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STORIES FROM THE ICELANDIC

TRANSLATED BY

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The Story of Heming

The Story of Heming (Hemings þáttr) was probably written in Iceland in the thirteenth century. The chief manuscripts are Hrokkinskinna (the relevant part of which was written in the sixteenth century), Flateyjarbók (the relevant part of which was written in the second half of the fifteenth century), and Hauksbók (written by the Icelandic Lawman Haukr Erlendsson in the first decade of the fourteenth century). None of these manuscripts contains the whole story. The text in Flateyjarbók has the first part, as far as the end of Heming's testing by King Harald (see note 3), while the text in Hrokkinskinna, which is considerably shortened compared with that in Flateyjarbók, breaks off just before King Harald's expedition to England in 1066 (see note 6). Hauksbók has only the last part of the text, beginning just before the text of Hrokkinskinna breaks off, though the first leaf of the text in Hauksbók is now lost and has to be supplied from a copy made by Ásgeir Jónsson in 1697–8, when parts of the leaf were already illegible.

There is no reason to doubt that the text as reconstructed from these three manuscripts represents more or less the content of the original story, though the central section, based on the Hrokkinskinna text, besides being shortened, has a large lacuna (from 21.23 to 24.5). This can be filled from a number of copies of the Hrokkinskinna text made in the seventeenth century or later; some late manuscripts also contain additional passages that seem to have been omitted from Hrokkinskinna.

The historical background to the Story of Heming has been constructed from Icelandic Kings' Sagas, chiefly Morkinskinna and Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla. Some details may also have been derived from Fagrskinna and Knýtlinga saga; also Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Laxdœla saga (for the idea of the swimming contest between the hero and the king) and perhaps other Sagas of Icelanders. Accounts of Harald Godwineson's survival of the Battle of Hastings are also found in Oddr Snorrason's Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar and Játvarðar saga (The Saga of Edward the Confessor). There are also several English sources that preserve this legend, which is also found in Geraldus Cambrensis, Itinerary through Wales II.xi; see E. A. Freeman, The History of the Norman Conquest of England, second edition, III (1875), 785–7, and Margaret Ashdown, 'An Icelandic Account of the Survival of Harold Godwinson', The Anglo-Saxons, ed. Peter Clemoes, 1959, 122–36. It does not, however, seem likely that the author of the Story of Heming knew any English sources at first hand, or, indeed any specifically Norwegian sources independent of the Icelandic ones. Nor is any source known for the life of Heming himself, who is probably not a historical character. There are, though, several well-known analogues to this story of a skilful archer in conflict with a tyrannical ruler. In Iceland, Eindriða þáttr, about the Icelander Eindriði and King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway, found in the Greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, may well have been inspired directly by the Story of Heming. The Danish Historian Saxo Grammaticus (late twelfth century) tells a similar story of Toko (perhaps the same as Pálna-Tóki in Jómsvíkinga saga) and King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark (died c. 985) in Book X. Close to this is the account of A. Krantz in Chronica regnorum aquilonari Daniæ, Svetiæ, Norvagiæ (1546), IV 149–50. Another Danish story from 1472 tells of Henning Wulf and Christian I of Denmark. The Norwegian Þiðreks saga, probably based on German sources, tells of the archer Egill, brother of Velent (Wayland the Smith), who also turns up in Vǫlundarkviða in the Poetic Edda and on the Anglo-Saxon

Franks Casket. The king in his story is the legendary Niðungr (Níðuðr, Niðhad). A folk-story from Rorbach in Germany tells a similar story of Puncher in about 1420 (see Jacob Grimm, Teutonic Mythology I (1900), 380–83, IV (1888), 1393. The best known, but by no means the oldest story of this type is that of William Tell, the earliest account of whom is in The White Book of Obwalden, 1471–2. There is a thoroughly English version of the story, first recorded in the sixteenth century, but probably at least as old as the fifteenth, in the ballad Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough and William of Cloudesly, in which William demonstrates his skill in archery to the king of England (The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. F. J. Child, No. 116, III 14–39; there is a good account of a range of analogues here on pp. 16–22).

The story of Heming himself was extraordinarily popular in Scandinavia. One set of rímur was composed in sixteenth-century Iceland, another by Benedikt Sigurðsson in 1729, a third by Magnús Jónsson in 1808. A prose paraphrase of the second of these, Æfintýr af Hemingi Áslákssyne, was made before 1750. Further rímur by Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798–1846) and Davíð Guðmundsson (nineteenth century) have not survived. An ending for incomplete text of Flateyjarbók was provided in the eighteenth century. Two Icelandic historians, Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) and Þormóður Torfason (Torfæus, 1636–1719) included Latin paraphrases of the story in their histories, Supplementum Historiæ Norvegiæ (1597) and Historia Rerum Norvegicarum (1711), II 365–72. There are several versions of a Norwegian ballad (Harald kongin og Heming unge, Heming og gyvre) and a Faeroese ballad (Geyti Áslaksson), and traces of the story in Sweden too (A. I. Arwidsson, Svenska fornsånger (1834–42), I 123, no. 13; A. A. Afzelius, Svenska folkets sago-häfder (1844–68), I 43).

The standard edition, with an extensive but not always clear introduction, is Hemings þáttr Áslákssonar, ed. Gillian Fellows Jensen (Editiones Arnamagnæanæ B3), 1962.

THE STORY OF HEMING

The beginning of this story is that King Harald (1046–66) was ruling over Norway. He was the son of Sigurd Syr (Sow) and Asta, mother of King Olaf the Saint. King Harald was king of Norway for twenty years. He was thirty-two when he became king in Norway. He was married to Silkisif (Ellisif), daughter of Haki.[1] He left her behind in Novgorod. He said he would come back to her and left behind a lot of money as a pledge—this was a goat-skin flayed with horn, and it was full of pure silver—and said it would become hers if he did not claim it before fifteen years had passed, and they plighted each other their troth. Their daughter was Maria, who was the most beautiful of women and a very fine person. But when the king got back home, he married again and took to wife Thora, daughter of Thorberg, son of Arni, and of Ragnhild, daughter of Erling, son of Skialg of Iadar. Their sons were Olaf kyrri (the Quiet) and Magnus, father of Hakon, who was fostered by Steigar-Thorir.

King Harald was a man of large build and most courteous. He was intelligent and eloquent. There were many fine men around him. Nikulas Thorbergsson was with him, his brother-in-law, a very celebrated man, and an Icelander, Halldor Snorrason, and Bodvar, son of Eldiarn, son of Arnor kerlinganef, and Odd Ofeigsson of Mel in Midfiord. Hiort Olafsson and Thorarin Nefulfsson were also there. They were very well thought of by the king. The king was accustomed to going on state visits round the north and south of the country in alternate years. One autumn he was on a state visit in the north.

There was a farmer called Aslak who lived on an island called Torgar. This island lies off the north of Norway. Aslak was a very learned man**.** He was the head-man of the island. He had a son who was called Biorn. Biorn was a very accomplished man. The king sent word to Aslak from where he had got to on his state visit, and said he wanted to see him. Aslak got ready immediately and went to meet the king and went into audience with him. The king received his greeting courteously. The king said:

'You are to prepare a banquet for me with a hundred of my suite, and I will stay for three nights.'

He replied: 'I am unable to provide a banquet for you, but I will give you as much money to provide for you as you would have received in the form of a banquet, and besides choose gifts for you, as I would have done if I had entertained you.'

[1] Hrokkinskinna correctly calls Harald's queen Ellisif (Elizabeth) and adds that she was daughter of King Jarizleif of Novgorod.

The king asked: ‘For what reason do you refuse to give a banquet for me?’

‘I don’t think I have enough room for it,’ said Aslak. ‘I don’t know anything about entertaining men of rank.’

Then the king said: ‘We won’t let that stand in the way.’

‘I haven’t got any hangings for the rooms,’ said Aslak, ‘and I would like to get out of having to give you a banquet.’

The king replied: ‘Make what objections you like, I am still coming there for a banquet.’

‘Then I shall not refuse,’ said Aslak. ‘When are you coming?’

The king said: ‘No later than tomorrow.’

Aslak said he was to do as he wished.

Aslak went home, letting these arrangements stand, and the king came the next day. Aslak went to receive him and gave the king a warm welcome. The guests were shown into the hall and given seats. The hall was completely hung round with shields and everywhere inside was most charmingly decorated. Then the king asked:

‘Do you think that the other aspects of the banquet are going to be as deficient as the interior decorations?’

‘In my opinion,’ said Aslak, ‘everything else will be even worse, but even so I think the provisions for the feast will be more plentiful, if they are edible, and yet the decorations are all my own, and nothing is borrowed.’

The king said he was well pleased. Aslak let the entertainment commence. And everyone there agreed that they had never been to a better banquet.

The night passed, and in the morning after church they were all drinking together. The king and Aslak were in conversation. The king asked:

‘How well do you know the laws that King Olaf Haraldsson the Saint instituted? You are said to be well versed in law.’

‘I think I have some knowledge of such matters,’ said Aslak.

‘What did he decree,’ said the king, ‘if a man has his son fostered secretly?’

Aslak said: ‘I didn’t know that a man could not have his children fostered where he wants.’

The king replied: ‘From what I hear, his decrees were rather different from that.’

‘What have you heard about it?’ said Aslak.

Then the king said that such a man was to be deprived of land and life.

‘Why should he have such a harsh sentence?’ said Aslak.

The king replied: ‘The king cannot conscript a man into the forces or to defend the country if he does not know of his existence, and he cannot be on his guard against a man if he does not know of his existence.’

‘I don’t want to discuss the matter,’ said Aslak, ‘it does not concern me.’

'On the contrary, I was told,' said the king, 'that you were having your son fostered secretly.'

'Who is it who says that?' said Aslak.

'Nikulas Thorbergsson told me,' said the king.

'Is that what you say, Nikulas?' said Aslak.

'I am in rather a dilemma,' said Nikulas. 'I dare not accuse the king of lying, and indeed I cannot get away with saying that I did not mention the matter. I remember,' said Nikulas, 'that I was here at Torgar when I was ten years old, and no one could deny that I was quite a fine fellow. But then you had a son called Heming, and we used to play children's games together, and I never saw any one else like him, and he was stronger in every way at the age of six than I was at the age of ten. And he stayed behind here when we left, and since then I have never heard anything of him. This is all I told the king,' said Nikulas.

Then the king asked: 'What has become of this person?'

'It is true, as Nikulas says, that I had a son called Heming, and I thought him quite a promising young man,' he said. 'But soon after he lost his wits, and I sent him away from Torgar, far enough away from everyone that no one should hear about him, and I have never enquired about him since, and I don't know whether he is alive or dead.'

Then the king asked Aslak: 'You shall not undergo any further expense on our account at the moment. Now we shall get ready to leave, and you will not have to entertain us again until next year at the same time. Then you must see that your son is here, whether he has greater or less control of his faculties, and even if he is dead, I still want to see his bones,' said the king.

'That is no trouble at all,' said Aslak.

Then they parted. The king went home and stayed at home for the rest of the year, and there were no events of importance in the country. The next year the king went on a state visit to Aslak at Torgar. Aslak welcomed them with ceremony. When the night had passed the king and Aslak got into conversation together. The king asked:

'Do you remember anything of what we spoke of together last autumn?'

'I haven't given it a thought,' said Aslak.

'I suppose your son is now here,' said the king, 'about whom you have been so secretive?'

'I have never given it a thought,' said Aslak, 'and I can't get him here, he is much too far away.'

'I shall not be as angry with you as you deserve,' said the king. 'We shall now leave the banquet and be away two months, and you will find you have nothing to laugh about if Heming is not here by then.'

Aslak replied: ‘There’s no need for you to be so insistent about this. It will be no trouble to me to get him back here by the time you have set.’

The anger of the king was obvious to everyone—and so they parted for the time being.

The king went on his visits on the mainland until one month of the winter had passed. Then the king sailed out to Torgar. Aslak had prepared a banquet for him and was very cheerful, and they thought that there had never been a finer feast than this.

During the day the king again asked Aslak: ‘Is Heming here now, whom you have prevented me seeing for so long?’

Aslak replied: ‘I still haven’t given any thought to this matter of yours.’

‘There is no need for us to have a long discussion about this, but I will tell you what I am going to do. Put off sending for your son as long as you like, but here we will stay until he comes. But if your provisions give out before that, then you will never provide another banquet, and nor will your son Biorn.’

‘These matters are up to you,’ said Aslak.

They concluded their conversation for the time being.

As soon as Aslak got away from this interview, he called twelve of his men over to speak to him.

‘I have an errand in mind for you,’ said Aslak.

They broke off their conversation. They said they would go wherever he wanted.

‘You are to take a ship,’ he said. ‘You are to row north by Snos and tie up at the promontory called Framness. There five men are to go ashore.’

One of the men he called upon to make the journey was called Kalf. He was in charge of the messengers.

‘The rest are to look after the ship. You are to go inland away from the inhabited districts into the forest. There you will find a path in front of you through the forest. The path gets wider the further you go along it. You will have to go on for four days, even if you get along fairly fast. Then you will come out of of the forest towards the end of the day. Then there will be a valley before you. It is surrounded by cliffs and forests, and you will not realise that it is a valley until you get to the end of it. There you will find a collection of farm buildings in front of you, which you are to go to. There will be no one else there apart from a man and a woman. They will ask where you are from, and you are to tell them the truth. They will offer you their hospitality. You are to accept it and rest yourselves. You must settle down for the night early. You will sleep in the kitchen. One of you must keep watch. I expect that someone will come in part of the way through the night, who will be handsome and tall and cheerful. The fire will be lit. He will sit down by the fire. I have no hesitation in saying that

his intelligence may be much greater than I have implied. Then Kalf is to stand up and salute Heming and give him my greetings and ask him to come to see me. And if he is not very keen on this, tell him that he is to please himself, and say that my life and that of my son Biorn depends on it, but there seems more likelihood that he will be able to save himself. Tell him also that his own life is at stake, if he comes. Then tell him to choose the course that he thinks best.'

After this he wished them a good journey.

Now they went and did according to Aslak's instructions. Kalf went ashore with four others, and nothing of note happened on their journey until they came to where the man lived. They were given a pleasant welcome there, as soon as the pair knew where they had come from. Then their accommodation was prepared and they went to bed. But the man and his wife sat by the fire, and she opened the conversation:

'Our foster-son is getting to be late now,' she said.

The old man answered: 'I haven't much wealth, and yet I would give it all for him not to come home this week.'

'Why is that?' she said.

'Because I am afraid that these men have been sent for Heming,' he said.

'I don't know what will happen if I have to part from my foster-son,' said the old woman.

'I wouldn't mind,' said the old man, 'if I knew for certain that he would be better off, but I am no happier about that than I am about parting with him.'

It was not long after this that someone went past outside, and a man came in in a red tunic with the skirts tucked up under his belt. His head was wound round with gold braid, but his hair lay down on his shoulders. Kalf thought he had never seen such a fine-looking man nor one looking in any way nobler.

The old couple stood up and welcomed their foster-son Heming. He replied courteously and sat down by the fire. The old man asked what he had caught. He replied:

'I didn't see many birds, but it was up to me if I chose to leave the ones be that I did see.' He asked: 'What's the news?'

The old woman replied: 'Some of your father's men have come here, and we are afraid that they have been sent to fetch you. There are many who will say that it is none too soon.'

Then what Kalf did was to stand up and go up to him and greet him. Heming gave him a friendly reply and asked where he was from.

'I am sent with this message from your father, that he asks you to come to him, and would be very pleased if you came.'

'It must be a matter of some importance,' he said, 'since I am sent for now. I think I am entitled to decide for myself, and I shall stay at home,' he said.

'I think now,' said Kalf, 'that we should not beat about the bush, that Aslak said you were to do as you pleased.'

And then he told him what his father had said about it. Heming replied:

'Then you go straight away tomorrow and do not stop until you reach your ship,' he said. 'And if by that time you see no sign of me, then go back home, and you will then not need to expect me.'

Then they brought their conversation to an end. And straight away in the morning Kalf and his companions set out and did not stop until they got to their ship, and they launched it. And when they were ready they saw Heming skiing down to the shore. He boarded the ship. Kalf asked him when he had left home. He said:

'I left home this morning.'

Nothing is told about their journey until they reached Torgar. Aslak welcomed his son. It was then at the time of the morning when they were just going to church, and after church, when the king had settled himself down, Heming went before him and greeted him. The king replied courteously and asked who he was. Heming told him his name.

'I wouldn't care to see the hide that you are one shank (*heming*) of,' said the king.

'Not everyone is what his name implies, but my purpose in coming here is that I am willing to give you everything that you care to demand of me. Though I have very little of value to offer, yet such as it is is at your service, if you desire anything of me,' he said. 'I am also willing to enter your service, if you wish it, but if you require more submission from me, then I am willing to be outlawed to save my father and the rest of my family,' said Heming. 'And even if you wish to condemn me to death,' said Heming, 'I shall not run away.'

The king asked: 'Are you a man of any special abilities?'

Heming said: 'In the opinion of the old man and woman, there were many things I could do, but I have never displayed my accomplishments before others, and I don't expect you will think much of them. There is one skill that I think I could demonstrate to you,' said Heming.

The king asked: 'What is that?'

'Skiing, I don't care who I have to compete with, no one will beat me at that.'

The king replied: 'We shall see your performance and see what profit we think there is in it.'

Heming replied: 'I shall join in whatever competition you have put on.'

'We will now go out,' said the king, 'and compete.'

Aslak then went up to the king and said: 'I have made preparations for your return voyage, if you want to go, for we think it is about time for the end of the sports.'

The king replied: ‘We will stay here for today.’

Then everyone went out. The island was well wooded, and they went into the woods. The king took a spear and stuck the point of the spear down in the ground. Then he put an arrow to the string and shot up into the air. The arrow turned over in the air and the point of the arrow came down on the end of the shaft of the spear, and stood straight up. Heming put an arrow to the string and shot afterwards, and this arrow kept going upwards a long time and the point of the arrow came down in the string-groove of the other arrow.

Then the king took the spear and threw it from his hand. He sent it so hard and far that everyone commented on it, and it still went straight. Then he invited Heming to throw after him. Heming threw after him and it went right past it so that the socket lay next to the point of the king’s spear. The king took the spear and threw it again and threw the whole length of the spear past Heming’s shot.

‘Now I would prefer not to throw again,’ said Heming, ‘for I can see that I cannot do it.’

‘You shall throw,’ said the king, ‘and make it an honest try and throw further if you can. It is the truest of all sayings that everyone is annoyed if he does not win with his own weapons.’

‘Now I shall throw, whatever comes of it,’ said Heming.

Then he threw and it went a long way further.

Then the king put an arrow to the string, and took a knife and stuck it in this oak. He shot into the back of the handle of the knife, so that the arrow stood fast. Then Heming took his arrows. The king stood next to him.

‘Your arrows are trimmed with gold, and you quite a show-off,’ said the king.

‘I didn’t have any of these arrows made for me, they were given me, and I didn’t take any of the decorations off them.’

Heming followed up the king’s shot, and hit the handle of the knife and the haft split in two. The point of the arrow stood on the tang of the blade.

Then the king said: ‘We will now shoot from a greater distance,’ and he took an arrow and looked very angry, and put the arrow to the string and pulled back the bow so hard that the ends seemed to touch. The arrow flew from the bow a long way and came to rest in a very thin twig. Then everyone said that this seemed indeed a masterly shot. Then Heming shot, and it went somewhat further and the arrow stuck through a nut. Everyone who was there was amazed. The king said:

‘Now the nut shall be taken and put on your brother Biorn’s head, and you are to hit the nut while it is there. You are not to shoot from any nearer than before, and if you miss, then you shall forfeit your life.’

‘My life is in your hands, but I shall not make this shot,’ said Heming.

Biorn said: 'I would rather you made the shot than bring about your own death, for it is everyone's duty to preserve his life as long as he can.'

'Will you be sure to stand still and not duck away if I shoot the nut?'

'Assuredly I shall,' said Biorn.

'Then let the king stand next to you,' said Heming, 'and see whether I hit the nut.'

The king replied: 'It is next to you I am going to stand.'

And he called on Odd Ofeigsson to do it. He went there and said he would hold it his absolute duty to give a true verdict. Then Heming went to where the king wanted him to stand and made the sign of the cross.

'I call God to witness that I place all responsibility in the hands of the king, and that I shall not wilfully do my brother any harm.'

Then Heming shot. The arrow sped swiftly and passed back over the crown of his head and went underneath the nut, and he was not hurt. The nut rolled down behind his head, but the arrow went on and did not stop until it hit the ground. Then the king went up and asked whether it hit the nut.

'Will you believe what I say about it?' said Odd.

The king replied: 'The person who knows has to give evidence.'

'I think he did better than hit it,' said Odd, 'in that he shot under the nut, which rolled down, but the man was not hurt.'

'It doesn't seem to me that he did what I told him to,' said the king. And so they went to bed for the night.

The next morning Aslak went to speak to the king:

'I have prepared for your return journey again, if you want to go to the mainland.'

The king replied: 'We will stay here for today.'

And when they had finished drinking, the king summoned them to go out and down to the sea. Then the king went to speak to Halldor Snorrason:

'I intend you to beat Heming in swimming today.'

Halldor replied: 'That would be beyond men who are better at it than I.'

Then he asked Bodvar Eldiarnsson to do it. He replied:

'Though I had the abilities of everyone here, I would still not be able to get the better of him in anything, especially since I know that I am his inferior in every way.'

Then the king said to Nikulas Thorbergsson: 'You shall compete with Heming at swimming.'

Nikulas replied: 'I don't know how it will go, but I will try, if you like.'

Then the king told them both to get into the water. Heming said:

'I have no need now to hold myself back, for I would much prefer to compete with him if I have to with anyone at all.'

Now they got undressed and went into the water. Then Nikulas asked:

'Shall we see who can swim the furthest?'

