wire-rimmed glasses into her suspiciously slitted eyes...which had, he realized, faced generations of politicians, making promises that always had a catch to them, going back to the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, when she was still a Young Communist.

"No catch!" he assured her, as confidently as he could, considering that she was glaring at him like a grandmother who had caught her favorite grandson with his hand in a cookie jar filled with workers' pensions.

The others had been returning to their chicken potpies, but now their forks and spoons were frozen in mid-air.

"There is always a catch," she accused.

"Well, I don't know if you would call this a catch," he said, and his defensive tone made them put their forks down. "But we do want to encourage you to take part in our exiting new activities, without distractions. So we are turning off the computers in your rooms."

This time, the gasps were filled with resentment and dismay.

"I knew it!" Emma hissed, as she flung down her fork, as though it had been the summons to a Congressional investigation. "You are taking our computers away from us, so all we will know about the world is what you choose to tell us. A typical capitalist trick!"

"Well, not entirely away," he improvised hastily. "We will still have supervised sessions. But we want you all to socialize more with each other and not become...anti-social."

"And whose idea was this, anyway?" Emma demanded.

"Well...one of our resident's children recommended it. She was concerned that her mother was spending too much time on line, instead of being with others."

"It sounds like Lucille's brats! Not that they want her spending any time with them."

"But I have plenty of friends right here," Lucille objected, tears filling her eyes again. "My best friend is right here across the table from me. She has proven how much she cares about me, by sharing...the most precious thing she has."

"What might that be?"

"Well..." she quailed before George Stone's intense if watery gaze. "Well, she introduced me to a friend of hers. On line. And we have very interesting discussions together." When her male tablemate kept glaring at her, she added feebly,

"all about Early American history. Mostly Native Americans. And European explorers, too."

"Vikings? And Skraylings? Viking men and Skrayling women?"

Adele and Lucille both stared at him, with growing comprehension.

"Carl?" Adele gasped.

"So you must be Starlight," and he bowed his bald head sarcastically, so that she could see the few white hairs on top of his shining pale scalp. "And this must be your good friend, the Golden One. Not exactly what I had in mind."

"What?" Adele demanded. "You are Carl? Well, I never really thought you were a Viking...but you did say you were a forty-seven-year-old Texan software developer in real life."

"And you two aren't exactly the young Elizabeth Taylor and Grace Kelly yourselves."

"Well, at least I never lied to you..."

"Now, you see, you are socializing more with each other already!" Nate interrupted hastily. "And isn't that better than talking to strangers on the Internet, when you never really know who they are?"

"Not really," Adele decided.

"But it must be an InTRA-net connection, for us alone," George realized. "Otherwise, we would have run into some other people too...not just us three Springtime residents."

"Someone who knew we were all reading those Viking and vixen books," mused Adele. "Someone who really cares about us...or about me, at least. If it is the one I think it is...she is also someone who is used to going to court to fight for her rights, and I believe she will do the same for ours."

"It will be good publicity for her, too," George muttered.

"Even more important," Adele added, "it would be even better publicity for a woman whom my niece has already made famous...namely, Zipporah Stuart."

That civil rights specialist had represented the Viking Anti-Defamation League in its suit against Rose Jacobson and Orgazm Books...but that could hardly stop her from making the former defendant into her latest plaintiff. Civil rights...and seniors', for that matter...were certainly the issue either way.

* * * *

"I don't see how civil rights are the issue here."

Nate was looking over Zipporah's shoulder as she read the contract, while seated at his desk. He knew how important it was to concentrate on every word, but found it hard to do so with his shoulder brushing against hers.

Always before, he would have said that he was

not at all attracted to that short, tight, natural Afro style. As she wore it, it was very attractive indeed, above her dangling cowry shell earrings.

No matter what they were wearing, women were always trying to attract his attention...at least, once they learned that he was safely divorced. They never found it very hard to do, since he was always so eager to meet females who were under age 70, on the rare occasions when he got away from Springtime for an evening.

