

Introduction

by Anthony Faulkes

The Saga of Hord and the Holm-Dwellers

From the road around Hvalfjörð a short way north of Reykjavík on the way to Akureyri, one can see the little island on which Hord Grímkelsson and his band of outlaws are said to have lived for nearly three years, defying the establishment of Icelandic society in the late tenth century, and from which his faithful wife Helga is said to have escaped after his death by swimming ashore with their two young sons.

The saga of Hord Grímkelsson, also known sometimes as the saga of the islet-dwellers (*Hólmverja saga*), is one of three Icelandic sagas that can be called outlaw sagas. The other two, *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*, have been better known (*The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, tr. G.A. Hight, Everyman's Library, no. 699, 1965; *The Saga of Gisli*, tr. G. Johnston, Everyman's University Library, 1963), and indeed *Grettis saga* has been one of the best-loved of all Icelandic sagas.

As is the case with most of the Icelandic sagas, the heroes and some of the other chief characters in the outlaw sagas were real historical people who lived in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It is however difficult to ascertain how many of the stories told about them are true. Some of them, because of the supernatural elements in them, are obviously fiction, others may be; but there are no independent sources about the history of early Iceland either to confirm or refute most of the events in the sagas. *Landnámabók* (*The Book of Settlements*) may be older than many of the sagas, but the versions of it that survive often include summaries of events told in the sagas which are sometimes derived from written versions of them, sometimes perhaps from oral versions, but it can rarely be regarded as a completely independent witness; and the same is true of the annals. And the *Saga of Hord* is probably the least historical of the outlaw sagas, perhaps among the least historical of the Icelandic sagas as a whole. But the main outline of events in it is probably true, though in the version we have most of the incidental details are almost certainly

part of the author's imaginative reconstruction of events of which he probably had only an outline from oral tradition. But Hord lived and was outlawed in the second half of the tenth century (when Iceland was still heathen), and may well have engaged in viking activities in Scandinavia in the time of Harald Greycloak, or Greymantle, king of Norway (c. 960-70) and Harald Gormsson, king of Denmark (c. 950-985; often called Harald Bluetooth).

Like all sagas of Icelanders, the outlaw sagas are anonymous. All three are preserved in Icelandic manuscripts of the fifteenth century and later. But there are indications that all three were first written in some form in the thirteenth century, the time when most of the major Icelandic sagas were first written, and which was the time of greatest literary activity in Iceland in the Middle Ages. But the surviving versions of the outlaw sagas may well be more or less extensive revisions of the original thirteenth-century works, and at any rate *Grettis saga* in its surviving form is thought unlikely to be older than the early fourteenth century. In the case of the *Saga of Hord*, the earliest complete text (in AM 556 a 4to, written in the second half of the fifteenth century), seems by its language and style to have been compiled not earlier than the fourteenth century, but there survives a fragment of the beginning of the story in AM 564 a 4to, a single leaf fragment written about the beginning of the fifteenth century, which is shorter and in a verbally more compact style and omits the verses, and may be a remnant of an earlier version, though it is perhaps equally possible that it was simply an abridgement of the existing saga; but too little survives of this version to know how it differed in content from the text in AM 556 a 4to. With other sagas that survive in both a more compact and a more verbose version, there is often reason to believe that the more verbose one is the earlier.

The *Saga of Hord* is referred to in Sturla Thórdarson's version of *Landnámabók* (c. 1280), so a thirteenth-century version of the saga must have existed. The comments on Hord's career attributed to Styrmir at the end of the surviving saga have suggested to some the possibility that Styrmir was

