

The Savage from the Sea: A Viking Romance
By: Claire Harris

The stench of salt and rotting seaweed hung heavy in the air. Several longships were anchored off shore, rocking in the early morning waves. Finna Vidisdóttir grasped the rope mooring to steady herself as the seas surged again, the deck of the ship dropping away from her feet. She caught glimpses of the rocky shoreline shrouded by fog.

They had been sailing for the last eight days, making the trip from the cold lands in the far north to the southern Saxon coast. The journey had been tedious as the sun beat down on their backs and the chill at night bit into their bones. The long hours spent alternating between the sail and oars paid off, and by the end of the eighth day, they spotted land. Based on the tides and rocky landmarks, they had arrived at a village on the shore of Northumbria.

The men shifted around the confines of the ship, tightening the leather belts they wore, running thumbs along the edges of blades to check their sharpness. It was almost time, and Finna's heart pounded. An early morning attack would catch the Saxons off guard.

Jarl Olaf gripped the mooring tight in one hand for balance, then rose above his men, holding his shield. He wore a tight leather tunic, his blond hair whipping in the breeze. The jarl's broad face was etched with deep lines on his forehead and at the corners of his eyes. Though an aged man, Olaf was strong and just as fierce as he had been in his younger years.

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The jarl had spent most of those years presiding over a small tract of land that was part of the larger kingdom of Vestford, ruled by their King Halfdan the Black. The jarl's prowess had often extended to the Saxon lands in the far south. He led their people in many successful raids, providing both wealth and food supplies for the families of Larvik.

The wind died down and Jarl Olaf took advantage of the break. His voice boomed above the crashing waves. "Be strong and Odin will reward your efforts."

Excitement filled the air; his men murmured in approval.

Olaf motioned to the beach. "We go ashore!"

With their shields in hand and weapons strapped onto their belts, the warriors moved to the rail. Finna followed, lowering herself into the surf. The cold water reached her hips and made her teeth chatter. A swell lifted her body and for a moment she drifted loosely like a leaf riding on the current of a stream. But she fought against the pull and finally her leather boots struck the rocky sea floor again. With steady steps she followed the line of men snaking to the shore.