Zipporah Stuart, however, did not seem to care that he was paying attention to her...that he was, in fact, gazing down at her lowered head. She was too intent on studying that contract, to see if there was any loophole where an X-rated computer chat group could sneak through. He could have spared her the trouble: Springtime was part of a national chain that retained the best attorneys.

"As you see," he told her, pointing down at the words in question, while hoping that she noted how big his hands were and how thick his fingers were. "As you see, we are in charge of providing the residents' entertainment...based on our judgment of what is suitable and proper."

He could see those regal shoulders sloping in defeat...but she still managed the automatic answer.

"Where do you draw the line?" she asked.

He had an equally swift reply. "Wherever we

draw it, Vikings and Vixens is on the other side."

She sighed, as her shoulders slumped still further. Then she straightened up again and even started to smile. He was glad to see it, no matter what the cause.

"All right, so I can't take you to court, no matter how much I would like to. But what about the court of public opinion? Suppose I get some seniors' groups demonstrating here. Your friend Emma Golden might get some of her old lefty friends to join them. *Very* old lefties, I might add."

"Did you read the titles of those books, which inspired the Vikings and Vixens site?" he asked patiently. "*Enslaved by Eric, Ravished by Ragnar...and now their own fan fiction, which they call Captured by Carl.* Do you really think that the leftists are going to fight for that? They can be bigger prudes than those outraged relatives, any day, especially when rape fantasies are involved."

"Forceful seduction," Adele answered, but for once he did not even bother to reply.

"Why, even the Viking-Americans sued the author, for defaming their ancestors," he pointed out. "The Viking Anti-Defamation League would be on our side."

Zipporah nodded ruefully, calling his attention to the long, fine neck beneath that close-cropped hairstyle. "I suppose not," she said, with a sigh. "But those old people have so little...it seems a

shame not to let them enjoy what they can. Well, we might as well go tell them about it. I know that they are waiting in the parlor for us, right outside the office. Not that they have much else to do."

"Well, they can play bridge, make pottery, do embroidery and talk about books," he reminded her, in a defensive tone. "Good books, that is. Or classics, anyway. And we are even planning to take them to the Mall of America." Even more feebly, he added, "Where wheelchairs will be provided for those who need them."

"But there are no wheelchairs in Vikings and Vixens land," she reminded him sadly. "And no need to face the old people and their disappointment, when they learn that they can't go back there again."

"Well, it isn't really healthy for them to live in fantasy that way," he told her gently.

"So we will have to tell them that, just by growing old and living here, they have lost their right to do things that are unhealthy...or even to decide what they are," she said. "I certainly don't want to see their faces when we tell them that, either."

His own face brightened and his voice did too, as he told her, "Well, perhaps we won't have to see them."

* * * *

"Greeting to Starlight the Skrayling and the Golden One and Carl the Conqueror," Zema's message came. "I have come across the seas from Ethiopia to summon you all here."

"We might not have come otherwise," Adele's message replied. "Carl the Conqueror, indeed! And saying he was a forty-seven-year-old Texan in real life."

"You never said anything about yourself at all," George retorted. "You just let me picture you looking like...well, like Starling. A few years older, perhaps, but not fifty of them."

"That will not be a cause of conflict any longer," the director assured them. "I have brought you here to bid you farewell."

Their own conflicts were forgotten, in the staccato burst of "No!"

"Every man's hand is against us," Zipporah announced. "They say you are harming yourselves, and they have the power to protect you. It may not be right...but it is the law."

"It is not right at all, but it is what you can expect from the capitalist rulers!" came Emma Golden's answer.

"What can you expect from anyone, when older people want to have a good time, and forget their problems for a few minutes, in a way that those young fogies don't approve?" George demanded.

"Or a few hours, perhaps. Anyway, I don't see how it is anyone's business but ours...mine and Adele and Lucille's. So why don't you go mind YOUR own business and leave us alone to ours?"

"Otherwise," he added coldly, "We might look for another old people's home...and if they won't let us enjoy ourselves, we can look for another one after that. Even if we never find it, just looking will be something to do."

He hesitated before adding, "I don't like to talk about this, but I could go to a VA hospital. I landed on D-Day-Plus-One and got shot in the shoulder, too."