the author of this earlier version. Styrmir (d. 1245) was a priest and prior of the Augustinian monastery at Videy and the author of a now lost version of Landnámabók and a saga about St. Ólaf of which only fragments survive, and probably had a hand in the composition of Sverris saga and other works. It is difficult to know whether he wrote a saga of Hord, but it is clear that in the Middle Ages Icelanders liked such epigrammatical summaries of the achievements of their legendary heroes as that at the end of the surviving saga, in which in some cases different figures were compared, and liked to attribute them to famous and learned men. Compare the end of Grettis saga, where a similar judgement on Grettir and the vengeance for him is attributed to Sturla Thórdarson, a prolific historian and nephew of Snorri Sturluson (d. 1284); this, and the earlier reference to Sturla in ch. 69 have suggested that there was an earlier version of Grettis saga written by Sturla. Comparable, but unattributed comments about Gísli are found in ch. 22 of Gísla saga and about Glúm at the end of Víga-Glúms saga, and one might also compare the judgement on Grettir and the foster-brothers Thormód and Thorgeir in ch. 51 of Grettis saga attributed to Thorgils Arason.

There is another apparent reference to a source in the Saga of Hord in the mention of the tale of Álfgeir on p. 65, but nothing further is known of that story.

The saga also survives in numerous paper manuscripts of the seventeenth century and later which are all believed to be derived from AM 556 a 4to, and verse paraphrases of the story were also made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Iceland.

In many of the Icelandic sagas some of the speeches of the characters are expressed in verse form, often in the highly ornate skaldic style which then provides an extreme contrast to the usual plainness of the prose narrative. In some cases the verses may actually have been composed by the person who speaks them in the saga, and handed down orally from the time of the events to the time when the saga was compiled. But there is often reason to think that verses in the sagas were composed later than the events to which they relate, as imaginative dramatic expressions of the likely emotions and feelings of the characters in the stories as they were developed

in oral tradition. Thus many verses in sagas may have been composed a century or more after the lifetime of the people who are supposed to utter them, sometimes but not always by the author of the saga himself. Though it has been customary to describe such verses as "not genuine" or "falsely ascribed" or even as "forgeries," it might be better to regard them simply as dramatic devices (without any intent to deceive) comparable to the habit of classical historians of composing set-piece speeches in which their historical figures express their views and attitudes to historical events.

All three outlaw sagas contain a number of verses, many of them uttered by the hero himself. Most of the verses in *Gísli* saga are believed to have been composed to fit stories about *Gísli*, which would then have been in oral form, in the twelfth century (*Gísli* lived in the second half of the tenth century). It is possible that some of the numerous verses in *Grettis* saga are from the time of *Grettir* (eleventh century), but the majority are thought to have been composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The verses in the *Saga of Hord* seem to belong to the fourteenth century, and may thus have been contemporary with the extant version of the prose of the saga; it is thus likely that the thirteenth-century version of the saga contained no verses (the fragment in AM 564 a 4to lacks the verses in the corresponding part of the story in AM 556 a 4to). Nine of the nineteen verses in the saga are spoken by Hord. It is interesting that the verses he exchanges with the dead viking *Sóti*, and the verses spoken by the idol on p. 72, are in the simpler style and metre associated with the heroic poems of the *Elder Edda* and heroic sagas (*fornaldarsögur*). Most of the rest are in the courtly style of skaldic verse.

Icelandic sagas in general are noted for their realism and restraint in both incident and style, though there are in fact great differences between individual sagas in these respects. According to the current view of the development of Icelandic literature, those sagas composed early in the thirteenth century have the greatest degree of realism and restraint. Later in the century exaggerations and supernatural incidents appear more and more, and sagas composed after 1300 have lost many of the characteristics of the so-called "classical" sagas (though the "classical" features of some sagas may in fact be the result of medieval editing). Of the three outlaw sagas,

Gísla saga is the most realistic and restrained, and also has the starkest expression of the heroic spirit of resistance to injustice and evil. In Grettis saga there are more supernatural incidents and many of Grettir's exploits are beyond the limits of the credible, at least for modern readers. The Saga of Hord is the least realistic of the three and the furthest from the "classical" style of saga-writing. The characterization is also less convincing than in the other two.