'We will be able,' he said, 'to compete at diving, when you have beaten me at the other game.'

Then Heming set out away from the shore. Nikulas asked, when they had gone a long way:

'Don't you think it is about time we turned back?'

Heming replied: 'I expect you kinsmen-in-law of the king intend to make your turning point further on.'

He pushed on as before. Nikulas followed after a moment, and a moment later asked:

'Are you set on going further?'

He replied: 'I should have thought you were capable of going on your own if you want to go back to the shore, but I am going further.'

'You are quite right. I shall venture to turn back.'

Nikulas then turned back, and he had not swum far before he began to sink. At this point Heming swam over to him and asked him how he was getting on.

'That is none of your concern. You can carry on.'

Heming replied: 'I should think that is what you deserve, but still we will help each other along.'

'I shall not refuse,' said Nikulas.

'Put your hand on my back and support yourself like that.'

And in this way they managed to reach the shore. Nikulas climbed out of the water unaided, and had become very stiff, but Heming sat down on a stone out below the high-water mark.

The king asked Nikulas how the swim had gone. Nikulas replied:

'I would not have brought back any news of it ashore if Heming had not treated me more decently than you have done.'

'Now, Halldor, you are to go and beat Heming.'

'I am not going to do it,' said Halldor. 'The previous competitor didn't get on very well.'

The king took off his clothes. But Aslak went to speak with Heming and said:

'Run away and save yourself. The king is now determined to have your life, and the forest is only a little way away,' said Aslak.

Heming replied: 'Eagles ought to fight face to face, and it is impossible to sink a man whom God wishes to swim. Let the king start as soon as he likes.'

Then Heming got up from his stone, and the king did the same a little way away. And when they came close to each other, the king swam up to him and forced him under the water. Then the others could see nothing of the progress

of their struggle, apart from the fact that the sea was so churned up above where they were. And now the evening began to close in, and when it had almost got dark the water grew calm again and the king swam to the shore. He seemed so angry that no one dared to say anything to him. The king was given dry clothes. But no one saw anything of Heming, and they all thought he must be dead, but no one dared to ask**.** The king went home with his men. There was not much merriment. The king was cast down with anger, but Aslak was cast down with grief. Lights were lit in the hall, and the king went to his place. Then Heming came into the hall and went before the king and placed a knife in his lap, the one that the king had worn on his belt. Everyone assumed that he must have taken the knife from him.

Now the night passed. And in the morning Aslak spoke to the king:

'We have made ready for your departure, if you wish to leave.'

The king said: 'We shall not stay any longer, but Heming is to accompany us to the mainland.'

Then they set out and went across to the mainland. They went ashore near a high mountain. It sloped down steeply into the sea just there, and there was a way, if anyone wanted to walk along, across the slope, and it was a single-track path. There was a precipice below and a high mountain above, and the ledge was only just wide enough for one person to ride along. The king replied:

'Now you can entertain us with your skiing.'

Heming said: 'This is not a very good time for skiing here, for,' he said, 'there is no snow now, and there are lumps of ice and the ground on the mountain is very hard.'

The king said: 'It would be no test of a man's skiing if conditions were perfect.'

'I shall do as you wish.'

Heming put on his skis and went over the slope, now up, now down, and everyone said that they had never seen anyone do it so skilfully. He skied over to the king and said:

'I would like to stop skiing now.'

The king said: 'You are to make just one more run. You are now to go straight up the mountain and ski down and see that you stop, if you can, right on the edge of the cliffs.'

Then Heming said: 'If you desire my death, there is no need to delay it.'

'If you will not do as I say, 'said the king, 'then you will die.'

'If I do that, I will not be putting off my death for very long, but still it is everyone's duty to live as long as possible, and I shall do that.'

Aslak went up to the king and offered all his possessions on behalf of Heming's life. The king said he did not want his money.

'And I am not going to have any more argument from him, but he is going to make this run,' said the king.

Heming said no one was to plead for him. He went a little way away from the others, and Odd Ofeigsson went with him and said:

'We are going to lose a fine man here, and I will show you in one small way that I hope that you may survive. I have here the kerchief which once belonged to St Stephen. This I will put round you, for I know of no manner of creature that has died, when it has had this cloth round it. But if you slide down over the cliff and die, then I don't think the kerchief is any better than any other piece of cloth, but if life is granted you, even though we never meet again, you must take good care of it, for I am not giving it you for keeps.'

He replied: 'It may be that you will not be properly rewarded, but I shall not show ingratitude.'

Then they parted for the time being. No one knew what had passed between them.

The king went to the edge of the cliff with all his men. The king was wearing a red cloak tied round his neck and carried a spear in his hand. He unfastened his cloak and placed the point of the spear firmly in the ground. Nikulas Thorbergsson stood behind him and supported him round the waist, and everyone else supported each other in the same way. Heming went up the mountain and put on his skis and glided down over the mountain. He went so fast that it was unbelievable. However much he was jolted, he always came down firmly on his skis. Very soon he came down to where the others were standing, and he thrust downwards with his ski-sticks when he came to the edge of the cliff, and jumped up in the air. His skis shot forward from under him. He managed to land on his feet on the edge of the cliff. He was very badly off balance. He grabbed at the king's cloak, but the king ducked his head down and shook off his cloak. Then Heming flew down over the cliff. Then the king said:

'Thus the doomed and the un-doomed went their separate ways.'

Odd replied: 'You still wouldn't have gone the same way even if you had both died.'

'What dwelling-place do you think we would each have gone to?' said the king.

'I would be content,' said Odd, 'to go to the same dwelling-place as I think Heming has been sent to, and I think that Christ must have been unwilling for the devil to have had the pleasure of welcoming you tonight.'

'I can reward you no better,' said the king, 'than by letting you reach that fine dwelling-place that Heming has gone to.'

And he commanded them to take him and throw him down over the cliff. Then Halldor Snorrason replied:

'Either all we Icelanders will die together, or else none of us, and yet we are not going to give up easily.'

'For your sake, Halldor, I shall allow,' said the king, 'Odd to leave my presence and keep his freedom for this winter, but he must go to Iceland in the spring. And as soon as Odd has left, I shall make him an outlaw throughout Norway.'

Odd replied: 'Let bygones be bygones, but I do not see that it is much loss for me to leave you.'

Then Odd left straight away. Then the king went on to the next place where a banquet was prepared for him, and stayed there for the time being. Concerning Odd we may mention that he went out to Iceland the next summer, and he comes into this story again later.

Now the story concerning Heming continues that he flew down over the cliff. It happened with him as it would with anyone else who flies through the air, that all his clothes billowed out round him. Then the kerchief blew out against the cliff and caught on a stone, and he hung there from it, unconscious. And when he began to come to, he was bewildered and afraid. But as his faculties gradually returned to him, his fear left him. Then he said to himself:

'How can it have happened that I am stuck here? It cannot be any more difficult for God to get me out of this than for Him to have made me land here safely. Now I will swear an oath and pledge everything I have. That will be half of all the property at Torgar. I shall divide this money into three parts. I shall give one part to the blessed King Olaf. The second I shall spend on pilgrimages to Rome and give to the poor, and the third I shall give to St Stephen, and this money shall be invested until I see Odd Ofeigsson again. And I promise to go on pilgrimage to Rome if it is God's will that I escape from this predicament, and if I may be allowed to be present as close to the king's death as he just now thought he was to my death.'

It was in the darkest part of the night that he saw a great light appear above him, and he saw a man walking along the cliff-top. This man took hold of his hand and pulled Heming up on top of the cliff, and he said to him:

'This is St Olaf come to you, for I did not want you to die in such a way that the responsibility should fall on King Harald. Now you are to carry out your oath and go on pilgrimage to Rome, but if you find yourself among strangers you are to call yourself Leif (Remains) as long as King Harald is alive. It shall be granted you what you asked, that you shall be involved in Harald's death, but I do not think that you will be showing me much gratitude for saving your life if you take much part in bringing it about. Now we shall part for the time being.'

Then Heming saw the king rise up in the air away from him surrounded by a light. And Heming took a ship and rowed out to Torgar. He went to church, and he saw it was all lit up, and Aslak and Biorn were there praying.[2] Then, when Heming came to the doors of the church, Biorn said:

'Father,' he said, 'a great miracle! Here is my brother Heming.'

Heming replied: 'This is not a miracle, for I am alive, just as I appear.'

And he told them everything that had happened. They were more overjoyed than words can tell.

Heming stayed there in secret during the winter. In the spring he divided his property as he had promised. Then Heming went to England, taking with him the third of his property that belonged to St Stephen, and he had it taken care of there while he went on pilgrimage to Rome.

In England there was a king called Edward the Good (the Confessor), son of Ethelred.[3] He had no children. Leif came to him, and the king welcomed him.

When he had been there for a while, he secretly sent word to Odd Ofeigsson, asking him to come to see him as soon as he could. And when Odd heard this news he prepared his ship and sailed first of all to Orkney, and then on to England, and there met Leif in London; the latter welcomed Odd, and he stayed there for the winter. He had two bells founded. He took charge of the money that Heming had given St Stephen for saving his life, and also of the kerchief, and Heming asked him to found a church with it.

Shortly before Odd was ready to go, he was present at a crowded assembly that the king was holding there. There he saw a big man wearing a cloak and carrying a sword ornamented with gold in his hand. Odd went up to this man and asked him his name, and he said it was Adalbrikt. Odd said:

'Where did you get these valuable things, the sword and cloak? For I recognise them as having belonged to my brother, and he sailed from Iceland on a ship which has never been heard of since.'

He said he had bought the articles. Leif went up to him and said:

'You will have to tell the truth, for the king has a sword called Skirtein (Proof), and you shall receive a blow from it. It possesses the quality that it kills everyone who lies, but it does not cut anyone who is telling the truth.'

Adalbrikt said: 'Then it will cut me. For there were a number of us on a ship, and we captured another ship, and the men on it defended themselves bravely,

[2] Here the text in Flateyjarbók ends.

[3] In AM 65 fol. this paragraph begins: 'There was a king called Edward who ruled over England. He was the son of King Ethelred. His mother's name was Emma [written Anna], whose husband was Knut the Great. The king was a wise and popular man.'

but we killed them all. And I do not deny that I am the killer of the man you speak of, and I put myself in God's hands and in yours.'

Odd said: 'I do not want your life, and only the king can command your banishment, but you shall pay me a hundred marks in pure silver.'

Adalbrikt gladly agreed to this. Then Odd prepared to leave, and was given tokens of high esteem by the king and Leif.

He sailed out to sea. The weather drove him to the coast of Norway, and they reached harbour in a place called Eikundarsund (Eikersund), and lay there for a few days. Late one evening King Harald arrived there with five ships. The king found out that Odd was there. It was now dark night. Then the king had his ships positioned in the sound outside Odd's ship, and had the ships tied together with cables, but he himself had a tent on shore, and Odd was imprisoned in the middle. His men became uneasy. Odd said:

'Don't be uneasy. For I tell you truly, Heming is alive, and he got into greater danger than we are in, and we will look for safety in the quarter he looked to, that is to almighty God. I will undertake to have a church built at Mel, as I am bound, and I shall endow it and establish a benefice there, and endow it with all the money which is on board this ship. You must all make some undertaking as well.'

And they did so. And when this was done, the wind dropped. Odd told them to weigh the anchors and hoist the sail. Then a slight wind arose. The men on shore laughed, and asked whether Odd was going to sail overland or out over the ships. Odd set his course out across the cable between the ships and sailed out to sea, and brought his ship in to Midfiord and went home to Mel. And there he had a church built, and it was dedicated to St Stephen. And the kerchief which Heming had around him is still there today.

The next part of the story begins with the circumstance that there was an earl in power in Northumbria who was called Godwine (Gudni), son of Wulfnoth. His wife was Ingirid,[4] daughter of Earl Thorgils Sprakalegg. She was the sister of Earl Ulf, the father of Svein Ulfsson, king of the Danes (1047–76). Godwine had many children. One of his sons was called Harald. He was a very well-bred person. The second was called Tostig. He was a tall and strong man, with dark eyebrows, very eloquent, and of extremely military bearing. He was not popular. The third was called Kari. He was known as Moru-Kari (Morkere). The youngest was called Valthiof (Waltheof). His daughter was called Velgerda. She was married to a man called Aki, who was known as Aki the Tall. They lived at Scarborough.

[4] Usually called Gyða in Old Norse (and Old English) sources.

One autumn King Edward rode to Scarborough and was entertained to a feast by Earl Godwine. He was carrying a spear that Harald would have liked to have. But his brother Tostig carried out the following stratagem. He took the head off his spear and shaped a wooden head for it, and then rode forward level with the king and said:

'Look, sire, at my spear, it hasn't got an iron head.'

The king said: 'I see what you want. I will give you my spear, and with it a nickname, you shall be called Tostig Wooden-Spear, and I think it very probable that you will never be lacking in covetousness, if you see anyone better off than yourself.'

The king invited Harald to stay with him, and he went with the king and took affectionate leave of his men. And when he got home, the king showed Harald to a seat on the second seat of honour next to Leif.

'He is accomplished in most skills, and he will teach you them all.'

Harald thanked the king very much for this. And Leif took every care to teach Harald skills, and he was the only person in England to know the whole of Leif's past life.

And when five years had passed, the only thing in which Harald did not come up to Leif's accomplishments was that he was not as strong. And when Harald showed off his accomplishments before other people, everyone wondered where he could have learnt such arts, for no one knew that Leif had so many accomplishments.

Harald was eighteen when he left England and went west to Valland (France) with twelve ships. Robert Rudujarl (Earl of Rouen) was ruling over that country. He had a son called William, and he was known as the Bastard (the Conqueror). He was taller than most other men. William had a wife called Mo-old. Their sons were Henry and Robert, who was a very well-bred and tall man. William invited Harald to stay with him, and he stayed for the winter. In the spring they became partners and agreed to share both what they had then and anything they might acquire later. They also agreed that if either of them acquired or inherited any territorial power, then it should belong to both of them, and they should each support the other in all undertakings, and each avenge the other as if he were his brother. Then they went on viking expeditions with twenty-five ships, and continued in this occupation for six years. Harald was the more popular of the two.

There was in England an earl of Gloucester called Henry. His son was called Helgi, a tall and strong man; he was intelligent and ambitious. He assembled an army and harried King Edward's dominions. The king assembled an army against him. The commander of the king's army was called John. They clashed at Bonolfsstein (Bonvilston, Glamorgan?). There a fierce battle took place,

and the earl won and John fell, and these who escaped went to the king. Then the king appointed a commander over the army called Otti. He was the son of Birgir Bretakappi (champion of the Welsh). He took the army against the earl. They clashed at Hrutsserk. They fought for two days. Otti fell, and the earl made himself ruler over that part of the country. The king came to know of this development. He sent messengers for Harald Godwineson and Leif, and meanwhile assembled an army. The messengers came to Harald and gave him the king's message. Harald told William that he was going to help the king. William said:

'I don't want to leave my own army.'

Harald replied: 'Then we shall divide our possessions and our following.'

William replied: 'You can go if you want, but there is not going to be any dividing of property.'

Harald said: 'It must be one or the other, either we divide the property, or else we both go and fight.'

It turned out in the end that the division of property took place. It is said that there were rather too close relations between Harald and queen Mo-old. And when William accused Harald of this, he denied it. And afterwards Mo-old and Harald agreed on this expedient, that he asked for her and William's daughter's hand in marriage. And this was decided, that he should become engaged to her before he went to England, and it was arranged that the wedding should take place at Rouen twelve months later. And they parted friends for the time being. Harald sailed to England and went to see King Edward. The king now assembled an army and marched against Earl Henry, and they met near the river called Lodda (Lud). And immediately a great battle commenced. The king had arranged for Harald to attack the earl with his men from the rear. And when the battle had been going on a short while, Harald arrived with a great force behind the earl's lines, and a great slaughter took place. Very soon the ranks of the earl's men broke into flight, and the earl was captured and a hundred men with him. Afterwards the earl was executed, and thirty men with him, and the remainder were enslaved.

A certain farmer went before the king and said:

'There is a young and strong-looking man here. I would like you, sire, to give him me, and I will make him my slave.'

The king replied: 'He looks to me as though he will be more than you can manage to get the mastery of him. But if he runs away, you shall be held responsible, but if you can't get any work out of him, then bring him back to me.'

The farmer said he had no fear that he would be unable to bow his spirit. Then they went home. The farmer said to the man:

'We shall make a good bargain together. I will treat you well, and you will work hard.'

Guest (the stranger) said: 'I am not going to work.'

The farmer said: 'You shall be put in a building all on your own, and there you shall be starved to death, if you won't work.'

'You can do as you please,' said Guest.

The farmer put him in a building and starved him. He continually beat Guest, so that he was scarcely able to walk, and sometimes he flogged him so that the blood lay on the ground. Sometimes he offered him money for him to work. Guest refused this. And on one occasion Guest said to the farmer:

'Stop torturing me to make me work, for I tell you once and for all that you will never make me a slave like the rest of your household by doing that.'

The farmer said: 'Then I shall take you to the king.'

Guest replied: 'The king will not make a slave out of me any more than you, though he may have more of a chance than you.'

The farmer said: 'You shall be put at his mercy.'

'I had not intended,' said Guest, 'to ask any favours of you, but I would like to be allowed to decide at what time we go before the king.'

The farmer agreed to this. Guest said:

'Then it shall be on Christmas day, when the king is on his way to High Mass.'

They did so. The farmer saluted the king and said:

'Here is the man you gave into my charge in the autumn, and I cannot make a slave out of him. It is easier to soften a solid stone than his heart.'

The king said: 'Kill him then.'

Guest said: 'I am entitled to be spared for today.'

The king went to church. Guest said:

'Go home, sir, and think yourself lucky that we part company in this way.'

When Mass was over, Guest went before the king and said:

'I am told that you give everyone a truce during Christmastide even if they have offended you greatly.'

The king said: 'You may have a truce if there is someone who will be responsible for you.'

Guest went into the hall with the king and went up to Heming and asked him to intercede for him with the king. And he did so, he obtained a truce for Guest for the period of the feast of Christmas.

When Christmas was over, Guest asked Heming to help him. Heming said:

'I cannot put my heart into interceding for you if I don't know who you are.'

Guest said: 'If there is little hope of your helping me while you don't know, then there is no hope afterwards, when you know what person I am.'

Heming said: 'I would not help you if you think yourself too good to tell me your name.'

Guest said: 'It shall be as you wish. My name is Helgi. I am the son of Earl Henry, and I exchanged weapons with my shield-bearer in the flight, and he fell, and they thought they had killed me.'

Heming went before the king and begged for Guest's freedom, and the king granted this for Heming's sake.[5]

After the death of King Edward, Harald Godwineson acceded to the throne in England in the manner related in the Saga of King Harald Sigurdsson. It also says there that Tostig and the other brothers of Harald Godwineson wanted to share the kingdom of England with him, but got nothing. Then Earl Tostig went to Denmark to see his kinsman King Svein, and he was welcomed there. Tostig asked King Svein whether he had any claim to the throne in England. The king replied:

'I do not deny that I used to think I had some claim, but I am quite satisfied with the way it has turned out, that my kinsman King Harald is in power, for we are cousins.'

Tostig replied: 'There are many people in the country there, even members of his council, who say that I and my brothers are entitled to a third of the kingdom.'

The king replied: 'Then I don't think Harald is sole king of England if a third of it is yours.'

Tostig said: 'What I would like is if you will go and conquer the country, then I and my brothers will support you with all the power at our disposal, if you will command the expedition, on condition that if we conquer the country you will make us kings over it. We will pay you tribute, and put the country at your disposal if you ever need it.'

The king replied: 'I shall have to consider my reply to this proposal.'

And he said he was to stay with him for the winter. Tostig was anxious to know the outcome of his request as soon as possible.

There was a certain occasion in the autumn when the king was riding out to a state reception, and Tostig was with him. It happened while they were resting in the open near a certain bridge and eating, the king had a sheep-dog that was with them. The dog was given a small loaf of bread. The dog ran up onto the bridge and saw its reflection in the water, and it seemed to it as though it

[5] The end of the lacuna in Hrokkinskinna. Some manuscripts continue: 'Now as time passed King Edward became ill in the beginning of winter, and lay sick on over Christmas. Then he had a great assembly called and had himself carried to the assembly and said . . .' The speech is supplied by a seventeenth-century redactor, making Edward appoint Harald Godwineson his successor; 'Soon afterwards the king died.'

was another dog which had another loaf in its mouth. It jumped down off the bridge and dived into the water and thought it was going to get the loaf from the dog. But when it got into the water it lost everything and came back on shore with nothing. Then the king said to Tostig:

'Did you see what happened to my dog just now?'

Tostig said: 'I wasn't paying much attention.'

The king said: 'The dog thought it saw another dog in the water with bread in its mouth, and thought it could get the loaf from it. But it was jumping after its own reflection, and came to the shore with neither loaf. And I know that that is how it will go with me, if I go to England now, I shall be seeing my reflection. But even if I manage to return here, it may be that King Harald will have got here before me, and then I will not even be able to get this kingdom. I will now give you my decision on your proposal. It is that I am not going to England, for I intend to be king in Denmark as long as God wills it, and it does not behove me now to have any further ambitions. But you, Tostig, shall go to king Harald.'

And he did so. The autumn before Tostig came to Norway, Steigar-Thorir dreamed a dream, and told it to his followers and asked them to interpret it. He said that he had dreamed he was present at an assembly where King Harald was. He sat on a seat that was so big that it extended over the whole of Norway, and the king was so big that he extended out from the seat in all directions.