"Then you really *are* a hero!" Lucille quickly responded.

"Much more than that silly old Viking!" Adele agreed. "Why doesn't he pick on someone his own size, anyway, instead of tying poor girls to trees?"

"George was a hero indeed," Nate declared. "And all the more because he never bragged about it." Taking their silence for assent, he quickly went on, "So, Adele and Lucille and George...can't you all accept who you are, and find Starlight and the Golden One and Carl the Conqueror in each other?"

"Not really," Adele said.

"But when you were a social worker, isn't that what you would have advised a client to do?"

"Possibly," she admitted. "I gave a lot of really

dumb advice in those days, to people who were in positions I could not possibly understand. But I hope that my suggestions were never as bad as yours."

As though he had not read that posting, he went on, "You may not be as conventionally attractive as your Skrayling and Viking fantasies...but you are real people with real lives to share, with wonderful true stories, and isn't that just as important?"

The others all stayed stubbornly silent.

"Not, of course," he added hastily, "that you will be thrusting things into other things in real life..."

"We couldn't if we wanted to," Adele muttered silently on screen. "I'm much too dry for that, and I would not dare take Estrogen, because it causes breast cancer. I even need Vaseline for the on line stuff."

"Even if she did use hormones, I don't think there is enough Viagra in the world..." George began.

"Shall we try to think about other things?" Nate demanded. "What about all the group activities that we have planned. Like the embroidery circle, which is starting right away. I know that Emma would hate to miss that." He tried to smile cheerfully as he went on, "She is working on a very exciting project, and I know she

is eager to get on with it."

* * * *

It had been exciting, anyway. But now, he realized that he seemed to have effectively doused the flame.

She was halfway through her handiwork, which featured the old Soviet hammer and sickle, above the motto, "Workers Unite!" Before that day, whenever he passed through the sewing room he had seen her stabbing at the fabric as though it had been some capitalist's heart. Now, she barely seemed to have the energy to complete the "Un."

The director had been planning to praise her efforts, when he strolled up to her table. Instead, he was forced to warn her of a serious mistake.

"Be careful, Ms. Golden," he exclaimed. "You have written, 'Workers Untie.'"

"Untie, unite, what's the difference?" she said with a sigh, still slumped over her sewing kit. "The Soviet Union is as dead as Stalin, and the Revolution has failed. I am only sorry that I have waited too long to join them."

"Don't talk that way!" he cried. "People will think you are in a depression."

"I am."

"But why?" he asked, as though he did not

know.

"Because," she answered, "I had just about decided to join their on-line game. I was going to be a beautiful Russian rebel who got captured by the Viking somehow. But it has been years since I was either beautiful or a rebel, and I never set foot in the Soviet Union at all."

Desperately, he decided that reverse psychology...or even shock treatment...was the only way to go.

"I'm glad to hear it," he answered, trying hard for a hearty tone. "I was tired of all that subversive talk. Now you may admit that George Bush was a great president! And Ronald Reagan. And Richard Nixon, too."

She has to leap up at that, he assured himself, with her eyes flashing and her finger stabbing my chest. But obviously, she was far beyond jumping.

"I suppose that's a matter of opinion," she said. "I am sure they all did the best they could."

Considering that the entire staff had been under the strictest orders never to even mention any Republican president since Abraham Lincoln in her hearing, at the risk of causing a coronary, she was obviously depressed indeed.

Clearly, desperate times caused for desperate measures.

* * * *

Not that his other residents were much better off.

Adele seemed to spend all of her time on the parlor sofa, slumped over *Wuthering Heights*. George was even worse off, since he never left his room at all, except to complain about something...and he found more cause than ever.

Lucille was faring slightly better. Driven by guilt, no doubt, her daughter was coming to see her more often and even taking her to visit the mall. Donna then had the unmitigated nerve to come back and ask him why her mother always seemed so sad, and why his staff was not doing more to keep her active and cheerful.

"I hate to say it, but she might have been better off on that Internet discussion site," she confessed.