During the thirteenth century other kinds of sagas came to be written in Iceland besides sagas about Icelanders. Sagas were compiled about events in northern Europe in the viking age and earlier, which took place much earlier than the events to which the sagas of Icelanders relate. These sagas are often referred to as heroic sagas or fornaldarsögur (sagas of ancient time). They are based on legends and poems and the events described are often of a sensational kind, full of exaggerations and supernatural incidents, and in many cases the stories are formulaic and repetitive and the characters undeveloped. During the same period romances of foreign origin (many of them originating in France or England) came to be known in Scandinavia and Iceland and were in many cases translated into Norwegian and Icelandic. These "Romance sagas" too mostly related to very early times (insofar as they had any historical content at all) and were full of far-fetched and sensational incidents, with many romantic episodes and a colourfulness in style and description which are rarely found in native Icelandic sagas. To begin with these three kinds of sagas remained distinct genres, but gradually they began to influence each other, and by the end of the thirteenth century sagas about Icelanders began to be written that in many ways resembled Romances and fornaldarsögur.

Of the three outlaw sagas, Gísla saga is the least affected by romance and heroic sagas, though the importance of love in it could be seen as betraying something of the new spirit (it may be noted that there exists a revised version of Gísla saga, probably made in the fourteenth century, which shows considerably more of the influence of heroic sagas than the older version that also survives). Many of Grettir's exploits in the extant version of Grettis saga however show considerable affinity with the heroic sagas (fights with berserks, trolls, and revenants, for instance), and these are often narrated with the

sort of exaggerations characteristic of heroic sagas; and the last part of *Grettis saga* is clearly influenced by romance, for the author has there clearly adapted an incident from the *Tristan* story. But of the three, it is again *The Saga of Hord* that is at the latest stage of development and that has the clearest characteristics of the new style of narrative, and which more than most other sagas about Icelanders bears witness to the mixing of genres in the later period of saga-writing. Particularly on pages 38-45, where Hord's exploits outside Iceland are described, the incidents such as the raiding of the graveyard and the fight with its occupant, and the sea-fights with vikings are very much in the style of the heroic sagas. The encounters with the disguised Ódin, and the episode later in the saga involving Thorgerdr hörgabrúdr show the author's interest in the heathen beliefs and practices of the time of his hero, though it is doubtful how accurate his reconstruction is, and how genuine his account of folk-beliefs like the "war-fetters" that afflict Hord in his last stand are. The numerous episodes involving magic and transformation also bear witness to the author's striving for sensational effect, and it seems that he has found his material for such episodes mainly in earlier sagas of various kinds. Indeed the inspiration for much of the saga seems to have been literature rather than folk-lore. Hord's marriage to a foreign princess, though not absolutely beyond historical possibility, seems to be evidence of the author's romantic tendency, as is his portrayal of Helga's heroism at the end of the story. The loose, episodic structure of much of the saga, the lack of realism, and the weakness of some of the characterization and motivation are also characteristic of many heroic and romance sagas. But although these features are more pronounced in some parts of the saga than others, and the episodes containing them may have been added to the earlier version of the saga, it is not now possible to distinguish clearly those parts of the saga which were in the earlier version and to separate them from the work of the fourteenth-century redactor, nor to reconstruct the original form of the saga. And it is certainly not possible on the evidence we have about it to make any critical judgements on the quality of the narrative in the earlier version.

In the text of the saga that we have, Hord is fairly success-

fully portrayed as a tragic figure, made outlaw in spite of his good-will and attempts to atone for his misdeeds, betrayed by his friends and relatives and plagued by companions morally inferior to himself, whom he tries unsuccessfully to restrain from excess and ill-advised actions. His loyalty to his friends in spite of their faults and his attempts to save them from their own gullibility, his attachment to his wife, his ability to see clearly when all around him are blind, and his death to which he knowingly goes because of an appeal to his honour and heroism, all combine to make him an attractive and sympathetic character who seems more sinned against than sinning, and evoke the pity and admiration of the reader. The same sort of irony is employed in all three outlaw sagas, whose heroes come to be at odds with society in spite of good intentions and are portrayed as more honourable than their victorious enemies in spite of their faults.