'I seemed to see a man go up to him and kiss him, and I seemed to see such a big fly fly out of this man's mouth into the king's mouth, as big as a raven. From this it seemed to me that the king grew a raven's beak. With this beak he seemed to strike everyone present at the assembly on the head, except us men of Steig. From this many seemed to die, and everyone was harmed. I was then afraid that he would strike us men of Steig. At that moment I awoke. Now I will interpret this myself. When we were present at the assembly and the king sat on the seat, that was his throne. But when he extended out in all directions from the seat, that is his ambition reaching out from his own realm. When I thought he had a raven's beak, I am afraid that the raven's beak will get him, and that the raven will drink his blood. When I thought he was striking men on the head with his beak, I guess that these events will be visited on their heads, so that many die as a result, but it will be worse for those who are with him. But we men of Steig shall not go with him.'[6]

[6] After this, Hrokkinskinna continues with a very abbreviated text for a few lines and then ends. The story is here continued from AM 326 b 4to (a copy of the story in Hauksbók, beginning with a leaf now lost from the vellum).

'. . . learnt from reliable men that another man is (rightful) king of England. Now next Christmas . . . [I would therefore be] most [happy] for you to have this power, and Tostig might just as well receive such a fief from Harald as from King Svein, if the country were conquered.'

Tostig also told him that King Svein refused to agree to his proposal. The king said that he would consult with his men what reply to make to this. Now Tostig stayed with the king for the winter.

The winter before, King Harald had sent Thorarin Nefulfsson and Hiort east to Novgorod for the goat-skin that he had left there with Queen Ellisif, as was related above, and they were not to return unless they got the skin and the valuables that were in it. They returned when Tostig had been a short time with the king. Hiort went before the king and saluted him and said that Ellisif sent her greetings to the king. But he was so deep in conversation with Tostig that he took no notice of the newcomers. Then Hiort spoke a verse:

The king amasses
gold with zeal;
the son [of Syr][7]
gives rarely.
Dangleskin should have
only little land;
then Harald would
answer people.

'How little?' said the king.
'No more,' said Hiort, 'than you could lie on.'
The king smiled and asked: 'How has it gone, Icelander?'
Hiort said:

There is a white goat
out in the yard;
he leers with his eyes,
has a big beard.
He stamps his hooves,
wants to snatch children.
This nanny-goat's son
wants to cause trouble.

[7] Harald of Norway was the son of Sigurd Syr (usually taken to mean 'sow').

The king told them to have the money brought in. Then the goatskin was brought in before the king. Then he asked whether she had remained silent, who had handed over the money. Thorarin said she had made no comment. The king said:

'We must ask the one who is more truthful. That have you to say, Hiort?'

He replied: 'I say that she recited a verse.'

The king said: 'How did it go?'

Hiort said:

The cowardly Harald
will not sail west
over the sea
with warships this spring.
So the paralysed king
will be for long
lacking all,
both England and glory.

Then Tostig said: 'This is a prophecy, their asking you to go to England. Is there no likelihood of your going there?'

The king [said]: 'You shall go to the shrine of the blessed King Olaf and you shall swear an oath that you will tell the whole truth about the forces [of the king of the English] and then I shall summon an army abroad to conquer England. But I insist on having sole command of the army.'

Tostig said he would swear the oaths.

'But if for any reason your expedition is broken off, then these oaths will be on your head.'

The king said it should be so.

Then the king sent letters all over Norway and summoned out a full levy. Then Eystein orri (Grouse), son of Thorberg Arnason, came to the king and became engaged to Maria, daughter of King Harald and Ellisif, daughter of King Iarizleif of Novgorod. Her mother was Ingigerd, daughter of King Olaf the Swede.

Nikulas Thorbergsson was at this time an official of the most northerly assembly district in Halogaland. This army all assembled in Solundir (Solundøyar, Sulenøerne). There were present there the king and Earl Tostig and fifty landed men.[8] One morning, while the king was waiting for a favourable wind,

[8] Landed men were men holding land in fief from the king.

he told Tostig of a dream he had had, when he seemed to see a man board his ship and he seemed to recognise him as his brother King Olaf.

'He looked very angry,' he said, 'and he recited a verse:'

> For the renowned king, the fat [St Olaf],
> most victories brought glory.
> When I fell to the earth I was in state of grace,
> not having ventured out from my own dominions.
> I am not happy about the king's final undertaking;
> I feel that your fate awaits you.
> Provide its fill to the greedy troll-wife's horse;
> This expedition does not have God's blessing.

Tostig replied: 'It won't have been King Olaf who recited the verse, but rather I suspect it was the sorcery of the English.'

'I am convinced,' said the king, 'that no one is so skilled in magic that they can assume the form of King Olaf.'

'A good man was King Olaf,' said Tostig, 'and yet magicians have appeared in the forms of men who are no less saintly than he.'

The king replied: 'I will go with you to England to try to bring about a peaceful reconciliation, but for no other purpose.'

Tostig replied: 'The oaths will fall on your head if you dismiss the levy.'

The king said: 'I shall not put myself in danger of that.'

It is said that when the king was sailing out past Trøndelag, and he [was lying at . . .] a man [rowed out to] his ship in a boat and asked the king to sail to land and help his wife who was sick. The king asked what sickness she had. The husband said that she had fallen asleep near a [certain] spring [and woke to find that] it seemed that a [worm] of some kind were in her mouth.

'And since then she continually wants to drink water.'

The king said that the ship was to sail to land.

'And then you will realise that you have not got a proud king, though he be called hard and mean.'

The king went ashore, and the poet Thiodolf with him. They came to the woman and the king ordered that the woman should be carried to the same spring where she contracted the sickness. He ordered that she should be turned face downwards with her lips down by the stream. The king sat next to her and had a pair of forceps in his hand. He had a small fire lit by him. The woman wept bitterly and begged to be given a drink, but the king would not allow her to get any water. Then the cause of her suffering was forced up into her throat. Then her mouth opened and a worm's head came out. The king took the forceps

and took hold of the worm-head and drew out of her a live worm and threw it on the fire. Afterwards the woman was taken home and soon recovered. Then the king boarded his ship and sailed south down the coast with the whole of the army that had joined him from the north of the country.

It is said that while the king was in Solundir, there sailed in from the sea a ship from Greenland. In charge of this ship was a man who was called Lika-Lodin (corpse-Lodin) because he had carried the corpses of Finn the Glad and his crew from Finnsbudir east of the glaciers in Greenland at the request of King Olaf the Saint, for Finn was the son of Ketil Kalf of Hringuness in Heidmork and Gunnhild, the sister of King Olaf. They launched a boat and rowed to the king's ship and Lodin saluted the king. The king asked how long they had been at sea. Lodin replied:

'Seven nights.'

The king asked: 'Did you notice anything out of the ordinary?'

Lodin replied: 'I don't think now that there was anything exceptional.'

Then his companions turned the boat round. Then the king said:

'Your men don't think you are telling the truth, so tell it now.'

Lodin replied: 'When we had sailed two days from land, we saw a fire burning. It was so long that we could not see past either end. It was dark like a flame. We had a very favourable wind and it was impossible to sail round it. I decided to sail into the fire at the place we had encountered it, where the flames were lowest. We [felt a great deal of] heat from the fire and both sheets were burned, and . . . the sheets and the edges of the sail with the new Greenland cloth. And when we had sailed [for another three days, there appeared] a dark bank of cloud above our ship. With it came such complete darkness that one couldn't see one's hands. Then we heard a great crash and I looked up, the bank of cloud had then broken in two and blood flowed from each [part] in a great waterfall, and this stream of blood came down into our ship, and I had [a cauldron] put underneath and the blood can still be seen here, it has now congealed since it cooled, for it was warm when it came down. And when we had sailed another three days, we heard a great din. Then we saw a lot of birds flying, for which I know there are names in Norway. The ones that were [biggest] flew nearest to us. They screamed and chattered with great joy. This flight lasted for three hours, so that one could not see clear sky because of it, and yet they were different birds all the time. Afterwards we sailed for another whole day before we came to land yesterday evening. Then we saw the same birds flying over the sea from the west [from the direction of England]. This time all the biggest birds were missing. Now they all flew in silence and as if they were sorrowful. And when they came to land they dispersed and alighted singly. Now I have no more to tell you.'

The king said: 'You tried to conceal this from me, since you claimed you had seen nothing.'

Lodin replied: 'What I said was, sire, that I did not now think there was anything strange in this, now that I know you have decided on an expedition abroad.'

'Why is that?' said the king.

Lodin said: 'Because you will not return. It is to be expected that a great omen should be seen of the death of such princes.'

The king said: 'Will you go with me?'

Lodin said: 'You must decide, but I could fetch back the bodies of those of your men who die.'

[The king replied]: 'I shall have a better choice of men while I am alive, but you shall go for this reason, that you claim to know what will happen on our expedition.' Then the king said: 'Don't you think, Tostig, that this is rather a remarkable thing?'

Tostig said: 'If it had appeared before a reliable person then it would have been unusual.'

Lodin said: 'It would be worth a lot that you should not tell more lies about your travels than I, Tostig.'

The king gave Lodin permission to depart.

There was a priest called Hugi who served at Avaldsness on Kormt (Karmøy). He dreamt one night that he was looking into the churchyard and it seemed to him that all the people that were buried there were up and about. They had one man amongst them whom they were pushing from one side to another, but on the other side of the church they had another man, and this one they were all pulling at. There came out from among them a woman who approached the priest; she was naked. The priest asked what all the turmoil was about. She replied:

'A corpse is coming to the church today when the sun is in the south-east which neither party wants to accept. But one will be coming at mid-day, which everyone wants to get hold of. The corpse that comes first I would like to be buried on the east side of the churchyard, but the one that comes afterwards I would like to be buried to the north where the nave and the choir meet, and there will be found there a skeleton, and I would like these bones to be piled round the corpse on all sides, for they are my bones.'

'Tell me then,' said the priest, 'how will our king fare abroad?'

She replied: 'He will fall.'

The priest asked: 'Who will rule the kingdom then?'

'Fridleif (Peaceful),' she said.

'How long will he rule?' said the priest.

'Twenty-seven years, she said.

'What will happen then?' he said.

'Styrlaug (Strifeful) will come then,' she said.

'How long will he be king?' said the priest.

'Ten years, she said.

'What will happen then?' he said.

'Godrad (Good ruler) and Godvili (Goodwill) and Hardrad (Harsh ruler),' she said.

'Which of them will be the longest-lived?'

'Hardrad,' she said.

'How long will he rule?' said the priest.

'Twenty-five years,' she said, 'but after him there will come to pass many evil deeds. And I shall not tell any more now.'

The priest awoke, and the corpses came during the day, just as she said. And it was Olaf kyrri (Peaceful; 1067–93) that she called Fridleif, Magnus Berfætt (Bare-leg; 1093–1103) when she named Styrlaug, Eystein (1103–22) when she named Godrad, Olaf (1103–16) when she named Godvili, and Iorsala-Sigurd (1103–30) was Hardrad. But God forbade that she should tell of the evil deeds which were committed afterwards.

Now the story continues that King Harald sailed to sea with his army. First he came to Orkney, and left behind there his daughter Maria and many other people. From there the king sailed to England and they came to land at Scarborough. Then the wind dropped to a dead calm and they lay there for the night. They awoke when there was a chanting in the air, and it seemed to each of them as if it were above his ship. They all looked up and saw a troll-wife riding a wolf in the sky. She had a trough in her lap, full of blood and human limbs. She chanted these three verses:

It is certain that the king is eager
to go from the east westwards,
a rendezvous to keep with many fine bones;
that is to my advantage.
There the corpse-grouse [raven] will pick out its food
from Giuki's [sea-king] stem-horses [ships],
he knows he'll find food enough.
I am always present there,
I am always present there.

Great mountains begin to fall;
sickness spreads among mankind;
peace is dead, born
is enmity between lands.
I shall be called the wierd
among you as among other nations,
singing sad laments.
The she-wolf swallows blood in the south,
The she-wolf swallows blood in the south.

The weapon makes the red shield shine
when battle comes near.
The wife of Aurnir's offspring [troll-wife]
sees misfortune awaiting the king.
The swarthy woman takes away
men's blood [or flesh] with her jaws.
The ferocious woman colours
The wolf's mouth within with blood,
the wolf's mouth within with blood.

The king asked Tostig whether he was awake. Tostig replied:

'I was woken up by this chant.'

The king said: 'Do you think all that meant anything?'

'Nothing,' said Tostig.

'Then you are dead in your heart,' said the king, 'for I have taken part in many battles, and I never saw omens like these before.'

They reached land and went ashore in the district called Cleveland. The king asked Tostig:

'What is that little hill called over there to the north?'

Tostig said: 'Not every hillock here is given a name.'

The king said: 'But this one is sure to have a name, so tell me it.'

Tostig said: 'It is the grave-mound of Ivar the Boneless.'

The king replied: 'There are few who have conquered England who first set foot in the country by his grave-mound.'

Tostig said: 'It is sheer superstition to believe such things.'

They went ashore with the army, leaving a party on guard by the ships. The brothers Earl Moru-Kari and Earl Valthiof and their brother-in-law Aki collected an army together as soon as they heard about the army of Northmen. They met at the river called the Ouse and there a great battle began which

continued until none (3 pm). By then Eystein had penetrated the English lines and killed Aki the Tall. Then he saw that Moru-Kari had got round to the rear of Tostig's lines. Then he brought his own men round behind Moru-Kari's lines. And when Earl Moru-Kari saw this, he told his men to stand back to back and defend themselves well and valiantly. And in the end his men broke into flight and they fled out into the river, and Earl Moru-Kari was killed there with the greater part of his followers. Many were also drowned.

While this was going on King Harald had captured Earl Valthiof. Then Tostig went up to the king and said:

'Let both brothers go the same way.'

The king replied: 'You shall kill those that you capture, but I will decide his fate.'

The king said to Valthiof: 'I will let you go free if you will swear never to fight against me and to give me information the same day if you know of any treachery being planned against me.'

Valthiof said: 'I will not swear any oaths and I will not save my life by not helping my brother Harald as long as I am able, but I will give you information if I know of any treachery planned against you, and this I will do to save my life. But I will not swear any oath, for it seems to me that Tostig is not going to let me have much of my inheritance.'

The king set Valthiof free to go wherever he wished. Tostig said:

'It is a foolish action to let a man go free who thinks himself too good to swear you oaths.'

The king said: 'I consider his word more reliable than your oath.'

Tostig said: 'Let's take our army to London and lay waste the country with fire and sword and spare no one, neither women nor children.'

They did so. And afterwards they returned to their ships and sailed south down the coast and brought their ships up to Ravenseer. Then they found when they got there in the villages neither people nor animals, since everyone fled before them. And one day, when the king was lying in a certain harbour, a woman rode down to the shore and asked for the king of the Northmen. The king told her who he was. She said:

'I have a land-tent that I would like to give you.'

Tostig said: 'Accept the tent and have it burnt afterwards.'

The king said: 'Burn things that are given to you, but I haven't noticed that your countrymen have been giving you any tokens of respect.'

He ordered the tent to be erected. And everyone agreed that they had never seen such a fine tent. The king asked what reward she desired for the tent. She replied:

'I have two sons, and I would like to receive assurance that they will both be spared.'

The king said that both her dependants and her property would be spared if he knew where it was. Then she rode away. But the king slept in the tent that night. And in the morning the king told the poet Thiodolf that he thought that Tostig had been right when he said that the tent would not be free from sorcery.

'For up to now I seemed to see seven plans to meet every eventuality, but now I don't seem to have any idea what course to take.'

Thiodolf replied: 'We will nevertheless abide by your counsels.'

The king said: 'Our plans shall now be changed. We shall go ashore with two thousand men, and six thousand shall stay with the ships. In charge of the latter shall be the brothers Eystein and Nikulas. Tostig shall go with me.'

The king carried out his plan, went ashore and burned and plundered. And when he reached the town called York, the citizens sent him a message, offering to surrender to him. They confirmed this with oaths. The king accepted their offer. Afterwards he returned to his ships. The next morning he was to go ashore to install his men in charge of the city, and the king stayed at the ships during the following night.

When morning came, the king prepared to go ashore to the city. They wore shields and helmets, but no coats of mail, except for a hundred men who wore very light armour. Tostig said:

'It is very inadvisable to go into the hands of one's enemies almost unarmed, for it will be no good trusting the English if they get you in their power, and the woman's gift of the tent has not done you much good, king.'

The king said: 'Are you afraid now, Tostig?'

He said: 'I think it is much more to be feared that you have lost your senses than for poems to have been chanted at us.'

'We shall nevertheless do as I say,' said the king.

Tostig was so unpopular with the Northmen that no one would listen to him. The same evening as King Harald went back to the ships with the army of Northmen, King Harald Godwineson came up from the south of England with an overwhelming army to York, and there learned the true facts about the Northmen. And when the citizens knew that the king had come, they broke all their promises to the Northmen and joined King Harald's army. And immediately the next morning the king moved his army down to Stoneford Bridge, which is now called Stamford, and so both armies advanced on each other. King Harald Sigurdsson said:

'Is that a whirlwind or the dust from horses that can be seen up inland?'

Tostig replied: 'It is dust from horses for sure, and now you can see how reliable the men of this country are.'

The king halted his army and waited, and soon saw that an overwhelming army in full armour was advancing on them. At that moment a man came riding up and asked for King Harald. He was told where he was. Tostig said:

'This is my brother Valthiof, kill him.'

The king forbade them to do this. Valthiof rode up to the king and saluted him and told him to turn back as quickly as possible to his ships.

'For my brother, King Harald, is coming against you with an overwhelming army and you have not the numbers to resist him, even if you were armed, but even less as you are.'

The king said: 'Fare well, Valthiof, and stand by your brother. You have kept your word well.'

The king then asked what course they should take, and the majority asked the king to go back to the ships for the rest of his men. The king replied:

'I have never yet fled without a battle, and I shall not do so now, for I do not want to give the English the triumph of both chasing me and killing me.'

Then he sent a man to the ships to tell Eystein orri that he needed reinforcements. And he had the trumpets blow and arranged his lines of battle. Then the English army also halted and arranged their lines. There was now little more than the distance of two arrow-shots between them. And just then three men rode up to the ranks of the Northmen and asked whether Earl Tostig could hear what they said. One of them, the one who spoke, was not a very big man, but slight in build, and very gentlemanlike, and wore a gilded helmet and a red shield with a hawk painted on it in gold. The second man was very tall and strong-looking and a most fine figure of a man. The third was a tall man, slim at the waist and broad-shouldered. This one rode behind. Tostig told him to say what he wished. The horseman said:

'Your brother Harald has sent you God's blessing and has offered you terms of peace.'

Tostig said: 'What further concessions does he offer now than before?'

The horseman said: 'He considers you now deserve fewer concessions in view of what you have done against him.'

Tostig said: 'We are not going to make up for that by paying compensation. But what is his offer now?'

The horseman said: 'He offered that you should have a fifth of England, and his brother remain unatoned for. But the damage you have brought about in the country he said he would compensate himself.'

Tostig said: 'I do not accept these terms.'

The horseman said: 'I shall not conceal what he said should be offered in the last resort, which is that he would rather offer you half England

than that you should fight it out in battle, and in addition he offers you the name of king.'

'And what will he offer king Harald of Norway then?'

The horseman said: 'Because he was not satisfied with his own kingdom, he shall be given the territory in England equal to three and a half ells in length, or as much more as he is of more than average height. But he will not get any more, for I am under no obligation to him.'

Tostig said: 'These offers have been made too late. But I have often heard the Northmen say that if good terms were offered me I would immediately abandon their interests, but this is not now going to happen.'

The horseman said: 'Then the king said that the whole responsibility should be on your shoulders,' and afterwards turned away.

King Harald Sigurdsson was riding on a horse with a black head and a white mark on its forehead, and was giving directions about the battle formation while this conversation was going on. While he was doing this the king's horse stumbled three times in a row. The king said:

'Why do you do that, brother Olaf?' he said.

Tostig laughed and said: 'Do you think that King Olaf is causing your horse to stumble?'

He said: 'I would not have anyone else to thank for it more than you if he turns his favour from me.'

He dismounted and walked in among the ranks. The king said to Tostig:

'Who was that horseman who spoke to you?'

Tostig said: 'My brother King Harald.'

'Why have you said this so late?' said the king.

Tostig said: 'I did not want to betray him when he came forward trusting in my good faith.'

[The king said]: 'He is a courteous man and decent-looking, and he stands well in his stirrup, and yet he will not be ruler for long. But who was it on each side of him?'

Tostig said: 'Helgi Heinreksson was one and the other is called Biarleif.'[9]

'I did not much expect this man to be here,' [said the king,] 'for I recognise him, and I would not have brought an invasion over here if I had known he was alive.'

Tostig said: 'It makes no difference to us at all.'

Then King Harald Godwineson asked Leif who the tall man was whose horse stumbled. Leif replied:

[9] I.e. Bæiarleif, 'Town-remains'; the second pseudonym used of Heming.

'That was the king of the Northmen.'

The king said: 'He is a fierce-looking man, has the look of one who has not long to live, for I guess that his days are now up.'

The king of Norway had arranged his line of battle so that those of his men that had shields should stand in a circle and all face outwards.

'But those that have no shields shall stand inside and strike their blows out past the others.'

When the two lines met, the English surrounded the formation of Northmen. Heming had revealed his name and all his experiences before he went into battle. Then the English raised their battle-cry. Then King Harald Sigurdsson spoke a verse:

Let us go forward
against the phalanxes
under the dark blades
without byrnies.
I have not mine,
but helmets shine.
Now our fine array
lies down at the ships.

'That was not very good poetry,' said the king, 'and I will improve upon it.'

We do not crouch down behind
our curved shield before the clash
of weapons in the battle; so did
the discreet hawk's land's [arm's] Hild [lady] command me;
necklace-plate [woman] bade me long ago
carry helmet-support [head]
high in metal-clash [battle]
where battle-ice [sword] meets skull.

King Harald Sigurdsson told his men not to fight recklessly, but to keep in line and not panic. Then the English began the attack, but the Northmen defended themselves so well that it didn't get anywhere. Then King Harald Godwineson said to Helgi Heinreksson:

'What strategy shall we employ to break down their stand? For it is likely they will soon be getting reinforcements from the ships, and then the attack is not likely to go well, since it is not even succeeding now, when they have only a small detachment of men.'