Now she tells me, Nate thought. But I'm afraid it's a little too late.

Or...was it?

* * * *

This time, the director called the meeting in the real-life dining room.

"I still have concerns about your frequent computer use," he said. "But it has been hard to replace."

"Impossible!" Adele muttered.

"Yes, well," he went on. "Of course we would

have to set some fairly strict rules."

"Like no Vikings," Lucille said with a sigh, as she sat slumped on the floral sofa. The very thought started her sniffing again.

"Well, some talk of Vikings can be allowed. And even some role-playing games."

All of them sat bolt upright then, and the fire started returning to Emma's bleary eyes.

"Of course, you can't start right away," he added. "We must still work out some rules." He was sorry to see them slumping back again.

"In the meantime," he added hastily, "you still have so much to share with each other...like just talking together. Just as I can enjoying speaking with Zipporah without calling her Zena."

"Zema," she answered firmly. "Not Zena or Xena. Zema means queen."

"Well, Zipporah is good enough for me," he said firmly. "I don't have to go looking for some fantasy girl."

"Of course, you are not eighty years old," Adele muttered. He pretended not to notice as he went on, "I hope she will join me for dinner tonight at the Rainforest Cafe in the Mall, to help me work out the rules for our new computer program."

"That place is just right for a jungle princess," the Golden One put in helpfully. "I would love to take my grandchildren there, so they can see all the jungle animals."

"That really sounds like fun for all ages," Zema added. "Why don't we invite all of our friends here to go with us?"

"I am sure that would be nice," the director answered. Even as the words appeared before them, they knew it would be anything but. He had planned an evening for two people, not six, no matter what their ages.

"Of course, they might have an even nicer time talking to each other on line, if you told them the rules right now," she added. "I am sure you will do it quickly, without wasting time on haggling over the details, so we can go out to dinner. It is not healthy for them to be on line all the time, certainly...but for a few hours during the evenings...especially when you have a date..."

He had to think about that for a moment, while the screen stayed blank as five pairs of eyes stared intently at it, waiting for the next message.

"But no pornography," he told them firmly, and could almost hear the sighs of disappointment that swept through their respective rooms. "Merely a literary discussion," he added hastily and was rewarded with a much louder sigh of relief.

"Well, we do encourage book discussions here." Now he could almost hear their enthusiastic gasping.

"If you choose to talk about those historical

novels that our own Adele's niece Rose Jacobson writes for Orgazm Books...well, that sounds like a good selection to me," he went on. "Educational, too, since she does know a lot about Vikings.

"And if your discussions lead you to speculate on what might have happened when they tried to conquer America...well, that is educational, too. And if you want to try your hands at some fan fiction...or even a bit of role playing...well, that helps you to exercise your imaginations, which is even better."

"Some authors sue to stop fan fiction, but Rose Jacobson is giving you written permission," the attorney told them. "Just as long as you keep it in-house here, as it were."

"Yes, and just as long as you make it clear that that is what you are doing, rather than trying to live in those fantasies of yours," the director put in.

Another long silence followed, but it was obviously a happier one this time, as his residents sought for ways to thank them both.

"Oh, thank you, great Director and noble Advocate!" Starlight finally exclaimed. "Your wisdom and mercy have balanced each other, and we must find some way to repay you. Now, if Zema wanted to do it for us, by bowing to kiss your hand and then lifting it to her breasts..."

"Not now, Adele!" he entered urgently. "At

least wait until we are gone. And remember that you are holding a literary discussion."

"You know..." Zipporah said hesitantly, "in addition to her writing, Rose Jacobson works with her husband at the Viking Museum and Gift Shop. One of the major attractions there is an authentic Viking runestone...and some say that if you touch it, you will become an authentic Viking."

"No thank you," George answered firmly. "My imagination is good enough for me."

* * * *

"Welcome to our literary discussion of Rose Jacobson's historical novels," Adele said. "Tonight, I thought we would try our hand at some more of our fan fiction, *Captured by Carl*. Our friend Emma Golden is creating a new character tonight...whom she calls *Rebel of Rus*."