Gísli, Grettir, and Hord were not the only men to be outlawed in medieval Iceland, though they were the most famous, and their outlawry is a central theme in the sagas about them. But outlawry was a commonly used penalty under the early law of Iceland, the only other one that was available being the fine (or honour payment); the law did not recognise any other sanctions against those who acted contrary to the rules of society. Outlawry might be temporary (three years) or permanent, and then the guilty man lost all legal rights and status for the rest of his life. Thus the final solution in early Iceland to anti-social behaviour was rejection. Very often, of course, the outlawed person would simply leave Iceland and live in another country, like Eirík the Red, who went and settled in Greenland, or the thirteenth-century outlaw Aron Hjorleifsson, who went to Norway (in other respects Aron's career was strikingly similar to Gísli's). The landscape of Iceland is inhospitable, particularly inland away from the farming areas, and it is surprising that it was apparently possible for outlaws to survive in the wasteland there, and that some should apparently choose to try to do so. When they did, they provided material for story-tellers who celebrated the independence and heroism that the undertaking demanded.

It may be thought strange that in Iceland, land of independence and individuality, where those escaping from the tyranny of the Norwegian monarchy had set up their own con-

stitution and legal system, it should have been necessary to idealize the outlaw who rebelled against restraints of that comparatively free society. But many of the sagas are based on conflicts between individuals and society, and there is no reason to think that such conflicts were less common in Iceland than elsewhere. Moreover though in some respects early Icelandic society seems to have been fairer and to have allowed more freedom to the individual than contemporary societies in other parts of Europe, it was not a democracy, but an oligarchy in which most of the power increasingly lay with a few wealthy landowners. The attempts of a small number of families to increase their power and wealth led to the turbulence of the Sturlung Age, and there are several sagas written during the thirteenth century that seem to reflect disillusion and dissatisfaction with the rule of the local chieftains in Iceland, though the stories in which this dissatisfaction is expressed, like *Hrafnkels saga* and *Bandamanna saga*, often relate to an earlier age. Moreover after 1262 when Iceland accepted the rule of the Norwegian monarchy oppression of the individual undoubtedly increased, and it is after that date that the extant versions of at least two of the three outlaw sagas were written.

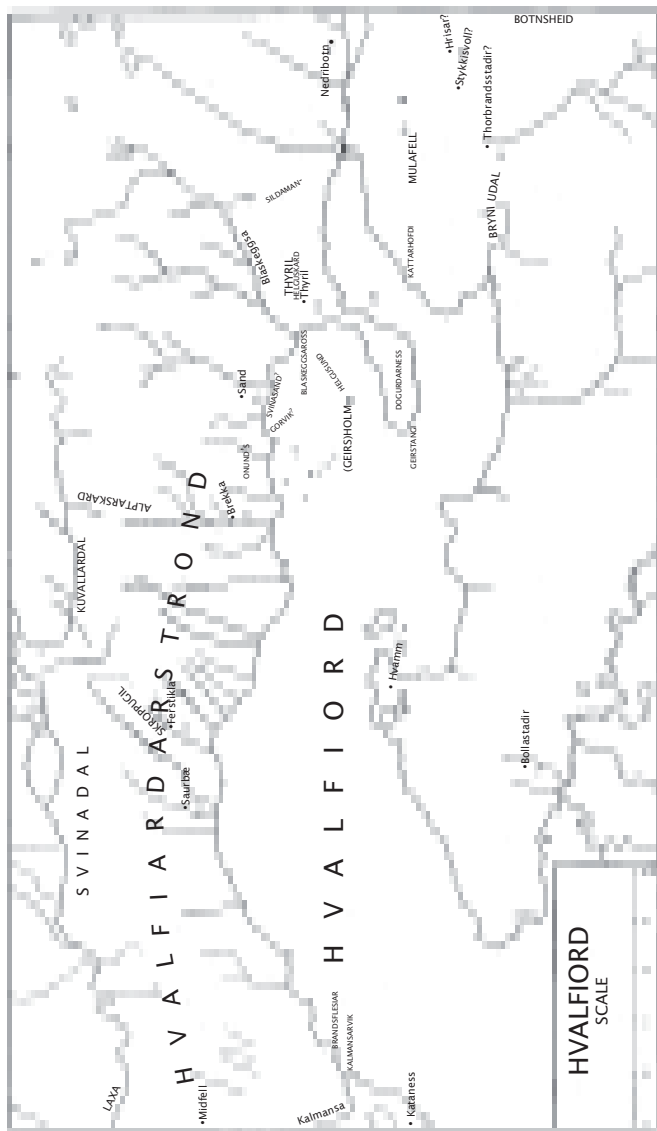
While the gradual decrease in individual freedom associated with the growing power of the oligarchy in Iceland may be a partial explanation of the popularity of stories of outlaws asserting their individuality against a repressive society, it is interesting that in Europe too outlaw stories became popular in the late Middle Ages, where there is better documentation for a decrease in personal freedom as a result of greater control by centralised government and the increased power of the nobility. It may be doubted whether actual oppression by ruling classes whether native or foreign is the complete explanation for the development of outlaw legends like those of Robin Hood and Hereward the Wake, but it is certain that such legends become increasingly popular from the end of the Middle Ages and are hard to find earlier.