'We shall attack,' said Helgi, 'as bravely as we can, and if that is no good, then we shall retreat, and perhaps they will think we are fleeing. Then they will break their ranks and chase us, and then we shall turn round against them again as quickly as possible.'

They did this. And when the Northmen saw them turn away, they pursued them, and when the others turned back again, they were unable to get back into position again. The battle now became bloody. But where King Harald and Tostig were standing the attack was not being very fruitful. Then King Harald Godwineson said to Heming:

'What good is the accuracy and effectiveness of your shooting, if you don't shoot the king, when only you can recognise him?'

Heming said: 'I do not deny that I recognise him, but I dare not shoot him because of King Olaf.'

'I don't know,' said King Harald, 'what you came to the battle for if you won't do anything to help. Now you shoot so that I can see who he is, because I am not afraid to shoot him because of King Olaf.'

Then Heming shot at the king with a barbed arrow and it hit his cheek and the arrow was stuck fast in the skin. The king immediately cut the arrow out. But because of this the king could easily be recognised. Then Harald Godwineson shot king Harald in the throat. Then the king sat down. He said to the poet Thiodolf:

'Come here and support my head. I have for a long time held your head up.'

Tostig went up to the king and asked if he was wounded. The king replied:

'A small piece of iron was sent me, and I presume it was not forged to no purpose. I want you to agree to terms with your brother, but I will accept the amount of the kingdom which was offered me this morning.'

Tostig said: 'We shall both be the guests of the same fellow tonight.'

The king said: 'Now you are speaking of the fellow whose hospitality I wanted never to accept.'

And then the king died. Then the English raised a cheer and said that the king of the Northmen had fallen and they offered Tostig terms. Then Tostig took hold of the standard and said that they would discover that not all the leaders of the Northmen had fallen, 'as long as I can fight.'

And Tostig kept the battle going for a while. Then Heming said:

'Why don't you urge me to shoot now, sire?'

The king replied: 'Because I don't want to bring about the death of my own brother.'

Heming replied: 'It is strange that you are willing to let your men be cut down, and I will send him a little present, if you do not forbid it.'

The king said: 'I will not demand blood-vengeance, though harm should be done him.'

Then Heming shot Tostig in the eye. Then Tostig said, when the shot hit him: 'This one marked me for God,' and died immediately.

Then King Harold offered the Northmen quarter. At that moment Eystein orri arrived and asked the poet Thiodolf what had happened. Thiodolf said:

Men have suffered heavy loss;
now I say the army has been caught.
On a vain journey Harald
has led men from the east.
So has ended the life
of the valiant king that we all
are in a parlous state;
the famed king suffered death.

Eystein said: 'Let us go forward bravely. We shall not spare ourselves, even though we had intended the result of our expedition to be something other than our burial here.'

They charged forward so hard that the whole of the English ranks were forced to retreat. They told the king that it was more than human beings they were fighting against now. The king replied:

'They are human, and they have got guts.'

When they had been fighting for a long time Nikulas said:

'We can't keep up this attack for long for weariness.'

Eystein replied: 'That is true. And so we shall resort to strategy. We shall retreat to the forest, and the English will not bother much about pursuing us, for they will be glad of any respite they can get. Then we shall take off our armour and then take up the attack again, and each of us shall fight to win glory, but not to preserve our lives.'

Everyone said they were more than ready to do this. And so they carried out this plan. Then the English raised a cheer and offered the Northmen quarter. Then Eystein charged forward with the Northmen and said that they would find out that the Northmen had no wish to be spared. Then the battle began afresh. The English deserted the king in their hundreds. Nikulas Thorbergsson fought with Helgi Heinreksson, and Nikulas pressed him so hard that Helgi could not do anything else but give ground and ward off the blows. And Eystein orri directed his attack at the king and Valthiof. The battle was so hard, that the term 'orrahrid' (Orri's storm) has always been used afterwards in England to describe a situation of great danger. Then there was a great number of

casualties, especially among the Northmen, for they were without protection. Then Heming saw that Helgi had been overcome by Nikulas. Then Heming shot Nikulas in the lower abdomen, so that it came out the other side. Then Nikulas and Thiodolf the poet and a great number of Northmen fell. Eystein kept the battle going and got so near the king that he killed his standard-bearer. Heming saw this and shot an arrow through Eystein's armpit, piercing his heart, and he fell with great honour. All the Northmen who could manage it fled as soon as Eystein had fallen. But the English did not pursue their flight. Then King Harald rode to London with no more troops than five hundred men. He appointed men to take the bodies of the men who had fallen, the Northmen as well as his own men, to church. He also gave permission for Olaf Haraldsson to sail from Ravenseer with all the Northmen who survived.

William the Bastard was ruling over France, as has been mentioned before. He heard about King Harald's invasion of England. He sent messengers all over his kingdom and summoned to himself a great army. Then he addressed them and said:

'You are aware what became of the fellowship between me and Harald Godwineson. Now I hear that an army is invading his kingdom. I now intend to go with this army here to avenge him if anything has happened to him. And there will also never be another time when it will be easier to take vengeance on Harald for the dishonour he has done me, and to stake my claim to England, even if he has been victorious, for all his bravest men will be wounded and battle-weary.'

On the day on which William rode out of Rouen, his queen went up to him just as he had mounted his horse and took hold of his stirrup, wanting to speak to him. But he drove his spurs into the horse and she fell in front of the horse and the horse trampled over her and she was killed instantly. He said:

'Evil happenings are portents of good to follow. It is now more likely that our expedition will turn out well.'

Afterwards they boarded ship and sailed to England and he started to ravage the land as soon as he entered the country. It is said that he had Ivar the Boneless cremated before he began to plunder. King Harald heard about this and summoned his men together. His people were just now in the worst condition. The king told them to leave the country if they thought themselves unable to support him, but they all said they wanted to support him. The king said:

'You will be handing me over to our enemies if you don't support me loyally.'

They said they would never desert him. He advanced with his army against William and there took place a fierce battle. This was nineteen days after King

Harald Sigurdsson fell. There were many casualties there among the English, for there were many took part in the battle for were not fit for anything. They fought the whole day, and in the evening King Harald Godwineson fell. But Heming and Helgi and Valthiof were shooting from a wedge-shaped formation and here their opponents were making no headway. Then William said:

'I will spare you, Valthiof, if you will swear me an oath of loyalty. Then you may keep your inheritance and your earldom.'

Valthiof replied: 'I won't swear you any oaths. But I will promise to be true to you, if you will do as you say.'

'We will make peace on these terms,' said William.

Valthiof asked: 'What terms shall Heming and Helgi have, if they make peace?'

William replied: 'Helgi shall keep his inheritance and earldom. He shall swear loyalty to me, and advise me on all matters about which he can see more clearly than I. Heming shall stay with me, and if he is true to me, then I shall honour him higher than anyone.'

Valthiof asked: 'What do you both want to do?'

Helgi replied: 'Let Heming decide.'

Heming replied: 'I know that you English must think it about time to bring an end to all this warfare, but I shall take no pleasure in life after this battle. But nevertheless I will not force you to risk your lives any longer than you wish. But it is my opinion that the truce will be short-lived for Valthiof.'

Valthiof replied: 'It is better for us to be overthrown than to refuse to trust anyone, and no more men shall die on my account.'

They gave up the battle and accepted a truce. Then William was made king and they rode thence to London. Valthiof asked permission to go home and received it, and rode away in a party of twelve men. The king looked after them and said:

'It is inadvisable to let a man ride off scot-free who refuses to swear us oaths, so ride after him and kill him.'

And they did so. Valthiof dismounted and forbade his companions to defend him. He went to a church and was killed there and there he is buried. People think of him as a saint.

The next night after King Harald Godwineson had fallen a certain peasant and his wife drove to where the dead lay to strip the dead and make some money for themselves. They saw there great heaps of dead men. They saw there a bright light. They discussed this together and said that there must be a saintly man there among the dead, and they now began to clear away the corpses from the place where they saw the light. They saw a man's arm lift up from among

the corpses with a large gold ring on it. The peasant took hold of the hand and asked whether the man was alive. He replied:

'I am alive.'

The old woman said: 'Clear away the corpses: I think this is the king.'

They lifted the man up and asked whether it was possible for him to be healed. The king said:

'I do not deny that I could be healed, but you could not do it.'

The woman said: 'We must risk that.'

They picked him up and put him in their cart and drove home with him. The woman said:

'You must strip the flesh off the horse and cut off its ears. And if anyone comes to you looking for the king's corpse, then you must say that I have gone mad, and that wolves have torn your horse to pieces.'

They cleansed the king's wounds and dressed them and kept him with them in secret. A little later King William's men came there and asked why he had taken King Harald home with him, whether he was alive or dead. The old man replied:

'I have not done that.'

They replied: 'It's no use denying it, for there is a trail of blood leading to your house.'

The man said: 'I am not at all concerned about the loss of your king. I am more concerned about the loss of my horse, which wolves tore to pieces the other night when the battle had taken place.'

They replied: 'That is no doubt true, for we saw the horse here that was torn to pieces. But even so we intend to go in here and find out what is going on.'

The man said: 'Misfortunes never cease to come upon me. My wife went mad from hearing the trumpets and battle-cries.'

They insisted on going in all the same. And when they got inside, there was the old woman sitting by the fire eating coal. And when she saw the men, she jumped up and grabbed a knife and began to swear and threatened to kill them. They went out laughing at her and went home without more ado, and told the king they could not find King Harald's corpse. But the old woman and her husband healed the king in secret until he was better. Then the king sent the old woman to Heming and she told him where the king was. Heming said:

'I hope, grandma, that you know what you are saying now.'

The old woman replied: 'I was not mad.'

The next day Heming came to the king and there took place there a very joyful reunion. They talked together the whole of that day. Heming offered the king to go all over the country collecting an army together.

'And you could soon get the kingdom back from William.'

The king said: 'I realise that this would be possible, but then too many people would become perjurers. And I don't want so much evil to happen on my account. Now I am going to follow the example of King Olaf Tryggvason, who, after he was defeated off Vindland, decided not to return to his kingdom, but went out to Greece and there served God as long as he lived. Now I am going to have a hermit's cell made for me in Canterbury, where I can see King William as often as possible in the church. And the only food I shall have is what you bring me.'

Heming agreed to this. The king gave the peasant and his wife a suitable reward, and afterwards went into his hermitage. He stayed there for three years without anyone knowing who he was except Heming and the priest that confessed him. And one day when Heming went to see Harald, he told him that he had caught a sickness that would bring about his death. And one day, when King William was sitting at table, bells were heard ringing all over the town. The king asked why such a fine peal was being rung. Heming replied:

'I should think that a certain monk, who was called Harald, has died.'

'What Harald is he?' said the king.

'Godwineson,' said Heming.

'Who has concealed him?' said the king.

Heming replied: 'I have.'

'If this is true,' said the king, 'then you shall die for it. But we shall look at his corpse.'

Then he went into the cell where the body lay. It had then been stripped. Everyone recognised King Harald. The corpse was beautiful and pleasant to look at, and they smelt there a sweet smell, so that everyone there realised that he was a truly saintly man.

Then the king asked Heming what he would undertake to do to earn a reprieve. Heming asked:

'What do you require me to do, king?'

'I want you to swear me this, that you will be as loyal to me in every way as you have been to King Harald, and to serve me as you did him.'

Heming said: 'I would rather die with him than live with you. But I could have betrayed you long ago if I had wanted to.'

'It is very true,' said the king, 'that England will be the poorer by one of the bravest men if you are killed. Now I will offer to make you the noblest baron in England, and to make you a member of my personal following, and put you in sole charge of it; alternatively, if you do not want this, I will give you an annuity of three hundred pounds, and let you live wherever you like in England.'

Heming thanked the king for his offer and said:

'I will accept your offer to let me stay in England, but I have no desire to possess wealth from now on. But this request I make of you, that you allow me to have this same cell, and in it I will end my days.'

The king was silent for a long time, and then said:

'Because this request is made with purity of intention, it shall be granted you.'

Afterwards William had the body of King Harald clothed in royal robes and gave him a most fitting funeral. And he was buried with the greatest honour. Soon after Heming entered the afore-mentioned cell and there served God until his old age, and finally became blind, and he died in that hermitage.

And that is the end of the story of Heming.

Wake-well and his brothers outwit the trolls

THE STORY OF BRAND THE OPEN-HANDED

The Story of Brand was included in the saga of King Harald of Norway (died 1066) in Morkinskinna. It was probably written in the early thirteenth century. Generosity was one of the two traditional royal virtues (the other was valour), but Iceland was the only country in Europe at the time that had no king. Like many other short stories in the Sagas of Kings, this is about an Icelander visiting the king of Norway and after some conflict with the king, won fame and fortune and returned to Iceland.

Now it is said that one summer came to Norway abroad from Iceland Brand son of Vermund of Vatnsfiord. He was known as Brand the Open-handed. It was a good name for him. Brand brought his ship in to Nidaross.

The poet Thiodolf was a friend of Brand and had said a great deal about Brand to King Harald [of Norway], what a splendid man he was and what fine qualities he had, and he had declared, Thiodolf, that he did not know of any other man in Iceland better fitted to be king for his generosity and munificence.

He had talked a lot to the king about Brand's generosity, and the king said, 'It shall now be put to the test,' he said. 'Go to him and ask him to give me his cloak.'

Thiodolf went and entered the room Brand was in. He was standing in the middle of the floor measuring cloth. He had on a velvet tunic and a velvet cloak on top, with the tie of the cloak up on his forehead. He had an axe inlaid with gold in the crook of his arm**.**

Thiodolf said, 'The king wishes to receive the cloak.'

Brand kept on with his work and made no reply, but he let the cloak drop from him, and Thiodolf picked it up and took it to the king, and the king asked what had passed between them. He said that Brand had made no comment, and went on to say what he had been doing and also how he was fitted out.

The king said, 'He is clearly a man of character and must be a man of some significance, since he did not feel he needed to make any comment. Go back and say that I wish to receive from him the gold-inlaid axe.'

Thiodolf said, 'I am not very keen, my lord, to go again. I do not know how he will take it if I demand his weapon from his very hand.'

'It is you who brought up the subject of Brand, both now and on other occasions,' said the king, 'so you must now go and say that I wish to receive the gold-inlaid axe. I shall not consider him open-handed unless he gives it.'

Thiodolf now went to see Brand and said that the king wished to receive the axe. He handed over the axe and said nothing. Thiodolf brought the axe to the king and said what had passed between them.

The king said, 'It does seem that this man must be more generous than most, and we are doing quite well out of it at the moment. Go back and say that I wish to have the tunic he is wearing.'

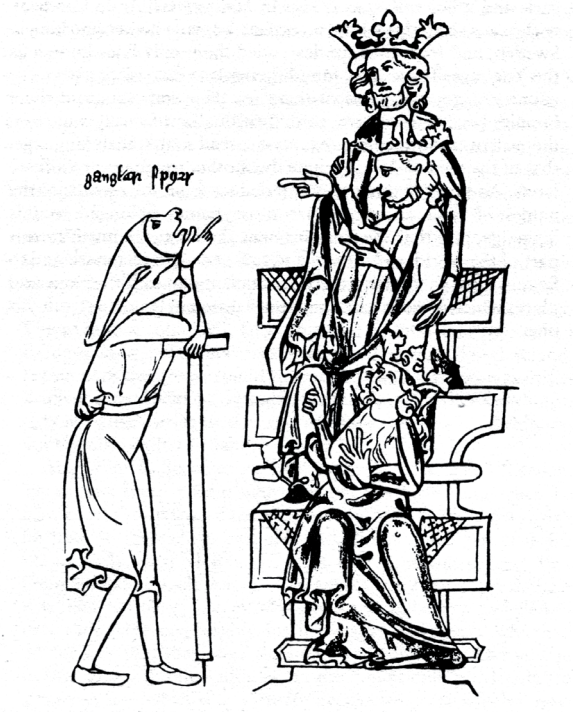
Thiodolf said, 'It is not right, my lord, for me to go again.'

The king said, 'I insist that you go.'

He went back and entered the attic and said that the king wished to receive the tunic. Brand then left off his work and threw off his tunic and said nothing. He tore off one sleeve and then threw down the tunic, but kept the one sleeve. Thiodolf picked it up and went to see the king and showed him the tunic.

The king looked at it and then said, 'This man is both clever and munificent. It is clear to me why he has torn off the sleeve. He thinks I have only one hand, and that for receiving but never for giving; go and fetch him.'

This was done, and Brand went to the king and received from him great honour and valuable gifts, and this was all done to test him.



Gangleri questioning the three kings. From the Uppsala manuscript of Snorri's Edda, c. 1300

STORIES FROM SNORRI'S EDDA

Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) was a wealthy Icelandic land-owner, politician, historian and poet. He wrote his Edda principally as a treatise on traditional court poetry as it had been presented to kings of Norway and other northern countries from the ninth century down to his own time. He writes about poetic diction and verse-forms, and introduced the work with an account of the origin of Norse religion and of the mythology of pagan Scandinavia which was of great importance for the language of the court poetry in his time. His story of the origin of poetry explains why poetry can be called Odin's drink or theft.

Men say that Odin and his people first came, many ages ago, from Asia, the part where Turks now live. Because of this Odin's people were known as Ases. When they reached Europe, everyone here thought they were so great and powerful that they were more like gods than men, and willingly took them as kings over them. Odin made his sons rulers of many of the countries of Europe, and from them are descended many lines of kings. From the language the Ases spoke came many of the languages spoken in the north of Europe today. Odin himself settled in Sweden and built a palace there which was called Asgard and made himself king.

Before Odin came, the king of Sweden was one Gylfi. He wanted to find out whether the power and wealth of the Ases was their own, or was given them by the gods they worshipped. So he dressed himself like an old beggar and went to Asgard. But the Ases knew he was coming and prepared to make a fool of him. When he got there, he saw a hall so high that he could hardly see the top of it. Its roof was made of golden shields. Gylfi saw a man at the door juggling with knives. This man asked Gylfi his name, and he said it was Gangleri. He said he had come a long way and asked if he might stay there the night, and asked whose hall it was. The man answered that it belonged to their king.

'And I will take you to see him,' he said, 'and you can ask him his name yourself.'

As soon as Gangleri got inside, the door closed behind him. There he saw many rooms and many people, some playing games, some drinking, some fencing. He saw three thrones, one on top of the other, and a man sat in each. Then he asked what was the name of their king. He was told that the one who sat in the bottom throne was king, and was called High; the second was called Just-as-High; the top one was called Third. Then High asked the newcomer why he had come, and said that he was welcome to food and drink, as was everyone else in High's hall. He replied that first he wanted to find out if there was any one in there who was wise. High said he would never get out again safe unless he were the wiser.

'Stand up,' he said, 'while you ask your questions; we shall sit while we answer you.'

So Gangleri began to ask questions.

'Who is the highest and oldest of all the gods?'

High said, 'He is called All-father in our language, but in the old Asgard he had twelve names. He lives for ever and rules all things great and small. He made heaven and earth and the sky and everything in them. His greatest work was when he made man and gave him a soul that shall never die though the body rot to dust or burn to ashes. And all men who act well shall live and be with him in a place called Gimle or Vingolf; this is down in the ninth world.'

Then said Gangleri: 'What was he doing before heaven and earth were made?'

Then High replied: 'Then he was with the frost-giants.'

The origin of Zealand

King Gylfi ruled over the lands which are now called Sweden. Of him it is said that he gave a certain wandering beggar-woman as a reward for the entertainment she had given him a ploughland in his kingdom, as much as four oxen could plough up in one day and night. But this woman was one of the race of the Ases, she was called Gefiun. She took four oxen from the north in Giantland, and these were the sons of her and a giant, and put them before the plough. And the plough cut so strongly and deep that it lifted up the land, and the oxen drew this land out into the sea to the west, and stopped in a certain channel. Here Gefiun set down the land and gave it a name and called it Sea-land. And where the land had been taken up from, there was left a lake; this is now called Väner in Sweden. And the inlets in Väner correspond to the nesses in Zealand.

Frey's marriage

There was a man called Gymir, and his wife was called Aurboda. Their daughter was Gerd who was the fairest of all women. It happened one day that Frey had gone to sit in Odin's throne, from which he could see out over all things; and he was looking out over all the worlds. And when he looked to the north, he saw on a farm a house, large and fine, and to this house walked a woman, and when she lifted up her arms and opened the door, then it shone from her arms across both sea and sky, and all the worlds were lit up by her. And Frey was punished for his great presumption in sitting in that holy seat, that he left it full of sorrow. And when he came home, he said nothing, he neither slept nor drank, no one dared to try to speak to him.

Then Frey's father Niord sent for Skirnir, Frey's servant, and bade him go to Frey and get him to speak, and ask who he was so angry with that he would not speak to any one. Skirnir said he would go, but unwillingly, and said nothing could be expected but harsh words from him. And when he came to Frey, he asked why Frey was so sad and did not speak to any one. Then Frey replied and said that he had seen a beautiful woman, and it was because of her that he was so sorrowful that he would not live long if he was not to have her.

'And now you must go and ask for her for me, and bring her back here whether her father is willing or not, and I shall reward you well.'

Then Skirnir replied, said this, that he would go on the errand, but Frey must give him his sword; this was such a good sword that it fought by itself. But Frey did not let this stand in the way and gave him the sword. Then Skirnir went and asked for the woman for him and received her promise; and nine nights later she was to come to the place called Barrey and then enter into wedlock with Frey. But when Skirnir told Frey the result of his errand, then he said this:

Long is a night, long is another,
How can I wait for three?
Often a month has seemed to me shorter
Than half this wedding-eve.

This is the reason why Frey was without a weapon when he fought Beli and slew him with a hart's horn.