"Of course, since we are not living in fantasy, which would not be healthy for us, Emma knows who she really is. But she is exercising her imagination to tell us what her character would say."

"Thank you, Adele," Emma answered. "Now, if I were the Rebel of Rus, I might say something like this..."

"Who comes against Russia by the sword, dies by the sword!"

Helpfully, she added, "That's from *Alexander Nevsky*, which is the greatest movie ever made! All about how Prince Alexander defeated the Teutonic Knights."

"I saw that in college," Adele answered. "It was made in the Soviet Union. Wasn't he supposed to be like Stalin fighting the Nazis in World War II?"

"So the Rebel of Rus has come here to warn the Viking against trying to invade our country," Emma raced on, "because who comes against Russia by the sword...dies by the sword!"

"But I have not come against Russia...I mean, if I were Carl the Conqueror, I would tell Rebel of Rus that I have not done it...yet," his words appeared. "But you, foolish wench, have come here to America to warn me, and that makes you my rightful prey."

"Does that mean you would ravish me, as you have the others?"

"I will ravish you all together...so that you might carry the message back to Prince Alexander of what a mighty foe I will be!"

"He will still defeat you!" his faithful subject pressed on loyally.

"I doubt it not, if he is as you say. But first, my own sword will give you my message to carry back to him."

"He means his..."

"I know what he means," the Rebel assured her.

"But no sword is mightier than Alexander Nevsky's, as I know full well."

And that, as Adele had to admit, was a fantasy well worth having...for an old lefty, anyway. It was also a challenge that Carl rose quickly to meet...in more ways than one.

"I will serve these others first," he told her. "Then you will see my sword in action."

"Will it still be as sharp then, for me?"

"As sharp and hard as Alexander's own."

"This boast will be hard to prove..." she answered, knowing she was letting herself in for another dirty pun, and not minding at all.

"But my sword will be even harder."

"Harder and sharper than the great Alexander's weapon?"

"Well...just as hard and sharp anyway," Starlight tactfully put in. "Nothing against Alexander Nevsky, you understand. He sounds like quite a man. Too bad he can't join us here."

"Wasn't Michael Webster a high school history teacher?" the Golden One asked.

"But he's almost blind," Carl objected.

"He's still got that adaptive software...like that board with great big keys."

"But how could Alexander Nevsky get here anyway?"

The Rebel of Rus met that challenge easily.

"Prince Alexander is already on his way," she assured them. "He is coming to rescue me, so that I can help him defy the Teutonic knights. Perhaps...I mean, mayhap...he can lead us all to return with him to fight against them. Mayhap he will challenge Carl to a duel...of swords. And since we ladies will be the judges of our swordplay, they are both sure to win. In plenty of time to defeat those Teutonic Knights."

"How can the voting be a tie, when there are three of us?" the Golden One asked.

"We can split our ballots," the Rebel of Rus decided.

This would all come as a surprise to Michael Webster. But, since he had planned to spend the following evening watching yet another "Law and Order" rerun, it was sure to be a pleasant one.

* * * *

This present evening was not going all that well for Nate Waterston and Zipporah Stuart. The chirping live birds, roaring mechanical animals and lavish foliage were setting a festive and even exotic atmosphere, but it could do only so much towards creating a romantic mood as well.

The Mogambo shrimp and Pastalaya had been a great success, especially since they could share both specialties together. The second entrée also

led naturally to conversation, about how nice it was that New Orleans' culinary legacy was being carried on, in both the Jambalaya pasta and the Cajun sauce.

"And Popeye and Rice-A-Roni are both advertising their New Orleans flavor, too," Zipporah put in eagerly. "That took some courage...but I was glad to see that they are still paying their tribute to the city. What a tragedy that was! Of course, I would have sued someone on a pro bono basis...but there seemed so much blame to go around, it was hard to choose."

"Well, I felt the most sorry for the old people," Nate said, with a sigh. "Especially the ones in the Convention Center. What a disaster that was!"

And this evening, she decided, was heading in the same direction. Katrina was certainly a safe topic, if a depressing one...for one thing, everyone was against it. But it was not moving the discussion to a more personal level.