There are differences between the roles of the three most famous Icelandic outlaws. While Grettir and Gísli are presented as on the whole lone rebels (indeed Gísli is hardly a rebel at all), living isolated lives in the wastelands of central Iceland with only sporadic help and support from friends and

relatives, Hord becomes the chief of a band of outlaws who set up what is virtually an alternative society outside the law of the land and separate from its institutions and settlements (though, it is to be noted, having its own rules and regulations). In this respect the story is much more like that of Robin Hood and his merry men who set up an alternative society in the greenwood which lasts as a literary ideal into the sixteenth century (As You Like It) and beyond, though Hord's enemy is neither a sheriff nor a king. In Iceland as in England this romantic ideal lasted beyond the Middle Ages, and the oral folk-tales collected in the nineteenth century include many tales of *útilegumenn* ("men who live out") as they came to be called, under the changed social and political conditions in Iceland now most often fugitives from justice (or injustice) rather than condemned to outlawry, who were said to inhabit remote inland valleys among the glaciers and to have supernatural powers, thus tending to merge with ideas of trolls and fairies who also have their own communities in the remote wildernesses. They are not always represented as being hostile to ordinary people, and clearly there was a tendency to idealize the life of such outlaws as a life of freedom and carefree simplicity, though they were often thought of as being heathen. But the "other world" they inhabit is often represented as being a pleasanter, better world than the ordinary world of men with its frustrations and limitations.

The standard edition of the saga is that of S. Hast (København, 1960; Editiones Arnemagnæanæ A6), but there is a more readable text in *Íslendinga sögur XII*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1947). An attempt to consider the outlaw sagas in a broad context is made by J. de Lange, *The Relation and Development of English and Icelandic Outlaw-traditions* (Haarlem, 1935). Icelandic outlawry is discussed by G. Turville-Petre in "Outlawry," *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni* (Reykjavík, 1977), pp. 769-78.

THE SAGA OF HORD



1

It was in the days of Harald Finehair that Iceland was largely settled, because people could not put up with his oppression and tyranny, particularly those who were of great descent and proud mind and had good means, and they preferred to abandon their possessions than suffer aggression and injustice, whether from the king or from anyone else. One of these was Biorn Gullberi (gold-bearer). He went from Orkadale to Iceland and settled the southerly Reykiardal from Grimsa to Flokdalsa and lived at Gullberastadir. Svarthofdi, Geirmund, Thiostolf were his sons; and they do not come into this story.