Thor and Thiassi

Three Ases went on their travels, Odin and Loki and Hænir, and went over mountains and deserts, and food was scarce. And when they come down into a certain valley, they see a herd of oxen and take one of the oxen and prepare it for the roast. And when they think it must be cooked, they open the roasting-pit, and it was not cooked. And the second time, when they open the roasting-pit after a while had passed and it was not cooked, then they ask each other what this could mean. Then they hear talking in the oak-tree above them, that he who sat there said he was responsible for the roast not cooking. They looked up, and there sat an eagle, and no small one. Then said the eagle:

'If you will give me my fill of the ox, then the roast will cook.'

They agree to this. Then he let himself drop from the tree and sat on the roast and straightway made a start with the two legs of the ox and both shoulders. Then Loki got angry and seized a great pole and swung it with all his might and banged it on the body of the eagle. The eagle jumped round at the blow and

flew up. Now the pole was stuck to the eagle's body, and Loki's hands to the other end. The eagle flies high enough for Loki's feet to reach down to rocks and stones and trees, but his arms he thought would part from his shoulders. He calls out and begs the eagle desperately for truce, but he says that Loki will never get free unless he promises to bring Idunn out of Asgard with her apples; and Loki agrees. Then he gets free and goes to his companions, and no further details are told for the time being concerning their travels before they return home.

But at the agreed time Loki lures Idunn out of Asgard into a certain wood and says that he has found some apples which will seem to her worth having, and asks her to bring her apples with her and compare them with these. Then there appeared Giant Thiassi in eagle form and takes Idunn and flies away with her to Thrymheim to his home.

But the Ases were badly affected by Idunn's disappearance and they soon became grey and old. Then the Ases had a council and each asked the other what was the last known of Idunn. And the last that was seen of her was when she was walking out of Asgard with Loki. Then Loki was caught and brought to the council and he was threatened with death or torture. And since he was terrified, he said he would go and find Idunn in Giantland if Freyia will lend him the hawk-shape that she had. And when he gets the hawk-shape, he flies north to Giantland and arrives one day at Giant Thiassi's. He had gone fishing out to sea, and Idunn was at home alone. Loki turned her into the form of a nut and held her in his claws and flew as hard as he could. But when Thiassi came home and found Idunn gone, he took his eagle-shape and flew after Loki, and the swish of the eagle could be heard as he flew. And when the Ases saw the hawk flying with the nut, and where the eagle was flying, then they went out under the walls of Asgard and carried there loads of wood-shavings, and when the hawk flew in over the fortification, he let himself drop down by the fortification wall. Then the Ases set fire to the wood-shavings, but the eagle could not check himself when he missed the hawk; the feathers of the eagle then caught fire, and his flying was put an end to. Then the Ases were close by and slew Giant Thiassi within the gates of the Ases, and this slaying is very renowned.

But Skadi, Giant Thiassi's daughter, took helmet and coat of mail and full armour and went to Asgard to take vengeance for her father. But the Ases offered her terms of settlement and compensation, in the first place that she was to choose herself a husband from among the Ases and choose by the feet and see nothing else of them. Then she saw one man's feet that were outstandingly beautiful, and said:

'I choose him. There can be little about Balder that is ugly.'

But it was Niord of Noatun.

It was also a part of her terms of settlement that the Ases were to do what she thought they would not be able to do, make her laugh. Then Loki did this: he tied a rope round the beard of a goat and the other end round his balls, and they pulled each other this way and that and both shrieked out loudly. Then Loki let himself drop into Skadi's lap, and then she laughed. Then were fulfilled the terms of settlement on the part of the Ases towards her.

It is said that Odin gave her as recompense that he took Thiassi's eyes and threw them up into the sky and made of them two stars.

Thiassi's family

Olvaldi was the name of his father, and you will be impressed by it if I tell you about him. He was very rich in gold, and when he died and his sons were going to divide their inheritance, then they used this method of measuring the gold when they shared it out, that each was to take his mouthful in turn, and all of them the same number. One of them was Thiassi, the second Idi, the third Gang.

The origin of poetry

The start of it was that the gods were at war with the race called Vanir. And they fixed a meeting to arrange a peace and established a truce in this manner, that both sides went up to a cauldron and spat their spittle into it. And at parting the gods took it and did not wish this symbol of truce to be lost and made it into a man, who is called Kvasir. He is so wise that there is nothing anyone can ask him to which he does not know the answer. He travelled widely over the world to teach people knowledge, and when he came visiting certain dwarfs, Fialar and Galar, then they took him aside privately and killed him. They let his blood run into two basins and a kettle; this is caller Odrerir, and the basins are called Son and Bodn. They mixed honey with the blood and it turned into mead, everyone who drinks of which becomes a poet or scholar. The dwarfs told the Ases that Kvasir had suffocated in wisdom because there was no one there clever enough to ask him questions.

Then these dwarfs invited to stay with them a giant called Gilling and his wife. Then the dwarfs invited Gilling to go fishing in the sea with them. But when they were rowing along the coast, the dwarfs rowed into some breakers and overturned the boat. Gilling could not swim and was drowned, but the dwarfs righted their boat and rowed to land. They told his wife what had happened, and she was greatly upset and wept loudly. Then Fialar asked her if she would feel better if she could look out onto the sea where he had drowned,

and she said yes. Then he told his brother Galar to go up over the doorway as she went out and drop a millstone on her head, and said he was tired of her crying; and he did so.

When Suttung, Gilling's son, heard of this, he went and took the dwarfs and carried them out to sea and put them on some rocks which were covered at high tide. They beg Suttung for mercy and offer him as a settlement in compensation for his father the precious mead, and this is agreed to as a settlement between them. Suttung takes the mead home and keeps it in a place called Hnitbiorg, leaving there to look after it his daughter Gunnlod.

Odin went out and came where nine workmen were mowing hay. He asks if they want him to sharpen their scythes. They say yes. Then he takes a whetstone from his belt and sharpens them. It seemed to them that the scythes cut much better and they asked to buy the whetstone. The price he set on it was that he who wished to buy it must give what was reasonable. But they all said they wanted to and asked him to sell it them. But he threw the whetstone up in the air. And when they all tried to catch it, they dealt with each other in such a way that each brought his scythe against the necks of the others.

Odin went to spend the night with a giant called Baugi, Suttung's brother. Baugi complained that his affairs were in a bad way and said that his nine workmen had killed each other, and said he did not know where he could find any labourers. But Odin told him his name was Bolverk (Evil-doer). He offered to undertake the work of nine men for Baugi, but demanded as his wages one drink of Suttung's mead. Baugi said he had no say concerning the mead, said that Suttung wanted it all to himself, but he said he would go with Bolverk and try if they could get the mead.

Bolverk did nine men's work for Baugi during the summer, and when winter came he asked Baugi for his wages. Then they both went to Suttung. Baugi told his brother Suttung the bargain between him and Bolverk. But Suttung refused absolutely any drop of the mead. Then Bolverk told Baugi that they must try some trickery to see if they can reach the mead. And Baugi said that was fine. Then Bolverk took out a drill which is called Rati (Way-finder), and said that Baugi was to bore through the mountain if the drill would cut. He did so. Then Baugi said that the mountain was drilled through. But Bolverk blows into the drill-hole, and the bits flew back up at him. Then he realised that Baugi was trying to double-cross him, and told him to drill right through the mountain. Baugi drilled again. And when Bolverk blew again then the bits flew inwards. Then Bolverk turned into the form of a snake and crept into the drill-hole. Baugi stabbed after him with the drill and missed him. Bolverk went on to where Gunnlod was and lay with her for three nights, and then she allowed him to drink three draughts of the mead. In the first draught he drank

the lot from Odrerir, and in the second from Bodn, in the third from Son, and then he had all the mead. Then he turned himself into an eagle's shape and flew as hard as he could. But when Suttung saw the flight of the eagle, he put on an eagle's shape and flew after him. But when the Ases saw where Odin was flying, they set out in the courtyard their pans, and when Odin came in over Asgard, then he spat up the mead into the pans. But he came so close to being caught by Suttung that he sent some of the mead out backwards, and this was not heeded. Anyone who wished had that, and we call that the poetaster's portion. But Suttung's mead Odin gave to the Ases and to those who can compose poetry.

Trolls building the Westman Islands

FOLK-STORIES

Icelandic folk-stories were collected from oral tradition in the nineteenth century and later. Many of them tell of human encounters with trolls, large, frightening creatures that certain clever individuals were able to outwit. Others relate to historical Icelanders, who in some cases, if they were clever magicians, could even get the better of the Devil, like the scholar Sæmund the Wise.

The Night-troll

It happened in a certain place that the person who was left to guard the farm on Christmas night while everyone else was at church was found, in the morning, either dead or out of his mind. The people of the farm were not much for this, and few of them were very keen to stay at home on Christmas night. Once a certain girl offered to stay and guard the farm. The others were glad of this, and set off. The girl sat on a bench in the living-room, and sang to the baby she was nursing. During the night someone came to the window and said:

'Fair seems your hand to me,
My daughter bold, and dillido.'

Then the girl said:

'Never has it dabbled in dirt,
My troll Kari, and corriro.'

Then the voice at the window said:

'Fair seems your eye to me,
My daughter bold, and dillido.'

Then the girl said:

'Never has it evil seen,
My troll Kari, and corriro.'

Then the voice at the window said:

'Fair seems your foot to me,
My daughter bold, and dillido.'

Then the girl said:

'Never has it trodden in dirt,
My troll Kari, and corriro.'

Then the voice at the window said:

'Dawn is breaking in the east,
My daughter bold, and dillido.'

Then the girl said:

‘Stand where you are and turn to stone,
But cause no harm to any one,
My troll Kari, and corriro.’

Then the creature disappeared from the window. But in the morning when the people came home, they found a great stone between the farm buildings, and it has stood there ever since. Then the girl told them what she had heard—but she hadn’t seen anything; for she had never looked up—and it had been a night-troll that came to the window.

Sæmund the Wise Gains Possession of Oddi

When Sæmund, Kálf, and Hafdan left the Sorbonne, Oddi was unoccupied, and they all three asked the king to give it them. The king knew quite well. who he was dealing with, and said that the one who got there first should have Oddi. Then Sæmund went straight away and called on the devil, and said:

‘Swim with me to Iceland, and if you get me ashore there without wetting my coat-tails in the sea, you can have me.’

The devil agreed to this, and turned himself into a seal and set out with Sæmund on his back. On the journey Sæmund was all the time reading the Psalter. After a little while they approached the shore of Iceland. Then Sæmund hit the seal on the head with the Psalter so that it sank, but Sæmund plunged in and swam to the shore. Thus the devil lost his bargain, and Sæmund got possession of Oddi.

Sæmund and the seal
by Ásmundur Sveinsson

THE END OF THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Halldór Laxness is Iceland's greatest novelist. His Heimsljós (Light of the World) was first published in 1937–40, and tells of the growth from childhood to manhood of an unlearned peasant fosterling Ólafur Kárason Ljósvíkingur, who grew up and lived in dire poverty and cruel ill-treatment but wanted to devote his life to poetry and become the Light of the World. At the end of the book, after his ultimate disillusion, he returns briefly to a cottage beneath a glacier and takes his final leave of the poor peasant folk of Iceland whom he had loved so much but who had never accepted him.

. . . The old man had breathed his last in mid-evening and the old woman was just finishing doing him the last services with the help of a visiting friend. Her poor wretch of a daughter was crying; she had broken her mirror. Baby Goldilocks was playing outside the front door. The old woman welcomed the guest with a smiling face, respectful and sincere. She had had and lost sixteen children. She worked for them by day and watched over them by night. And when they smiled in their mother's face every cloud was gone from the sky and the sun, moon and stars belonged entirely to this woman. She had grown a little hard of hearing, and when the poet referred to the sky and its beauty she thought he was going to go and say something disrespectful about the earth, and hastened to interrupt:

—If God had been as kind to everyone as He has been to me, life on earth would be beautiful.

Then the poet seemed to hear it echoed inside the house:

—And beautiful seemed the earth to us.

When her children breathed their last after harsh death-throes she put them in a white robe and smoothed out all the creases with as much care as if she was getting them ready for a party. She cried as she stood by their graves, then went back home to those that were still alive. Others of them she said farewell to as they stood fully grown at the farm gate when setting off out into the world. Her daughter Helga's bones were washed up on a bank in the river about a year after she disappeared The old woman went herself down to the bank and collected up the bones; there were some other, little bones as well; she sewed them all up in a shroud and put them in a coffin and followed them to the grave and then went back home to love those that were still alive. In this house love reigned. That is what human life has always been like at its best—to smile at one's child when it laughs, comfort it when it cries, carry it to the grave when it is dead, then dry one's own tears and smile again and accept everything as it comes without questioning the past or the future; to live, be kind to everyone.

—When I think about my past life, said the old woman, it seems to me to have been one long sunny morning.

—And the smell of the woods came to us as we slept, said the echo.

—I am only a poet, said Olaf Karason apologetically.

He asked to be allowed to fasten a little mirror above the poor wretch of a daughter's bed so that she could see the glacier again and stop crying. In this mirror each and every thing dwells, he said. Then he asked if he could stay the night at the farm, but in the morning before dawn he got up, kissed the old woman and said:

—I cannot stay any longer, for soon the sun will be rising. Farewell, kind lady.

He also kissed the poor wretch of a daughter's forehead as she slept.

—When she wakes she will see the sun rise up over the glacier, he said.

It was calm weather with the moon at its zenith and it shone with a cold bluish light. He made his way straight up the mountain. Lower down there were long slopes, further up banks of moss, then scree, finally nothing but snow. The moon faded as it got light. Over the sea there were dark rainclouds in the offing. He kept on over the glacier, towards the dawn, bank after bank, in deep newly fallen snow, without paying any heed to whatever bad weather might be creeping up on him. As a child he had stood on the beach at Ljosavik and watched the breakers sucking back and forth, but now he was heading away from the sea. Think of me when you are in bright sunshine. Soon the sun of the day of resurrection will shine across the bright paths where she is waiting for her poet.

And beauty will reign supreme.

THE JOURNEY THAT NEVER TOOK PLACE

BY Sigurður Nordal

Sigurður Nordal was a scholar, philosopher, historian, poet and diplomat. He was one of the most influential of the teachers of the 'Icelandic school' who revolutionised the study of the sagas in the 1930s. This story was first delivered on Icelandic radio in 1940, though it had been first written 23 years before. When it was published in printed form, he noted that a large number of listeners had written to him wanting to know where he had got the story from and how much he had adapted it. But there were no sources. It was entirely fictional.

During the years 161–180 after the birth of Christ the emperor over the whole of the Roman empire was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, one of the greatest philosophers and men of virtue ever to have held power over men and lands. It came about in the early part of his reign that his close friend and adviser Quintus Caecilius Metellus fell in battle against the Parthians. Quintus Caecilius had been one of the wealthiest men in Rome and had a fine palace and estate just outside the city. But like the emperor himself he had been brought up in the strict school of the Stoics, he lived a pure and austere life and remained frugal and without self-indulgence in spite of his wealth. He left an only son, Lucius Caecilius Metellus, who was eighteen years old when his father died. Lucius had been given the finest upbringing, had absorbed the teachings of the philosophers and scholars and learned all kinds of accomplishments, but had achieved little independence of mind and had just followed the life-style of his father. He was still inexperienced when he inherited land and property at this early age. He soon became popular, for many young men of his own age from the neighbourhood and from Rome itself were eager to pay him court. They knew all about the pleasures that were fashionable in Rome at the time though Lucius had scarcely even heard of them. But he was quick to learn about such things and was keen to enjoy youth and life while there was still time. The upshot was that before long Lucius had abandoned all his father's habits, gathered about himself a lot of shallow young men of noble birth, entertainers and dancing-girls, and lived every day in extravagant pleasure. He turned night-time into day-time and day-time into night-time, and did not spare expense; he was well enough off. It was soon widely reported that it would be difficult to find anyone who entertained his guests more splendidly or provided them with a greater variety of expensive and rare pleasures. The emperor knew all about his activities and goings-on, but was waiting for Lucius himself to weary of this way of life when he had drunk the cup to the dregs. And so some years passed.

But when the emperor found it was taking a mighty long time for Lucius to rediscover the ways that had been inculcated into him in his childhood, he decided to send one of his philosophers to see the young man. This man disguised himself as a minstrel with a harp. When he got back to the emperor he told him all about his visit. In the palace there had been a fine feast and splendid drinks, but so much noise and merriment that it was difficult to make oneself heard. But Lucius had made his guests listen to the song of the white-haired old man with the respect that befitted his age. When the minstrel sang of the vanity of this transitory life and of the bitterness of the dregs of the cup of pleasure, of submission to the laws of nature and of virtue as the only way to peace of mind, Lucius nodded his head as if in agreement, and it was evident that his father's and teachers' doctrines were being recalled to his mind. But when the envoy started on the ancient Latin heroic lays about the deeds of valour in battle and quests which the Romans had had to achieve before the whole world submitted to them, then Lucius sat up in his seat and there came a glow into his eyes, which however faded again very soon afterwards. And when the singer praised in his songs the peace of solitude, the contemplation of nature and the meditations of the philosophers which were higher than any other joys, then a look of interest appeared on Lucius' face, as if he did not understand these mysteries but would very much like to find out more about them. The philosopher gave as his opinion to the emperor that the young noblemen must long ago have become more weary of his feastings and excesses than any of his guests, though he lacked the initiative to give them up and send his friends and fellow-drinkers packing. He advised the emperor to dispatch Lucius immediately into the army and so force him to change his way of life.

Marcus Aurelius thanked the envoy for his mission and advice and pondered the matter. Lucius seemed to him ill-suited to the soldier life at his present state of development. His family was of such high rank that he could do no other than give him a high command if he was sent to the wars. But the emperor knew that some generals would live in luxury even on campaign, and then they seldom won victories. Moreover there was a danger that Lucius might be killed in battle, and he was unmarried and so this distinguished old family would die out entirely on the male side. And even if Lucius did turn out a good soldier and returned home safe, the emperor thought it probable that he would return to his old ways to make up to himself for the hardships of his expeditions.

Soon after Marcus Aurelius sent an officer to see Lucius with a letter, and the content, apart from some friendly words of introduction, was as follows:

'I have in mind a mission for you, and after careful consideration I have chosen you for it rather than any other of my subjects because the undertakings of former members of your family have often been blessed with success when

Rome was in need, and your father was a good friend of mine and could be relied upon in anything affecting the public good. And you yourself have had the finest upbringing, though as yet you have not been put much to the test. But this mission is quite demanding. It has to be kept top secret, so that you will have to go on your own and poorly equipped though this may be undignified for such a wealthy man as you, who have a lot of companions and dependants. I know nothing about the countries and roads you will have to pass over when you get beyond the boundaries of our empire, and I know of no one who can inform you about them. But I am sure you will be able to put up with the difficulties and dangers of the journey. As to your errand, I can tell you nothing now, nor will I ever be able give you any further details later except to say that the security of Rome could well depend very greatly on its successful outcome. You will have to face a powerful king in the country you go to, and you will have to match him and his advisers and counsellors in wisdom. It is therefore very important that you have as much knowledge as possible, because you will need to understand what is the most advantageous thing for the empire and be able to defend your views. But I cannot give you any advice about it, since no one knows or can foresee the circumstances. I will not hide from you the fact that men have been sent on this mission before and none have returned. But I trust to the good fortune of your family and also to what philosophy teaches us, that a good and wise man will be successful in everything that lies within his power, and will be able to take whatever else comes his way with fortitude and calmness. You will have three years to prepare yourself for the journey and to put your house in order, though it may well turn out to be longer before you are summoned to undertake it.'

When Lucius got this message from great Caesar, he was stunned into silence, and for a while was oblivious of those around him. The first thing he did was dismiss all his guests and entertainers, and then he wandered for days together through his courts and could think of nothing but how he was to prepare himself to undertake such a mission. One thing that was immediately clear as daylight to him was that he was in no state to undergo great hardships and physical discomfort. So he began to take up all kinds of exercise, hunting, fencing, swimming, hiking. To begin with this caused him extreme pain and exhaustion, for he had become enervated and feeble through luxury and dissipation. But before very long he began to bear the exertion better and eventually to take pleasure in it. It now became a joy and delight to him to go on his own along uncharted ways through mountains and forests and to sleep under the open sky. On these journeys he found himself in various dangers when he came upon bears and wolves or highwaymen and sometimes got home both wounded and injured from his encounters with them, though he escaped

with his life. His slaves were amazed that their master should undergo such difficulties and dangers needlessly, and even more when they dis-covered that he often chose to sleep on the stone floor of his bedroom instead of in the bed. They thought the gods had made him mad.

The contrary however soon became apparent. Lucius now began to pay attention to the fact that his estate was in a condition of the greatest neglect, for while he himself had been concerned only with his own enjoyment, his stewards had been amassing for themselves all the wealth they could and his slaves had lapsed into idleness and sloth. He did not think it just to punish them for what was the result of his own fault. But he began now to see to his property and housekeeping with vigilance and energy, had repairs made to the buildings that were fallen into decay and fresh land brought under cultivation. One and a half years had now passed from the time he received the emperor's letter and it occurred to him that he might never return from the mission and then there would be no one to inherit his property. So he decided to marry and chose as his wife the daughter of a neighbour, a poor man but of good ancestry who had brought up a large family of promising children to a simple though well-bred way of life. His wife bore him a son at the end of a year whom he called Quintus after his father.