She hoped that the dessert might help to change that.

"Look at this Sparkling Volcano!" she said, pointing to the lavishly illustrated menu. "A chocolate brownie with vanilla ice cream plus both chocolate *and* caramel syrup...and a sparkler on top. And it's for two, so we can share it together."

Then, fearing she had been too bold, she quickly went on, "Unless we'd rather have the

banana cheesecake and mango shortcake. They sound more...exotic. And we can share them too, of course." Hopefully while being tempted to eat them out of the same dish.

Rather than making his selection, he put fingers hand awkwardly on her hand.

"So tell me about yourself," he asked.

"Well, there isn't that much to tell," she said. "You know almost everything about me already..." She laughed briefly before she added ruefully, "...more than you ever wanted to know, in fact, what with all my civil rights work on behalf of Vikings."

"But I want to know about *you*," he insisted.

"And I want to know about you, too," she told him. "Not just your work with the older people...and you really care about them, I can tell. But about *you*."

They both thought about that for a long moment. "That's a lot harder than it sounds," she said, shaking her head so that the cowry shell earrings swung enticingly. "But I can think of one good way to do it, anyway." As a smile started spreading over her lips, she said, "You *do* have an e-mail address?"

"www.waterstonthewonderful.com," he said, with a responding grin.

"Well then, I am starting to learn about you already!" she exclaimed. "So shall we share our

Sparkling Volcano and then go?"

Happily, she heard him ask the waiter to serve it in one dish with two spoons. As they waited, she wondered what really intimate questions she put to him on line...from his childhood ambition to his favorite TV show. And *please*, she begged silently, don't let it be "American Idol." And other personal preferences...the ones she would never have dared to mention anywhere else.

* * * *

Chocolate was also a major attraction at the Viking Museum and Gift Shop, where Lucille had taken five of her grandchildren.

"Of course I won't say anything naughty to them," she had assured their respective parents. "This will be strictly educational. They will study the Vikings in school, won't they?"

"If it won't be too hard for you," Donna had asked her cautiously.

"Not hard at all," her mother had assured her. "The mini-bus is taking our group to the Mall of America, and the Viking Museum is nearby. I am sure that I will enjoy it more, especially with the children."

"Spending a day with your poor old grandmother is not too much for you to do," Lucy's mother had told the child firmly, when

passing the invitation on. "If you youngsters would spend more time with her, she might not be interested in writing to strangers about...about spears and things. It was our fault as much as hers, so we should try to make up for it."

"But it's a Saturday afternoon," her daughter had wailed. "I wanted to go to the movies with my friends."

"You can do that next weekend."

"'Toy Story Three' might not still be on."

* * * *

Lucy would obviously have to risk missing "Toy Story Three," she realized, as she let her grandmother embrace her, enveloping her as always with her sweet lavender perfume. The old lady seemed so happy about it, the child decided it might be worth the sacrifice.

Then it turned out not to be any sacrifice at all. The Viking Museum and Gift Shop had just installed a new Kid's Korner. It featured funny carved trolls, including a Troll Boy with big buck teeth that made Lucy smile. They stood guard over a basket filled with imported chocolate bars, with intriguing names like "Melkesjokolade" and "Firklover."

Lucy was especially proud when she sounded out "mel-kes-jo-ko-lade" and realized that it

translated to “milk chocolate.” Crowning their visit...literally...were the gilded plastic helmets, topped with horns and attached to long blond hair...flowing free for the boys and braided for the girls.

“Not that the Vikings ever really wore helmets with horns,” the owner assured them, as Lucy admired herself in the mirror, transformed into a Viking maiden. Seeing her disappointed look, he went on, “But they were imported from Norway, so they were made by real Viking descendants.”

Noting Karl Gustavsen’s own genuine long blond locks, touching the collar of his University of Minnesota T-shirt, the child remembered that he was a real Viking descendant himself. Even in school, she had heard about him and his Viking Anti-Defamation League, with its stirring motto, “I’m A Viking...and I Protest.”

They had sued Rose Jacobson for writing naughty things about them. While neither her mother nor her grandmother ever agreed to tell her what they were, they could not been too naughty. She and the store owner were married now.

“If you want to find out more about the Vikings, you will see lots of books about them here,” Rose said, and pointed to the bookshelf. It was filled with cheerfully-colored picture books, bearing titles like, “If You Were A Viking” and

"Who Were The Vikings" and even "Everything You Wanted To Know About the Vikings But Were Afraid to Ask Because They Would Burn Your Town, Slaughter Your Men and Carry Your Women Away."

"What your teachers will not tell you," her husband confided, coming up to put his arm around his wife's shoulder, "is that the Vikings discovered America, hundreds of years before Christopher Columbus got around to it. Part of the proof is this Viking runestone over here...we found it right here in Minnesota."

"And," Rose Jacobson confided, in a low, dramatic tone, "Many people say that if you touch it, you will turn into a Viking yourself. It is for adults only, though," she added hastily, placing herself firmly before it. "So you will have to wait."

"I never knew that!" Lucy exclaimed. "History can really be exciting."

"That's what I am trying to show you," her grandmother said. "And believe me, you don't know the half of it."

Since Grandma was the one who had taken her here, Lucy concluded that she could be pretty interesting, too. Although the child still didn't know the half of that, either.

* * * *

"So you still want to hear about my favorite dream?" Nate wrote.

"I asked you that two nights ago, and you wanted time to think about it while your computer instructor set up our little instant message group," Zipporah reminded him.

"Well, then...I suppose it is not really exciting...but I have always dreamed of having a summer camp for seniors. I know they couldn't do everything the youngsters do, but they could, you know, go swimming in the shallow water and play games like ping-pong and then sit around the campfire singing songs and telling their stories. I know they've got a lot of those."

"That is a wonderful dream!" she assured him. "And don't you have any others beside that?"

"Well," he added, even more hesitantly. "I have also dreamed of a seminar for seniors from all over the world, where they could really be a force for peace."

"And do you have any other dreams, beside those?"

"Well, of course, ever since I met you I have dreamed of tearing that African dashiki off your shoulders and admiring your slim bronze body, naked except for your dangling cowry shell earrings. Unless I have offended you?"

"Not at all," she assured him. "Those sound a lot like my dreams. Except that I'd like to hold

seminars where I can teach seniors about their legal rights, on a volunteer basis, of course. And then I'd like to have similar courses for their children and other caregivers. And, of course, I'd also love to see you in the Roman arena, wearing only your helmet, your sandals and a leather loincloth, while you fight off the Emperor's guard."

"And why am I doing that?" he demanded, typing as quickly as he could

She thought for only a moment, before the latest sword-and-sandals TV-miniseries marched into her mind.

"Because that's their way of executing a rebel leader like you. But Augustus wants to seem to be just, so he has promised that you can have your choice of his female captives if you win..."

"Well, all right," he responded, at about 120 words per minute. "So as the guards advance on me, brandishing their weapons, I glance up to see you leaning forward eagerly in the emperor's box, with your bosom heaving against your transparent Egyptian cotton..."

* * * *

AUTHOR' S NOTE:

Adele Jacobson is not a doctor...and she does not even play one in this story. Her views on her symptoms and side effects must be taken with a grain of salt...which is about all that her high blood pressure will allow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Living in Northern Virginia, Jackie Rose indulges her passion for history by touring restored colonial homes. A resulting newspaper story on historical re-enactors led to a Virginia Press Association first prize. This was the first of five VPA prizes she earned during her ten years of feature writing for weekly community newspapers.

Her husband shares her love for history, Walt Disney World and their son and new daughter in law. She was able to combine the first two passions at the Norwegian pavilion in Disney's world showcase, where she enjoyed seeing the restored Viking ship and stave church, not to mention the smorgasbord. That visit helped inspire "I'm a Viking and I Protest" and, most recently, its sequel, "I'm a Senior and I'm Savage." Both followed her best-selling series of sexy vampire spoofs, which started with "I'm Undead and I Vote."