But when Lucius was married, he began to consider that he was still far from ready for his journey. To be sure he still kept up his habits of exercise and farm-management. But now he seemed to have plenty of time for all the things that he had never been able to attend to while he had no purpose in life, and indeed he now wasted no time in bed and all his labours were a pleasure to him. And now he gathered round himself guests once again, though they were of a rather different kind from before. He invited to stay with him people who had travelled widely and found out about the customs and languages of distant peoples. He took great pleasure in talking with them. He was amazed when they told him how much languages had diverged, though it was possible to speak of the same things in them using quite different words. But even more astounding was that all nations worshipped some kind of gods, but gave them various names and attributes. It was the same with the customs of different nations, that in every country they had their own ideas about what was right, good and beautiful, though in some cases they amounted to the same thing. So it became even more apparent to him that he was ill equipped to know what was best for the whole Roman empire unless he could come to a better understanding in himself of what was most essential for man's happiness and prosperity. He now began to recall the learning that his father had had him taught, and he sent again for the scholars that he had dismissed when he became of age. He now got much greater benefit from their teaching than

before, since he was more experienced in himself and was continually mindful of how philosophy might be a help to him when would have to find for himself solutions to the problems he might come up against in his negotiations with the unknown king if he got to meet him. He now realised, moreover, that there might be other ways to the good life than the wisdom of the Stoics who had been his mentors. He sent for men of learning not only from Greece, but also from Persia, Egypt and Judaea, and listened enthralled to all their teachings. But when it seemed to him that their variety and contradictions were about to confuse him he still kept up his custom of going alone to the mountains and forests, sleeping at night under the open sky, listening to the voices of nature and gazing in wonderment at the stars of heaven. And he always returned from these expeditions convinced that the life of man is a simpler matter than the philosophers and their writings imply, though he was none the less eager than before to find out more about their meditations.

So the three years passed that Marcus Aurelius had given Lucius to prepare himself for his journey. And more years passed, one after the other, without a summons coming from the emperor. Lucius had more children, his estate prospered and his wealth increased. As his awareness grew he thought more about his slaves and dependants, gradually gave his slaves freedom and bought new ones, and tried to encourage everyone he came in contact with to some kind of maturity. His neighbours gradually began to come to him for advice both about their farming and other problems. He was also summoned to sit in the senate as he was entitled to because of his ancestry, and was elected consul and held that office for four months as was the custom at that time. He now often came into contact with the emperor, who valued his proposals highly. Never did the emperor mention the journey to him. But it sometimes happened that great Caesar gazed at Lucius with a far-away look in the midst of the deliberations as if to say:

'All this is just a preliminary for you, for you are the man who has to go on the great mission when things are really at stake.'

Lucius awaited the journey calmly. He was grateful for every day that it was put off. Every day he felt he might learn something that would later on be an advantage to him. When he saw his children grow and the grapes in his vineyards redden to purple for the harvest, the thought often came into his mind:

'Take the opportunity today to look upon the sweetness of all the things that have for the time being been entrusted to you, for it may be that tomorrow you will have to leave it all behind and never return.'

His days came to be like pearls on a string, where each new pearl was more beautiful and more precious than the previous one, because in it the bright-

ness of past time shone with greater intensity, and always he was aware that the pearl that lay in his palm today might be the last one on this string. He welcomed each day with wondering joy and was forever asking himself:

'Do I love this day because it brings me one stage closer to the journey which is the aim of my life, or is it not a sufficient aim in itself?'

It now came about that Lucius held banquets as before, and then he was most inclined to have the preparations made for them while he was alone on his mountain walks. He invited to them many of his old drinking companions and let nothing be lacking from their entertainment that was to their taste. They thought it was very strange, when he joined them, dressed after the fashion of noblemen in the richest clothes, but himself sinewy, weather-beaten, springy of step like the hunters that chase chamois north in the Alps. But what most attracted their attention and caused the greatest amazement was that this man, who had turned his back on luxury and pleasure for many years, was the most cheerful of them all, partook of the delicacies with more evident enjoyment than they themselves were able to feel and helped himself to the fine liquor unrestrainedly without becoming drunk. And in his conversation at table he was able to mingle together the light and the serious in such a way that they sometimes almost neglected the fine fare to attend to him and to find out about many things that otherwise are rarely mentioned at such dos.

One morning, ten years from the time that Marcus Aurelius had sent Lucius the letter, an urgent message from the emperor arrived at his gate. The emperor had never before sent for him, but now summoned him to come before him on the evening of that same day. Lucius was immediately sure that now the journey was on. He gave the messenger a prompt reply and said he would be with the emperor at sunset. He got ready to travel, put on his hunting gear, put stout shoes on his feet, girded himself with a trusty dagger and took a spear in his hand. Then he took leave of his children and his wife and said that he could be expected to be a long time away. But everything relating to the management of the farm and the upbringing of the children he had always tried to make sure that she knew about no less than himself. Then he mounted his carriage and drove off to the city, then sent the carriage back home, and went the last part of the way on foot. He walked along the Appian way where many a finely-ornamented carriage was on its way to and from the city, while the gravestones of various important men stood all along on either side. When he came to the splendid monument of his kinswoman Caecilia Metella, which still stands there today, he turned aside from the road into a grove near by that was dedicated to Diana the huntress goddess. He paused in the grove, looked back at Mount Albanus which stood against the sky and glowed in the evening sun, and passed over in his mind the course of his life, especially the last ten

years which had been for him the fullest in experience, learning and joy. He looked with indulgent tolerance on his salad days, when he had striven with the frenzy of ignorant youth to seize happiness to himself, but had always grasped empty air. Perhaps it had been a good thing for him, for he had never afterwards had any need to regret what he had found to be vanity. But where would he have been now if no letter had come for him from the emperor? Probably a 32-year-old old man putting to his lips with shaking hands the same cup night after night without feeling any thirst or getting any relief. These ten years had passed quickly, but wherever he now had to travel over the cold damp mountains of Germany or the hot dry sands of Nubia and then on to even less-known parts, he had an inexhaustible supply of memories and reflections as companions. He listened to the noise out on the road, thought about the fate of all those who had driven along it in glory and the pride of life, and now their ashes rested in peace by the roadside. Where was it all going? What was really life and what was death? There came into his mind the dying words of the emperor Hadrian which he had learned from his father as a child:

Animula, vagula, blandula,
hospes comesque corporis,
quae nunc abibis in loca,
pallidula, rigida, nudula?

'Little, wandering, sweet soul, guest and companion of the body, where are you now bound for, so pale, so chilly, so naked?' And suddenly there came upon Lucius such an overpowering love of life and feeling of gratefulness for existence that he knelt down on the ground and pressed his cheek to the trunk of a tree in mute happiness. When he stood up again it seemed to him that time had stood still for a moment of eternity. Yet again this last day before his journey had brought him deeper joy than any previous day in his life. And he thought to himself:

'Would I ever have awoken to the knowledge of my own happiness, if I had not come face to face with the fact that life was destined to be shorter and harder for me than for others of my age?'

Lucius went out onto the Appian Way, quickened his step and hurried through the Capena gate to the Palatine hill to see the emperor. Marcus Aurelius received him privately in his audience-chamber. Great Caesar was thin-faced and pale-faced, with an expression at once gentle, lifeworn, and weary, his clothes in their way as simple as Lucius' travelling gear. One might as well have supposed that he was a prisoner in that great hall as that he was the sole ruler of the Roman empire. Lucius bowed down to him reverently, and the emperor addressed him as follows:

'Caecilius Metellus! In three days time I have to leave Rome again because the Marcomanni have launched a fresh attack on our frontier and it must be defended. It may be that I shall not return from this expedition. I do not wish to part from you this time without admitting that I have tricked you. Such an act was scarcely worthy of Caesar, but Caesar's power is inadequate in the matters that are of greatest importance. I knew no other way. Every man who wants life to be tolerable has to have some aim. I knew that you were searching for happiness, but you were not searching for it in accordance with the law of the universe, your own nature, nor the needs of human society. You were at war with nature and with your own reason, which is in accordance with nature. In that war you were bound to be the loser. I used my power to provide your life with an aim, but I tried to make it so distant and so indefinite that it would not tie your hands in any way, but rather give you greater freedom, open your eyes to the quality of life, and teach you to use the powers you had in you. Then I felt sure that you would find yourself a sphere of activity which would befit a son of Quintus, a Roman citizen, and an able man.

'You have prepared yourself well and honourably for the journey which your emperor said he had in mind for you. You stand now before me ready to face any trials which may be in store for you. You have done your duty. Now I in my turn must do mine: I must free you from this obligation. The journey that I spoke about will never take place. You can return tomorrow to your home and need no longer expect any summons from Caesar.

'Lucius! I see both disappointment and joy in your face. Perhaps this morning in your heart you were looking forward to this test of your manhood at the same time as you were taking leave of your home with regret and sadness. Or does it seem to you that your life will now be empty, when you no longer have this aim in view?

'Have patience yet awhile. We all of us have before us a journey like the one that was planned for you. Alone we must travel to an unknown land where I shall not be Caesar and you will not even be able to take with you your spear or dagger. Naked shall we stand before the king of that country, without anything except what we *are* in mind and heart. According to my masters, after death the soul like a small flame will he united with the fire of the godhead in unimaginable happiness and joy of victory. Other ancient philosophers believed in a judgement in the next world and in the separate existence of the soul both *after* that judgement and *in the course* of it. It is beyond my power to decide which view is closer to the truth. But this I do believe, that the judgement if there is one will not be by any other laws than those which are imprinted on that same mind that is within you, and on that nature with which it accords, when one attends to the pure voice of them both. Would not even Minos and

Hradamanthys, if they have to judge you, be subject to the inviolable law of the universe the same as you yourself? However lenient they would like to be, they could not at one stroke rid a man of all the delusions which vain thoughts, hypocrisy and fecklessness have wrapped around him. There as here nothing but your own endeavour will be of any use to you.

'Now I have to go to the banqueting hall, Lucius, where some of my friends are waiting for me of whom I intend to take leave this evening, as also of you. But tomorrow you must get up early, as is your custom, and make your plans. If you think you have wasted these ten years that you have been preparing yourself for the journey, then go back to your former way of life, and forgive your emperor. You are still a young man and have plenty of time to enjoy life yet. But if you wish to go on preparing yourself for that journey which is certainly in store for each and every one of us, then you will not miss the anticipation of the other one. And you will never think there is too much of life in which to prepare yourself to stand alone before eternity with even less protection than you have here now.

'I see what is in your mind. You are going to ask to go with me on campaign against the Marcomanni. But I will not let you, Lucius. I have plenty of soldiers who are more experienced in warfare than you. I would think it much more valuable to know that I was leaving behind here in Latium many men like you to look after the empire while I am away. Be as helpful in your counsel in the Senate as you can. Give a good example to your fellow citizens. Bring up your sons to be even nobler than their father. But now we shall together drain a parting cup of the best wine there is from the reign of Trajan. Then our ways part. You go to your estate and your home, and I trust that there awaits you there a life long and beneficial to you and others. I go under the ancient eagle standard to the battlefield where death may always be only a step away. But, as Socrates said, "Which of us goes the better way is hidden from all save the gods alone."'

SIX SHORT STORIES

BY

ANTHONY FAULKES

2002

I

All day they walked. They kept on through the heat, the rain and the wind, pausing only from time to time to look at a wayside flower or to watch a squirrel scurry to the trees at the side of the path. They never turned aside from the hedged path, which seemed to have few turns, although there were many wearisome hills and dips, so that they could never see far ahead. At night they slept under the hedgerow and drank from a stream that flowed nearby, and ate some berries from the hedge. And so on, day after day. There seemed to be other people on the road, though they could not see them very clearly and they rarely exchanged any words—and when they did, they learned nothing about each other. Some they overtook, some overtook them—the feverishly excited ones who pressed forward at their fastest speed, hoping to reach somewhere ahead of all the other travellers. Some of these they saw again later, collapsed in the roadside, having no will any more to go further.

They did not know where they were making for, still less about where they had come from, although each had some shadowy idea in his head about what the destination would be like. But no one was able to explain why it was so important to keep going on.

II

He carefully blotted the neat, perfectly-formed and completely characterless italic handwriting and sat for a moment admiring his work:

> To the ever-living memory of my greatest inspiration and delight, N. M., to whose insight and vision the following owes so much, though it be only a faint and inadequate reflection.

Then he reverently closed the perfectly made octavo volume, quarter-bound in leather and tooled in gold according to the unimpeachable taste of the evening-class instruction in book-binding and decoration, and placed it with thirty-eight other exquisite columes on the hand-carpentered, glass-fronted bookcase—the fruit of an earlier winter's classes. He then sighed and leaned back with satisfaction for a moment before tiredly picking up the overflowing waste-paper basket and going and emptying it in his land-lady's dustbin. When he got back to his desk, he noticed lying on it the final draft of his latest inscription. It had caused him a good deal of work. 'Eternal' had given place to 'everlasting', only to be finally replaced by 'ever-living'. 'Delight' had once been 'joy', which he felt was too commonplace, 'insight' he had felt more meaningful than 'wisdom', 'vision' more profound than 'understanding'. 'The following' worried him still a bit, but it might justify itself eventually. It was not meant to be an empty compliment.

He always took the greatest care over these inscriptions. He tried to steer a course between the Scylla of formality and the Charybdis of sentimentality—though if anywhere the dedication was the right place in a book for sentiment, as long as it was absolutely sincere. Some of his inscriptions were actually extremely brief:

> For A. B., with true gratitude.

The longest was little over half a page. He felt that was the maximum for a modern book, though he often read with great pleasure the lengthy dedications of earlier authors, Spenser or Sterne or Wordsworth. His greatest delight was still Shakespeare's 'To the onlie begetter . . . Mr. W. H. . . .' What fascinated him was not the elusive identity of Mr. W. H., but the sonority of the phrase 'onlie begetter'—how he would have loved to have been the author of those words. Still, he had achieved a great deal, and he was proud of his achievement.

He sighed again, and ran his eyes lovingly along the bookshelf at the thirty-nine neatly bound volumes. He selected one at random and read the familiar dedication with satisfaction. Of course, they were all dedicated to imaginary people—perhaps Mr. W. H. was imaginary too?—but still they read beautifully. He did not after all know anyone to whom he could in any honesty dedicate a book with gratitude; one's landlady would hardly do, and he did not know anyone else well enough. He had once written to a famous personage whom he admired to ask his permission to dedicate a volume to him, but the famous personage had politely written back (through his secretary) saying he would be delighted to consider the request if he could see the book first, and the matter had gone no further. As he mused, his thumb moved across the edge of the tightly bound pages, and they flicked across—two hundred and fifty white virgin sheets, only the first with writing on it. He shifted in his seat uneasily and averted his eye from the accusing whiteness. He knew he ought sometime to stop just writing dedications and start writing the books, but somehow he could never make a start. Ideas came and went, but his real talent, he knew, was for that preliminary delicious sincere and hearfelt part of the book, the dedication.

III

Half a mile of smooth treacherous sand across to the island. We had been assured by a local inhabitant that it was safe to cross, at least with our Land Rover. We started across, gingerly, keeping to the tracks of vehicles that had gone before. The sand was fairly firm. Almost on the other side, under the shadow of a huge cliff, a single pair of tracks veered off to the right towards the sea. We followed this, carefully, keeping close to the cliff where the sand seemed damp, but firm. Further out it was obviously soft and dangerous. After a few hundred yards the wheels began to sink further in and the tyres to lose their grip. We decided to leave the car there and walk to the beach and look for puffins and seals. A car, returning from the island, had got half-way back across the sand to the mainland, when the driver saw us and swerved to his left straight across towards us, evidently thinking we were finding something they had missed. Predictably, after fifty yards he got stuck up to the axles in soft sand. Three occupants got out, hovered round the car for a minute, and then set off after us. We had nearly reached the beach when a tall but rather stout American puffed up to us. We pointed out the head of a seal bobbing inquisitively a few yards out in the water, and he stared vaguely at the horizon. He kept looking worriedly over his shoulder, explaining that his wife was rather overweight and was finding it difficult to walk over the beach, and we saw a huge bulk floundering ankle-deep in the soft dry sand. We pointed out the hundreds of puffins flying to and from the ledges on the cliff-face and offered him the binoculars, through which he gazed

at a black-backed gull and said yes, he had been told there were puffins on the island, but they had not seen any yet. He was still preoccupied with the progress of his wife, which was infinitesimal, and explained that his car was stuck and could we help him out? It was only then that we realised he did not want to see the beach and the seals and the puffins at all, but only wanted to ask us to help him off the sand and back to terra firma. After a few more minutes looking at the birds we returned with him, escorting his enormous wife back over the ten yards she had managed to cover. We managed to lift his car out of the trench it had dug itself into and to drive it onto some firmer sand, where his wife and son got in. The wheels then settled about six inches into the sand again, and both had to get out again so that we could move it. This time the American, having got his car moving, dared not stop again, but drove slowly back to the beginning of the road home, his wife slowly plodding after, sinking only slightly less deeply in the sand than the car had done.

IV

In a remote district of the Western Fiords lived a farmer and his ever-growing family in a remote valley. By local standards the farm was considered large and his land extensive—20 cows, a few hundred sheep, a few hundred acres. On one side the land dropped precipitously to the sea over hard basalt cliffs with many outjuts of lumpy rock. The road-builders had had to blast a tunnel in one place where the foreshore was not wide enough to take the road. The rock had been so hard, said the proud landowner, that they had had to employ a Scottish engineer to bore the tunnel. The state owned the road, he said, and the hole, but he owned the rock framing the tunnel.

Above the outjut a high promontory nosed up towards the west. From the top there was a fine view of the summer's double sunset: the sun sank first behind the high mountains the other side of the fiord, and later, following its shallowly inclined path to the Arctic Sea, reappeared where the northern face of the mountain plunged vertically into the water, to skim the shining surface before dropping finally each twilight night for its short spell just below the horizon. People came from miles around, said the farmer, to see the sunset from his rock; there was indeed a well-worn track to the summit.

Once some people had come from the nearest town in search of rubble as a foundation for their new house. On the top of the farmer's rock there was an abundance of flinty hard basalt chips, which they proceeded to load into the boot of the car. The farmer had met them as they descended to the road and asked what they were doing. They explained, so he informed them that the rock and everything on it was his. They offered to buy the rubble from him, but it was not for sale. He made them drive back up to the top and unload it. 'I would have given it you,' he had said, 'if you had asked.' They asked, and he gave it them for nothing.

He gave us many things too, milk, when we asked for it, and would not take any payment; a place to camp, a trout caught in his nets at the mouth of his river (we did not discover what he charged the fishermen with the expensive tackle who came for a weekend's salmon fishing); coffee and cakes almost every evening we were there; and

conversation in large measure, on every conceivable topic, especially books, for which he had an avid appetite. He was particularly pleased that his favourite Icelandic author had made an Icelandic version of 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' rather better than Ben Jonson's original. He promised to continue the conversations in letters, but only wrote once. Did he maybe discover that we had without asking taken some neglected rhubarb from a disused patch near our camp on his land?

V

'So I said to him, "Come inside the church with me," and we went, and I said to him, "Now repeat what you just said," and do you know, he was afraid to. The blustering fearless self-righteous atheist was afraid to blaspheme inside the church, though he didn't care what he said in the churchyard.'

The bishop sipped his Madeira, replete with self-satisfaction, having proved both the innate superstitiousness (and hence openness to religious persuasion) of the most hardened unbeliever, and also his own moral superiority to him.

The young vicar hummed ruminatively and appreciatively.

'I suppose he thought he would be struck down by a thunderbolt, though I should have thought that less likely inside the church than outside.'

He whinnied, but the bishop, who only laughed at his own jokes and those of his superiors, did not respond, and the whinny turned into a madeira-choked cough.

'But really, bishop, I am surprised that he should have been more over-awed by the invisible presence in the church, which he probably doesn't in fact rationally believe in, in spite of his superstition, than by the most palpable physical presence of your own episcopal self. I would not expect anyone to be overawed by the divinity if he did not believe in it, but I cannot see how anyone could fail to be overawed by your powerful personality—and he was surely not so sophisticated as to doubt your objective existence?'

The boldness of the dean's remarks shocked the young vicar, who, although he would have whinnied if they had been made behind the bishop's back, could do no more than hide a blink behind more Madeira.

'But surely, bishop, it was sheer bravado in the first place; and you called his bluff. He must have been a very stupid man to behave like that, and then be overawed by a bit of overblown medieval architecture. You cannot convert the world just by building churches big enough to dwarf men's minds so that their intelligence is cowed by the weight of the masonry.'

The dean's wife, ordinarily silently sceptical, was encouraged to bait the bishop by her husband's outspokenness.

'We should lose to ordinary civil architecture anyway if we tried that,' replied the bishop. 'Maybe a contributory cause of the increased secularism of the modern world is that men's physical lives are dominated by the massiveness of secular architecture, whereas in the past the most overpowering man-made structures were nearly always religious buildings. But you mistake me, my dear lady, about the blasphemer. He was

not an unintelligent man, though he was not highly educated and was a bit rough in his manners. Oh no, an unintelligent and unimaginative man is never overawed by anything as abstract as the numinousness of a beautiful building or the feeling of an invisible presence on consecrated ground. Without intelligence and imagination a man is affected only by the purely physical nature of objects and is persuaded only by brute force. But an intelligent and imaginative person is able to perceive the spiritual power inherent in objects—and people—and is accordingly susceptible to rational—and irrational argument. Only intelligent people can know God,' ended the bishop with supreme smugness.

VI

'Hey, Johnny, here comes the Rev.'

'Let's rag him, shall we?'

'Go on, I bet you won't.'

'All right, I'll show you.'

'Hello, vic., how were the takings last Sunday?'

'Er, hello, young man, er, no, not as good as they might have been if you had been there.'

The three youths laughed excessively and danced round the young vicar, hooting at his weak joke.

'You don't think we're going to give money to pay bloody Jesus's rent, do you, vic.?'

'Bloody Jesus is a fraud
Oh my Lord, Oh my Lord.'

They danced again round the now shattered vicar, chanting their impromptu rhyme, while he tried hard to summon up the courage to call their bluff. He began to edge towards the church.

'Come inside, young man, come inside. Now, surely you will not be so shameless as to speak thus of Him in His own house?'

But the chanting only died away slowly as they progressed into the musty dim atmosphere of the ugly mock Gothic interior.

'Say, what's that smell, vic.,? Have you been leaving someone's burial too long?'

'Er, it's the incense, dear boy. We like to appeal to all aspects of men's, er, receptive faculties.'

'Stink bombs for Jesus, eh vic.?'

The trio were only slightly abashed at their shamelessness, but they were determined not to let him go. But they were intrigued by the unaccustomed atmosphere and the many strange objects they saw.

'Who's this fellow here, then, vic.?'

'Er, that is a representation of Joseph, our Lord's father.'

'Father, eh? Or stepfather, was it?'

Sniggers and daring smiles exchanged by the three blasphemers. The vicar ignored that one and made his way further into the church.

'What's that red light over there, vic.?'

'It, er, hangs over the sacrament, the holy bread and wine, which is kept from the Communion in case someone in, er, extremity, that is at the point of death, needs it quickly.'

'Sort of magic potion, eh, vic.? Get well quickly, cures all ills?'

'Well, not exactly. Er, if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I have to go and see someone in a very few minutes.'

He made his hurried escape through the vestry, trusting to the powerful atmosphere of the building and the divinity's protection to save it from more than verbal desecration.

Late that night the same three youths, having spent the evening roaming round the town in a fruitless search for amusement, found themselves again outside the church.

'Let's go in again, shall we?'

'What for?'

'See if it's more cheerful in the dark.'

'We could have a better look round without old Snoopy about.'

'Find out what it is they all go to get on Sundays.'

They went to the great west door. It was locked. After kicking it a couple of times they went round the building, trying all the doors until they came to the vestry entrance, which was unlocked. They went in and floundered for a while among billowing surplices and vestments in an exaggeratedly theatrical manner. They each put on a surplice, and one found himself in the vicar's chasuble, embroidered with blue and gold.

'I say, I like that. You look right in that.'

'Pay more respect for the cloth, young fellow.'

They bowed to each other delightedly. Then they set out in procession round the church. They stopped at a box marked 'For the poor' and looked at each other. They jogged it and it gave not a clink. The next was for the restoration of the church. This, when jogged, tinkled faintly. Again they looked at each other.

'We don't need that,' said the one in the chasuble.

'Wouldn't take it if it was offered me,' said another, looking regretfully at the fragile-looking wood of the lid.

They marched on. In the Lady Chapel a table used for Sunday School had a crib on it. They put a lamb in the crib and the infant Jesus on the back of a cow and went on.

At the bookstall they swapped the price-labels so that the postcards cost 45p. and the books 4p.

They lifted the lid of the font and placed a large bunch of Chrysanthemums from a vase in it.

With great care they made a large house out of the stack of prayer books and crowned it with a brass ewer from the side of the font.

They took candles from the vestry and lit them, holding them solemnly as they continued their procession. Then they came to the red light and under it a small cupboard. It was locked. One of them searched the vestry and found a bunch of keys. The smallest one opened the cupboard.

'Do you think it really is magic?'

'No, of course not. It's only a bit of white papery stuff and a jar of wine.'

'What do you think it tastes like? I bet that wine's watered down well.'

'You can't just swallow it like that, you fool.'

'What, are you afraid to try it? Thunderbolts and all that? It's only old Snoopy's private tipple.'

'Of course not. But you must do it properly. Come over here.'

'Thinking of making a priest of yourself, are you?'

The youth in the chasuble led them to the chancel. He remembered the ceremony from seeing the Pope on the television. He stood erect in front of the altar and motioned his two companions to kneel. He with great dignity placed a wafer in each of their mouths, which after a moment they both spat out, as being too dry and tasteless to swallow. As he raised the chalice, the vestry door opened. The vicar, working late on next Sunday's sermon, had seen from his study window the flickering of the moving candles inside the church, and had come to investigate, afraid that a fire had been accidentally started. As he rounded the corner of the chancel, he stood for a moment transfixed with horror at the sight of the parody taking place before him and could think of no appropriate action. Then, summoning all his courage, he approached the rather shamefaced trio.

'I say, you young fellows, what do you think you're doing?'

'What's the matter, rev., gasping for another tot are you? Here you are,'—thrusting the chalice at him.

The young vicar despaired of having any effect on the blasphemers and turned in blind panic, remembering it used to be the practice to ring the church bells in an emergency, and made for the bell-ringers' gallery at the back of the church, muttering, 'The bells, that's the only thing to do, ring the bells.'

'Look out, he's going to ring the bells. He'll have the law on us.'

They chased him down the aisle, surplices streaming, the implements of the parody mass and the candles flung aside, and clattered after him up the narrow dark winding staircase. At the top he tripped and launched himself as he fell on one of the hanging bell-ropes as if he were a drowning man. The rope descended and the bell began to swing with a resounding clang. The three youths fell on him to stop him ringing, but he wriggled from under them and jumped again for the now rising rope, putting all his weight on it as if his life depended on making the bell sound. The youth in the chasuble jumped up at him, adding his own weight to that of the vicar. In an attempt to control the vicar's flailing limbs and to stifle his panic-stricken muttering, now fast rising to a wail, he began to wrap the long end of the rope, at the bottom of its slow and heavy descent, round the upper part of the vicar's body. The bell began its return swing and the rope, as it gradually increased the speed of its rise into the bell-tower, tightened round the vicar's neck and lifted him high up to the ceiling of the ringers' gallery. The three youths, finding that their prey had somehow eluded them, took some time to regain their breaths and sort out their tangled limbs from the heap in which they had fallen on the floor. When they finally got up and could not find the vicar, they fetched the discarded candles, and then saw him, gently rising and falling with the bell, whose echoes were now just disappearing into the black silence, with his neck twisted strangely and a hideous grin, as if at the comic desecration of his church, on his boyish face.

Icelandic Adventure

by

Anthony Faulkes

2002

THERE IT IS, there's the road,' said John. 'It says Fagridalur. Jeppavegur.'

'That means "beautiful valley. Jeep-track,"' said his father. 'Shall we try it and see where it goes?'

'The clouds are very low. It looks like rain,' said his mother. 'Perhaps we ought to stop a while.'

'But it may be sunshine the other side of the mountain,' said Peter. 'Let's go up the road and see.'

'All right, we'll see what the road is like. It may be too rough even for our car, especially if there's been a lot of rain, and it certainly looks as if more is coming.'

Spots began to appear on the windscreen as he spoke, and now the car was stopped the wind could be heard whistling round it. The huge grey clouds swirled round the upper slopes of the mountains and the water down towards the mouth of the fiord began to rise in white-topped waves. They turned up the jeep-track leading higher up the valley beside a mountain stream that jumped over small waterfalls down to the head of the fiord, passing under the road that led on round the coast to the next fishing village. The track went up a gentle slope for a while and was crossed by several small rivulets through which the Land-Rover splashed jerkily. Soon the farms on the lower slopes of the valley were left behind and the track began to climb steeply and got much rougher, with large boulders sticking up out of the surface and deep ruts where water running down had loosened the sandy surface. Then it began to twist and turn and the rain began to pour down in earnest so that the windscreen wipers could hardly keep the windows clear, and they had to go very slowly because they could not see far ahead. The clouds were now very low, and it was obvious that soon they would be driving up through them in a damp fog. The light got rather dim.

'At least it won't be raining up in the cloud,' said mother.

'You never know what you might find in a cloud,' said father. 'It might be snowing.'

They remembered how a low cloud had settled on the mountain-tops a few days earlier and had cleared the next day, leaving the peaks gleaming with new snow.

'We're surely not high enough up for that,' said John.

'I don't know. We've been climbing steadily for a long time. It seems this valley is never ending.'

They were just passing into the beginning of the cloud and mist began to swirl past them in long wraiths. The rain became finer, although it was still unusually dark. Suddenly they passed between two surprisingly tall trees standing one on each side of the track, their branches meeting overhead. The leaves had a strangely glowing light about them in the dim misty twilight, and seemed to tinkle as they passed underneath.

'Those looked like apple trees,' said mother.

'What, in Iceland? Nonsense, said father. 'Especially right up here. Nothing grows here but birch and willow.'

'Well they weren't birch or willow,' said mother. 'I'm sure they were apple trees.'

'I say, are you sure we're still on the track, said Peter, who had been studying the map. 'We ought to be following the stream round a long curve to the left, but I can't see it anywhere and we've been turning right for ages.'

'I expect the stream isn't far away. The map can't show every little bend, you know. You've probably lost the place, anyway,' said John.

'I haven't. I know exactly where we are. But we ought to be able to see the stream still.'

'Whoops! What's this?' said father, and jammed on the brakes.

They had come to a wide river flowing straight across the road.

'I didn't know there were any big rivers to cross up here.'

'There shouldn't be,' said Peter. 'I told you we'd lost the track.'

'Rubbish, there hasn't been any other way. It's just you can't follow a map,' argued John.

'Well, you show me where we are, then,' said Peter, shoving the map across.

'Anyway, this road leads across this river. You can see the tracks leading out the other side,' said father. 'Do you think we can get across?'

'It doesn't look all that deep,' said mother, 'but we don't want to get all our things wet in this weather. You can never tell how deep they are until you're in them. And it doesn't look a very nice place to get stuck in. I bet not many cars come up here.'

They looked round. The mist was so thick they couldn't see more than a few yards in any direction. The rain, however, had stopped, and as they looked across the roaring river the cloud on that side seemed thinner.

'Well, there's not much room to turn round, and the road on can't be much worse than the road back,' said father. 'I think we'll try it. We seem to be nearly at the top of the valley. I'm sure we can get through.'

He nosed the car gingerly into the river. At first it didn't seem too deep and they pushed steadily through the water, but near the middle the nose of the car dipped down steeply and looked as though it would plunge right under the churning surface, but it levelled out with the water just under the bottoms of the windows and the wheels stubbornly grappled with the stony bottom, drawing the car slowly but surely up out of the drag of the current which had by now drawn them several feet downstream.

'Well, I'm glad we're out of that. I though we were going to get dragged down to the fiord again,' said father.

'We really shouldn't have tried it without anyone else about to help us if we got stuck,' said mother.

'Well, we were all right, weren't we?' said Peter. 'Look, no water came in at all. Everything's perfectly dry inside.'

After the river, the road led straight for some time, and the surface was much smoother. The mist began to clear and the light improved, and they could see that they were still climbing slightly, but instead of the rocky, wet, barren slopes of the lower part of the valley, they were now travelling between gentle, green, flowering meadows on each side. Then the road levelled out and began to drop gradually into a pleasant green valley. The clouds lifted and the sun came out. They could see the tops of the mountains all around, covered with snow and ice. The sides of the valley were very steep higher up, but lower down the slopes became shallower and the bottom

of the valley was almost flat, shaped like saucer, with a little lake surrounded by green fields covered with wild flowers. They stopped the car to look at the beautiful view. For the first time for many miles they saw signs of life—cows, sheep and goats. Looking back from where they had come, there was only a long straight road up the hill, the top of which was still made invisible by the thick blanket of fog they had come through.

'It's much warmer here,' said mother. 'It's the first time the air has felt really warm for a long time.'

'Isn't it beautiful,' said Peter. 'It's the most fertile valley we've seen in the whole of this part of the country.'

For once, John forgot to contradict:

'It really is nice here. I'd like to stay for ever.'

'I wonder where it is. Do you think this is Fagridalur?' said father. 'We can ask down there. There's a farm by the lake, and we might be able to get some milk.'

They drove on down into the lush valley. The road became grassy and soon vanished altogether and they found they were simply driving over a smooth green meadow with sheep and goats grazing all around.

'Isn't it funny,' said Peter, 'all the streams run down into the lake, but there doesn't seem to be any river flowing from it. I wonder what happens to all the water.'

'I expect the lake is so deep it never fills up,' said John.

They soon came to the farm. It had several large buildings built of wood with a turf roof. There was no sign of life except that smoke was coming from a squat chimney. There was no farm machinery to be seen, and no barns, only haystacks in a yard enclosed by a dry-stone wall. They stopped outside the biggest building and father got out and knocked. For a long while no one answered. Then there was a shuffling sound inside and the door opened slowly. A huge man appeared, blocking the whole of the large door-frame, and even so having to stoop to let his great bulky head emerge from the dark smoky interior. His features were large and heavy, his nose broad and flat, his eyes slightly slanting, his long unkempt hair hanging in black rope-like strands over his outstanding ears. He was dressed

in leathern trousers and a sheepskin jacket. Father asked him if there was any milk they could buy and what the name of the place was. The man looked at him and the three in the car suspiciously but without much change of expression on his rock-like features, and turned without a word back into the house, slamming the door. A few minutes later the door opened again and a woman's head appeared, looking similar to the man's, but even squatter and broader and with a low flat forehead and long ropy hair. She too looked at them all, but without any expression of either curiosity or welcome on her face, and eventually came right out from the doorway. Now they could see that she had in her hands a large, flat board of wood which she was using as a tray, and on it there stood four wooden tankards brimfull of foamy milk. This was not quite what they had expected, but so as not too appear ungracious they all four went up and took a tankard each. The woman did not reply to their thanks but went back and stood in the doorway and stared at them as they drank the milk. It was still warm and very rich and had a strange taste to it.

'I think this must be goat's milk,' said mother.

'I like it,' said Peter.

'So do I,' said John. 'It's delicious, and it tastes nice from these mugs.'

When they had all finished, they took the tankards back to the woman and father asked her the name of the place.

'Trollheimur,' she replied.

'I thought there was a place called Fagridalur.'

'Yes,' she replied, and went back in, closing the door.

Now the family looked about them, wondering whether they should simply drive on out of the valley, or perhaps camp there as it was so late. The sun would soon have disappeared behind the high hills surrounding them, although it was till warm and pleasant out.

'I'd like to stay here,' said John.

'We must ask the farmer if we can, then,' said father. 'But we'll have to knock again anyway, to ask where the road out is. I can't even see the one we came in by.'

They all looked up and down the valley, but there was just grass on all sides, and no sign even of a track in any direction.

'That's funny,' said mother. 'We should at least be able to see the end of the track that led here. There's no mist at all now. All the mountains are completely clear.'

'I'm not sure which direction it was now,' said father. 'I'll knock on the door again.'

He did so, and after a long while it opened again and the woman's head reappeared. He asked her where the road out of the valley lay.

'No road,' she said.

He asked where the nearest village was.

'No village,' she said.

'Well, as it's so late, could we stay here for the night? We have a tent and all we need.'

The woman's head was withdrawn and the door slammed again. After a few more minutes there was more shuffling inside and the door opened again.

'Come in,' said a man's voice.

After some hesitation and the exchange of rather puzzled looks, the four of them trooped inside and found themselves in a dark, narrow porch, which was nearly filled by the bulk of the man they had first seen, who motioned them into a room on their right. They went in and found themselves in a large wood-panelled room with rather small windows and a large table in the centre. Round three walls were built-in wooden bunks and on the fourth was a fireplace built of large rounded blocks of stone with a wood fire alight in it over which a large pot was boiling. The woman came in after a few moments with four wooden platters which she filled from the pot with huge lumps of salt mutton. She motioned them to sit at the table and eat, and they did so. She left the room.

'This meat is delicious,' said mother.

'I like it too,' said Peter. 'It's much better than ordinary mutton.'

'It's a funny thing,' said father. 'They have neither of them said much, but they speak Icelandic with a very strange accent. I'm sure I've never heard it before, but it's somehow very reminiscent of something. It's very different from the way the other country

people round here speak, but they are certainly real Icelanders, not foreigners.'

'I expect it's just that they are very isolated and hardly ever have anyone to speak to except each other,' said mother. 'It's not surprising if they talk in an odd way. They certainly act in a strange way.'

'No, it's not just that—wait a minute, I know, it's almost as if they were talking Old Icelandic, if that were possible. They pronounce in a very archaic way and use some very old words.'

Soon the woman came back, cleared away the platters and brought wooden bowls full of skyr. When they had eaten that the woman just pointed to the beds round the walls and left them.

'Well, this is rather strange,' said mother. 'I suppose they are being hospitable in their own way. Shall we get to bed?'

The beds were filled with eiderdown and each had a sheepskin covering on it. They were very comfortable and they all slept soundly till morning woke them with the warm sun streaming through the window.

The woman brought them breakfast. It was a cup of whey and a large piece of hot rye bread.

'I'm not sure I like the whey very much,' said Peter, 'but the bread is delicious.'

Then the man came in and said:

'Would you like to do some hay making?'

'Well,' said father, 'if it will repay you a little for the very nice food and comfortable beds, by all means. It will be pleasant to spend a day in such a lovely valley. Then perhaps this evening you will show us the road out.'

'No road,' said the man.

They all went outside and were provided with pitchforks and rakes and walked down to a hayfield. They worked all morning turning the hay to dry it and loading it onto carts, while the farmer took it with two horses to the hay-yard by the house.

For lunch the farmer's wife gave them smoked mutton and skyr, and they worked again until evening. Then they had rye bread and goat's milk cheese and were again left to sleep.

'That was a very pleasant day,' said mother.

'Yes,' said father, 'but I wonder how long it will go on for. We can't stay here all summer.'

'I wouldn't mind,' said Peter. 'I think it's fun working on the farm. I'd like to stay for ever.'

'So would I,' said John. 'The food is lovely, and the farm. I'd like to live here.'

'Well, we may have to,' said father, 'if we can't find the road out.'

They stayed a few more days on the farm, working in the fields and getting their meals from the farmer's wife and sleeping in the downy beds. The boys thoroughly enjoyed it and showed no signs of impatience to be gone, and mother, though a little worried at first, soon became very content with the carefree life. The farmer and his wife also showed no signs of wanting them to go, although they never said much to them and only spoke when someone spoke to them. Father remained restless, and during the lunch break and in the evenings after supper prowled round the farm and the surrounding fields, looking for some clue about where they were and how they were to get away.

After a week, father tried to tackle the farmer seriously, but he remained uncommunicative as ever.

'No road,' he said. 'You stay here.'

'But we must go soon,' said father. 'You surely won't keep us here prisoner?'

For the first time the man smiled—if it could be called a smile on so ugly a face.

'You stay,' he said.

Father told the family what the farmer had said.

'I don't care,' said mother. 'I could stay here living like this for ever.'

'Me too,' said Peter. 'I've never enjoyed myself so much.'

'Can't we stay?' said John.

'We can't stay indefinitely,' said father. 'We must leave sometime and go back to our home in England, and I have to work.'

'I'd much rather stay here,' said Peter. 'Bother England and work.'

That evening after their meal of salt meat and cheese, father went out for a long walk round the fields and up the hillsides. He found

no sign of a road or even a track leading out of the valley and every time he got high up the hill, a mist came down and surrounded him, so he turned and went back for fear of getting lost. Then, on his way back, he found something that made him look even more worried, and he hurried down to the farm. He found mother walking by the lake near the house.

'This is a lovely place,' she said. 'It's very tempting to give up all idea of ever leaving and stay here for ever. But I never noticed before: there are no birds in the valley.'

'That's not the only thing wrong with the place,' said father. 'Up behind that hillock above the farm there is a rubbish pit. It's full of human bones.'

'Are you sure?'

'Positive. I think these are people that have been living here isolated since the Middle Ages, and they have turned into trolls and eat everyone that comes. You can feel the place is bewitched, and you and the boys have come under its spell.'

'What shall we do?'

'We must get away as soon as possible. We'll wait till the trolls are asleep and get quietly out to the Land-Rover and drive away as fast as we can. I think we should try to get out of the valley the side we came in, and I think it was over there.'

'I'll bring our things out one by one under my jersey so they won't see what we are doing. We left most of our things in the car.'

'I checked the oil and fuel at lunch time while the trolls were in the kitchen. The keys are in the car and the battery is all right.'

They went back into the house and whispered, in case the trolls were listening, to the boys what they planned to do. The boys were disappointed when they heard they were leaving, but when they heard about the bones they were eager to be off, and got quite excited about their planned midnight escape. They tied up all their things in small bundles and carried them out to the car under their jerseys one by one. Once or twice they saw the trolls looking out at them through a small window in the roof, but they didn't seem to suspect anything. About midnight, when it was darkest (although since it was only late summer it was still twilight) they all crept

out into the car. The trolls seemed to have gone to sleep. Father switched on the car and it started immediately with a roar. He drove it round to face the way they had come and started off up the hillside as fast as the car would go. They looked back and saw the trolls come rushing out of the house in their night-clothes looking very bewildered. By now they were halfway up the hillside and it was getting very steep, although it was still grassy. Then they saw that the trolls were picking up huge stones and throwing them at them. One fell straight in front of the car and they had to swerve round it. Most of them fell short.

'If one of those lands on us it'll flatten the car,' said father.

But they gradually got out of range, and the trolls, after chasing them a little way, seemed to give up. Now they were high up the mountainside and it began to get misty.

'Do you know, I think we're on the track again. Its stony here,' said father.

The mist closed in and they could not see more than a few feet in any direction, but they kept on driving as fast as they could. Soon they found they were going downhill.

'I think we're out of the valley now,' said father. 'That was a lucky escape.'

Suddenly he stopped. The river lay across the road in front of them. He nosed into it slowly and carefully and the car chugged across, pulling them safely out the other side. It was still foggy and dark but did not seem quite so dense. Then they passed the two overhanging trees, which seemed to tinkle again as they passed, and it began to get clearer and lighter. The road went down steeply and began to twist and turn. It was very bumpy and rocky. The mist cleared and they saw the sun rising from the sea in the fiord below them. The stream led down by the side of the road on their right. Before long they came down to the head of the fiord and met the main road again. There was the sign saying Fagridalur, but instead of standing straight and freshly painted as before, it was falling down crookedly and the letters could hardly be read.

'That's funny,' said Peter. 'I'm sure this is the same road we went up, but the sign looks different.'

‘I expect it’s a different one,’ said John.

‘No it isn’t. It just looks different. And there’s another notice that wasn’t there before. What does it say?’

‘It says “road closed”’, said father, as they turned onto the coast road round the fiord. ‘And I think we’ll stick to main roads from now on.’

The End

The Cave

by

Anthony Faulkes

2002

The Cave

'It's supposed to be on the side of that hill; I expect we go up that track,' said father. 'Do you think we can drive up there? It looks rather rough.'

'It looks all right for a Land Rover. It must be rather a long way to walk,' said Peter.

They drove half a mile up the track.

'I think we will stop and walk from here,' said father. 'Its not far now, and the track gets worse and worse.'

They got out of the car and began to walk. After about a quarter of an hour they came to the end of the track and found a jagged opening in the ground where the roof of a cave seemed to have fallen in. It was possible to climb down over the huge pyramid of fallen boulders to the bottom on either side of the roof fall; they went down on the north side and found themselves in a huge round tunnel formed by a vein of lava flowing under the ground and the roof cooling so that the vein flowed away leaving a tube which might be several miles long. They could see that on this side at least the tunnel went on into the darkness as far as they could see.

'Shall we see how far it goes?" said John.

'We may not be able to get far. The floor is very uneven, and it looks very dark,' said mother.

'We'll see what it's like,' said father.

They walked carefully forward along the tunnel. Even when they were past the fallen rocks the floor was still strewn with loose boulders and they had to go slowly. As they got further in it got gradually darker. The puddles on the floor were now covered with ice and as they looked ahead they could see that in some places there was a sheet of ice right across the floor of the tunnel with rocks sticking up out of it, and little knobs of white ice standing here and there formed like stalagmites from drips from the roof, looking like ranks of sheeted, faceless ghosts in the twilight. They only had one torch, and that not very bright, and as they got further from the entrance the gloom deepened. They kept passing the torch from one to the other, but there were always three of them unable to see where to put their feet next and in danger of slipping into crevices or breaking their shins on rocks. But the ice seemed several inches thick and so safe to walk on, though slippery and covered with a film of water.

The tunnel curved slightly to the left and soon they were unable to see directly back to where they had come in; then as they went further even the light shining on the wall behind them dimmed and they were in pitch darkness. They turned off the torch for a few moments to appreciate the fact that they were in absolute blackness, much darker than the darkest night.

'Are you frightened?' Peter asked John.

'No,' said John, but he held very tight to his father's hand.

They discussed whether they ought not to go back. Mother thought they should, father said they might go on a little way and see if there was light ahead, then it might well be easier and quicker to go on and out a different way than to go back. So they felt their way forward, and in some places the floor was much smoother and they went quite quickly. Then when they had gone some way and were again wondering whether it would not be wiser to turn back, Peter, who was holding the torch, turned it off and said:

'Look, there is light ahead.'

Sure enough, there was a faint glimmer in the distance.

'There must be another roof opening,' said father. 'Now it all depends on whether we can climb up to the opening or not.'

They stumbled on, impatient now to find out what sort of opening the light was coming from. As they got closer, they found the tunnel was curving slightly again and then saw a light shining on the wall ahead, and then saw that there was another hole in the roof like the one they had got in by, but not as big, with a pyramid of boulders underneath where the roof had fallen in. They went up to it eagerly, no longer needing the torch. But when they got close they found that although there was a huge pile of boulders beneath the opening, it was not high enough to reach the edge of the hole, and the walls of the tunnel curved right round to the lip of the hole until they overhung horizontally so that it was impossible to climb out up the walls.

'Could we carry some more rocks up and make the pile higher?' said Peter.

'We might be able to, but we would have to be careful to make it firm, or we could cause a small avalanche,' said father.

'Don't you think it would be better to go back to where we first came in?' said mother. 'It's not all that far, and we don't want any of us to break a leg down here.'

Meanwhile John had worked his way round past the heap of fallen boulders and was investigating the continuation of the tunnel.

'It goes on over here,' he said, 'and there are two tunnels.'

'There's another over here,' said Peter.

They all went round the pile of boulders. Besides the continuation of the tunnel they were in after the roof fall, another tunnel went crossways on a slightly higher level than the first, with openings into the side of it, not with as high a roof, extending both to left and right into the darkness. It was possible to go on in any of three directions, and where they met there were two chambers, one above the other, with a rock floor between that they could easily climb on to.

'Its like an underground junction,' said John. 'Which shall we go along?'

'We mustn't get lost,' said mother.

'This upper tunnel is closer to the surface,' said father. 'If there is an opening in the roof of it, it ought to be easier to get out of. But it is rather a low tunnel.'

John had gone down a little way.

'It gets higher along here,' he said, 'and the floor is quite smooth. It's easy to walk along. Bring the light.'

They all scrambled onto the floor of the upper tunnel and shone the torch down first one way, then the other.

'Let's go just a little way down this way,' said father, pointing down the left-hand tunnel. 'We must remember which way we turned, in case we have to come back. There may be lots of tunnels, we don't want to lose our bearings. There may be only the one place where it's possible to climb out.'

They walked down the tunnel, shining the light ahead. Both floor and walls seemed smoother than in the other tunnel, and the air seemed warmer. There was no ice. Soon they found the tunnel had curved and they could no longer see light behind them when they turned off the torch.

'What was that? I thought I heard something,' said John.

'What was it like?' asked Peter.

'Almost like music,' said John.

'I expect it was drops of water from the roof.'

'I don't think so. Anyway, this tunnel is quite dry. I say, isn't it sloping downwards?'

It did seem as if they were getting deeper. It was very dark, and the tunnel seemed wider and the roof higher, but the floor was still quite even. A current of warm air seemed to flow towards them and they all thought they could hear metallic sounds from time to time, almost like shrill music. They seemed to be walking quicker.

'Don't you think we ought to turn back?' said mother. 'It doesn't look as though there is going to be any way out this way, and the torch battery seems to be going.'

'We'll just go a bit further,' said father, 'if there is a way out here we ought to come to it soon. This is a much better tunnel to go along. I wonder how far it goes.'

'I think there's light ahead,' said John.

They stopped and extinguished the torch, which was very dim by now anyway. There did seem to be a slight glow on down the tunnel, but looking back the way they had come was completely dark.

'I think we had better go back,' said mother. 'We've come too far. It will be getting dark outside soon.'

'But it must be miles back to where we came in. There must be a way out ahead, where the light is. It'll be much quicker and easier to go on,' said father.

'I'm sure that is music I can hear,' said John.

'There can't be music down here. We're miles from anywhere,' said Peter. 'But let's go on and find out what the light is ahead.'

They walked on, finding that the tunnel was still sloping downwards and curving to the left. As they went on, the light ahead became brighter, and they could all clearly hear a metallic tinkling that sounded more and more like music. It became much warmer. None of them spoke now, but they walked on hesitantly, unable to turn back, not only because of their curiosity to see where the light and warmth and sounds came from, but because they felt drawn onwards and downwards towards the light.

Then they turned a corner and saw before them the tunnel some way ahead opening out into a great hall with tessellated floor and walls and hundreds of candles on holders near the roof, and a great fire in the centre of the floor. Many trestle tables were set up in a circle round the fire at which hundreds of small people sat feasting and drinking from glass goblets.

'Welcome, strangers,' said a voice in the shadows near the four explorers.

He was about three foot high, wearing a green coat and a pointed brown hat with a long feather in it.

'Welcome,' he said again, when they did nothing but stand and stare at him. 'We will do you no harm. Enter, and join the feast.'

'Are—are you elves?' asked Peter.

'We call ourselves the People of Light.'

'But you live down here in the darkness,' said John.

'It is only dark when we are not here,' said the elf.

The four strangers walked down into the great bright hall among all the feasting folk and saw that every face turned to them with a smile, every hand raised a goblet to drink to them a welcoming toast. Four seats had been cleared opposite one who wore a small gold crown . . .

A few days later in the Reykjavík newspaper there was a short paragraph:

'A Land Rover has been found abandoned on a rough track just off the main road leading to the centre of Iceland. It is believed that there was a family of English people, two adults and two children travelling in it, but no trace has been found of them and it is not known what has become of them.'

The Crystal Mountain

A Fairy-Tale Retold

by

Anthony Faulkes

2002

The Crystal Mountain

A Fairy-Tale Retold

Once upon a time, a long long while ago, there was an old king who ruled over the biggest kingdom in the world, and he was the richest king in the world. He would also have been the happiest king in the world except for one thing: that was that there was a part of his kingdom—for it was a very big one, and stretched so far that no one had ever been to the end of it—that was lost. It had been lost a long time before by a king who had been very careless, and thought his kingdom was so big and rich that he needn't worry about looking after such a little bit as this bit that was lost. And you might think, too, that in such a big kingdom it wouldn't matter if just one little corner were lost. But it so happened that this little bit, although it was so small, was more important than all the rest put together. It had on it a crystal mountain, which was very beautiful, except that at the time of this old king I am telling you about, no one who was alive had ever seen it, for it was, as I say, lost. And because it was lost, everyone in the kingdom was very unhappy, and the children never laughed, and the lambs never gambolled, and the flowers withered almost as soon as they came out, and the sun very rarely shone, but it nearly always rained or drizzled. So you see, since this was all because the crystal mountain was lost, it was a very important mountain. At one time the king had announced a prize for the man who found it, and many brave knights had gone out in shining armour to try and find it, but they all wandered round for many years until either they got lost themselves or they came back in despair and gave up. So for a long time no one had even tried to find the crystal mountain; they had even given up hope of ever finding it, and they just went on living in the drizzling rain, with no flowers waving in the sunshine and no lambs gambolling and no children laughing.

Now this old, unhappy king had three sons. One of them was still quite a little boy, just at the age when boys love to hear lots of stories about everything in the world, and spend all the day worrying the grown-ups to tell them some, until the grown-ups get very angry and switch on the television. The other two were a bit older, and they soon got tired of stories, and never even stayed to hear the end, but went outside to tease the cat. But the youngest never got tired of them and went on asking for them, though the only person who could be bothered to keep making up stories for him was his old grandma. Now this old grandma was the oldest woman in the world, and *she* said she was the wisest, but all I know is that she was the ugliest. She was so ugly you've never seen anything like it and I can't possibly describe her to you. Some people said she was as

ugly as sin, and that is very ugly indeed. She always used to say she made up for it by having a beautiful soul, which was the most important thing. I don't know about that, but certainly she was so ugly outside that on one could bear to look at her for more than a moment or they felt just like you do when you wake up in the middle of the night with a stomach-ache after a bad dream. But she may have been very wise and very beautiful too inside, and anyway Jacob—that was the name of the youngest of the three brothers—used to love hearing her stories, and she used to love telling them, and so they got on very well together. They used to sit in a room on their own for hours and hours, and she would tell him lots of stories. She used to tell him lots of stories, but there was one particular one that he loved to hear, and he used to ask for it over and over again because he loved it so much. And this was the story:

There was once a very beautiful girl who was being courted by a young prince, and for a long time she refused him until at last he won her by his faithfulness. But she said she would only marry him if he would go on a long journey round the world to fetch her a certain special flower which only grows in one special place a long way away. But on his way back he was not to let anyone see it or smell it until he brought it to her. Then she would marry him. Well, he went off on his journey and found the flower and was bringing it back, but on the way he was tempted by lots of beautiful young girls who tried to persuade him to let them see the flower, and some of them were so beautiful that they were very nearly as beautiful as the princess he was going to marry. In the end they kept pestering him so much that he let them have just one little peep to satisfy them, and so broke his promise to his princess. When he got back she was very angry with him and said she would never see him again. Then he was so unhappy that she relented and promised that he should see her on one day every year; she would go and live in a golden palace on a crystal mountain—the very same crystal mountain that Jacob's father had lost—and then he would have to come there to see her on the right day once a year. So she went away to live on the crystal mountain and he waited for the end of the first year so that he could see her again, and he saw her once that year, and once the next year, and once the year after. Then the next time, either he had stopped loving the princess or someone had led him astray, but he never found the crystal mountain, and lost his way. And it was never seen again. The princess was so angry that he didn't come that she said that the sun would never shine and the flowers would never come out, the lambs would never gambol and the children would never laugh until there was another prince who was strong enough and faithful enough to find the crystal mountain and find her in the golden castle.

Well as I say, Jacob used to love this story and made his grandma tell it him over and over again, although he nearly knew it by heart, and then he

would go away and lie awake at night thinking of the crystal mountain and the golden castle and the beautiful princess, and he longed for it to be him that would find it in the end. He never told anyone of this wish, but kept it a secret and just dreamed about it every night, and thought about it all day long. No one knew why it was that he always went about with that dreamy look in his eyes, and why he didn't care about all the things that most children care about, and no one knew he was always thinking of the beautiful princess and the golden castle and the crystal mountain, and how he longed to be the one to find it so that the children could laugh again and the lambs could gambol and the flowers could come out and the sun could shine again. But I think he grandma guessed what he was thinking about, and she used secretly to pray that one day Jacob might find the crystal mountain.

So Jacob went on day by day and year by year, living in his dreams, but most of all in his dream of the crystal mountain. Soon his old grandma died, but still he went on dreaming and never forgot the story of the beautiful princess. Then one day when he was about fourteen years old, and was just becoming a young man, he made up his mind that he wouldn't any more live in dreams, but wanted to find the reality and make his dreams come true. So he went to the old king his father and said:

'I want to leave home now, father, I'm going on a journey, I'm going to try to find the crystal mountain.'

Now this made his father very angry, for he had always brought his sons up to be quiet, untroublesome youths, and they spent all their time digging in the king's garden, growing flowers and vegetables, and he himself had always done the same for his father, and so had his father for his father. And he thought it right and proper that boys should stay at home and look after their father's garden, as his elder sons did, he didn't agree with this gadding about after crystal mountains, he wasn't even sure that there was such a thing as a crystal mountain, he thought it most likely that it was just a fairy-tale invented by old women to tempt honest men's sons to ruin themselves leaving home chasing about the country looking for will o' the wisps. But nevertheless, Jacob was so decided on going, he believed so firmly that there was a crystal mountain and that he would be able to find it (and he wasn't interested in his father's garden anyway) that he in the end left home even though his father stormed in anger, his mother wept bitterly and his brothers despised him for a fool; he simply had to follow his dream and search for the crystal mountain, he could do no other. And if he never found it, well, he would die rather than give up. So one fine spring morning he walked out of his father's home full of hope and confidence, in spite of everyone's saying that he was a fool and a mad-man to go out looking for fairy-tale crystal mountains when he could be living

comfortably at home looking after his father's garden. In spite of everyone and everything, he was following his own vision of the crystal mountain.

It would take too long to tell you all the things that happened to Jacob on his long long wanderings in his search to find the crystal mountain and the golden castle, his many adventures and dangers, his lucky escapes and disappointments, the marvellous things he saw and the interesting people he met. It was a long hard journey and he was often very hungry and tired. But he never lost hope and eventually came across the mountain and saw the golden palace shining on the top. Climbing up was not easy, nor was finding his way into the palace. But in the end he got there and went in through the great doorway, seeing no one, hearing no one. The whole place seemed empty, and he searched through the echoing rooms and then up the winding staircase and through all the rooms above. He came to the last room of all and opened the door gently and peeped inside. And then he saw the most beautiful sight you have ever seen in all your life. There was a big hall with beautiful hangings on the walls, and beautiful pictures of all sorts of wonderful things, and there were big tables covered with the most delicious food and wine, and all as fresh as if it had been laid the moment before. And there was an enormous glass chandelier with thousands of glittering candles which made all the silver on he tables glitter and dance, and filled the whole hall with shining light. But the most beautiful thing of all was right in the middle, a bed covered with lovely silk coverings, all beautifully embroidered with flowers and birds and fishes. And in the bed was the most lovely girl in the world, with long black shining hair and long eyelashes and pale, very pale cheeks, and her eyes tight shut as though she had been asleep for a thousand years—which as a matter of fact she had. And when Jacob saw the girl he felt in his heart that there was only one thing in the world that he wanted, and nothing else mattered, and that was to see those lovely pale eyelids with the long eyelashes open, so that he could see what was in those two dark pools of still water. So he crept in and tiptoed across the hall and passed by the tables with all the delicious food, the peaches and apricots and cherries, and the wine and everything, and he never once looked at all the wonderful pictures or the shining chandelier. He went straight to the lovely girl with his eyes fixed on those frozen eyelids, and he bent gently over so that his head made a soft shadow over her face, and his hair just brushed her forehead, and slowly and silently he stooped down and imprinted a long, deep, gentle kiss on the soft red lips. The long eyelashes stirred as though moved by a summer breeze and the eyelids flickered and opened, and Jacob looked long and gladly into those deep blue eyes which shone like the water of the sea by moonlight. For a long time he gazed with joy into them and saw that

far-away beautiful vision that he had longed for and sought for so long, and which had been kept from the world for so many years until he came to find it. And at that moment he was the happiest man in the world.

And so at last the crystal mountain was found again which had been thought lost for ever, and now the children all began to laugh again and the lambs all gambolled like mad in the meadows, and the flowers spread out their petals and smiled at the sun, which came out from behind the clouds. And the old king who was on his death-bed was happy for the first time in his life, and blessed his sons and died for very joy.

And what happened to Jacob after he left off looking into the maiden's eyes? No one knows. Some say what he saw there was so wonderful that he died straight away, some say he gazed so long he went mad. Certain it is that he was never seen again. I heard an old man whisper that after he had gazed for many hours into those lovely eyes, they faded, and the girl and the golden castle and the crystal mountain all disappeared, and Jacob found himself staring at his own face in a puddle; and then he was so angry that he ran all the way back to his home and went to his grandma's grave and dug it up, shouting all the time:

'It was a lie! It was a lie!'

And he buried himself with her. But whatever happened, even though for that first moment when he looked into the girl's eyes he was the happiest man in the world, I don't think you should go looking for any crystal mountains. Better stay at home and look after your father's garden.

THE END

The Badly Fitting Mantle

by

Anthony Faulkes

2002

The Badly Fitting Mantle

Every year at Whitsun King Arthur held a splendid feast for all his lords and ladies, and they all wore their most splendid clothes. On the Saturday King Arthur and Queen Guinevere gave their lords and ladies fine presents. On Whit Sunday they would have a special festival meal, but it was King Arthur's custom on these occasions not to allow the meal to start until some news arrived from outside the court of some surprising or marvellous event. One year they all sat down to the meal, but were kept waiting for several hours, because no news came, and the lords and ladies began to get very hungry. Then in the end a young man was seen riding a horse towards the court at top speed. When he reached the doors of the king's hall he leapt from his horse and threw off his cloak, for he was very hot from his galloping. Soon, everyone thought, they would be able to start their meal.

But the young man would not answer anyone's questions, and insisted on speaking directly to the king. He told him that he had come from a far-off land and was sent by a beautiful young maiden with a request, which the king must grant before he know what it was. The king granted the request, and the young man brought out a beautiful silk mantle. It had been made by an elf-woman, and was so fine that it was impossible to see any seams or hems on it. It had a great deal of magic woven into it, the nature of which was that any maiden who had been naughty with her lover would have her naughtiness revealed as soon as she put the mantle on, in such a way that it would appear either too long or too short, and its length would show how far she had gone in her naughtiness. So no maiden who put the mantle on would be able to hide what she had done.

When the young man had explained all this, he said that the request the king had granted was that each of the ladies in his court, which was reputed to be not only the finest, but also the most well-behaved in the world, must try the mantle on to see if it fitted them, and this must be done before they found out about the magic. All the lords were amazed and were very curious to see the mantle tried on.

So the king sent for Queen Guinevere and all her ladies, and they were to be told that a young man had come with a beautiful mantle which the king wanted to present to the lady it fitted

best. They were very pleased to come, because they were very hungry. The king asked Queen Guinevere to try the mantle on first, and everyone looked curiously as she put it on to see how it would fit her, for she was supposed to be the most virtuous lady in the world. But when she put it on, it didn't fit her at all, but was much too short, and only came down to about a foot from the ground. So the lady that stood next to her said she would try it on and see if it fitted her any better. She was about the same height as the queen, but on her it was much shorter. All the lords laughed, but the queen got very angry and asked what it was that was so special about this mantle, and when they told her both she and the lady who had tried it on blushed very red and went and sat down at the end of the hall.

Then it was the turn of the other ladies to try it on, and none of them were very eager to do so, now that they knew shat its nature was. But there was no escaping it, the king insisted that every lady there should try it on, and would accept no excuses, though many of them tried very hard to get out of it. But the result was that it fitted none of them at all. On some it was too short at the front, and came up above their knees, on others it was too short either on the left or the right side, and showed up as far as their thighs. On some it was all right in front, but was very short at the back, and hardly came down below their bottoms. On one of them all the buttons and fastenings snapped off as soon as she put the mantle on, and it fell off her completely and landed in a heap on the floor at her feet. All the men laughed, but the ladies were very ashamed, though began to see that it didn't really matter all that much, because everyone who tried the mantle on found that in some way or another it would not fit them.

So the king told the young man who had brought it that he had better take it away with him and try at another king's court, but he asked whether there was no other lady left in the court who had not yet tried on the mantle. So the servants went upstairs to see if anyone had been left out, and there they found a lady who had not yet come down, for she was very tired and had fallen asleep without anyone noticing, and had not been at the gathering below. So she was fetched down. She was rather shy, and her boyfriend who was there did not want her to try on the mantle, for he loved her very much however naughty she had been and didn't want her to be shamed in front of all the

other people. But she said she didn't mind trying on the mantle as long as he wouldn't be cross. So she tried it on, and what do you think? It fitted perfectly. Now all the ladies had tried it, and she was the only one it fitted. So the king said that the mantle was hers to keep, and advised never to be naughty otherwise it would not fit her the next time she put it on.

Then the king said they might all sit down to their feast, now that a marvel had been shown in the hall, and they need wait no longer. But many of the lords and ladies would rather have gone home hungry, for they were still being teased about not being able to wear the mantle.