The eldest of Biorn's sons was called Grimkel. He was both big and strong. Biorn Gullberi became an important man and of great property. Biorn's son Grimkel asked for the hand of Rannveig, daughter of Thorbiorn of Arnarholt—Thorbiorn was brother of Lyting, father of Geitir of Krossavik—and married her, and they were together no longer than three winters, and she died of sickness. A daughter survived who was called Thurid. She was brought up with a man who was called Sigurd Muli (snout). He lived under Fell. She was a handsome woman and skilled with her hands and of a somewhat harsh disposition. Nevertheless she was popular.

2

Grimkel lived to begin with south at Fioll, not far from Olfusvatn. It is now called Grimkelsstadir, and it is now a sheep-shed. Grimkel had an extensive *godord*. He was a wealthy man and a very great leader and said not to be in all respects a just man. He moved his farm after his wife's death to Olfusvatn, for he thought the qualities of the land were better there. Thereafter he dwelt there always, as long as he lived. He was known as Grimkel *Godi*.

There was a man called Hogni and he lived in Hagavik, a little way from Olfusvatn. His wife was called Thorbiorg. They had a daughter

who was called Gudrid. She was a handsome woman and popular. Hogni was of an insignificant family and was nevertheless an accomplished person, but his wife Thorbiorg was of considerably greater family, and yet they got on well together. Hogni had great property.

There was a man called Valbrand who lived at Breidabolstad in the northerly Reykiardal. He was son of Valthiof the Old. Valbrand's son was called Torfi. Father and son owned a *godord*. Torfi was a clever man and widely known. A man grew up there with the father and son who was called Sigurd and he was son of Gunnhild. He was related to Torfi. He was known as Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother. He was a most promising man and able in most accomplishments. Valbrand had a second child. It was a daughter who was called Signy. She was married to Thorgeir, son of Finn of Midfell the Wealthy, son of Halldor, son of Hogni. He was dead when this story took place. Their son was called Grim, a promising man, and he grew up with his mother. Signy lived at Signyiarstadir a little way from Breidabolstad. She was a very outstanding person, ready of tongue and of proud mind and harsh-spirited in everything. A man grew up with her there who was called Grim. He was known as Grim the Small. He was Signy's foster-son and an important man, swift in his movements and intelligent about most things.

Koll son of Kiallak was living then at Lund in the southerly Reykiardal. He was a great leader.

3

There was a man called Thorvald who lived at Vatnshorn in Skorradal, a big man and strong. His wife was called Thorgrima and she was known as Smith-woman, very skilled in magic. Their son was called Indridi, a big man and promising. Thorgrima lived the longer of the pair, and when she had become a widow, she lived at Hvamm in Skorradal. She became a wealthy woman and one of importance.

It is said that one summer as on other occasions, Grimkel *Godi* rode to the *assembly*, and one day he went from his *booth* with a great troop of men to Valbrand's *booth* and went straight into the *booth*. Valbrand welcomed him, for Grimkel was already known to him. They sat down and began to talk together. Grimkel said:

‘I have been particularly told, Valbrand, that you have a daughter who is called Signy, and that she is a very outstanding person. I wish to ask for her hand, if you are willing to marry her to me.’

Valbrand replied, ‘It is known to us that you are of good family and have much wealth and are yourself a very fine fellow. I would like to give a favourable response to this.’

Their talk ended with Valbrand betrothing his daughter Signy to Grimkel *Godi*, and the wedding was to be in *Double-month* south at Olfusvatn.

Torfi son of Valbrand was not at the *assembly*, and when Valbrand came home from the *assembly*, he told his son Torfi the news. Torfi replied:

‘Very little do you value my opinions, when I am not asked about such a matter, and moreover I do not consider this match that you have arranged for your daughter as advantageous as it seems to you to be. Signy will not get much out of it when the man is both old and harsh.’

Torfi then uttered a verse:

Old demander of mail-coat-strap wound-storm [warrior, Valbrand]
 —thane [Torfi] has learned this—
 has given brooch-prop [woman] to Grimkel.
 The simple one has deprived jewel-Niorun
 of wealth, pleasure and happiness; I guess
 the old fellow will provide her with little of that.

Signy now learned of her proposed marriage and made little response. And when the brother and sister, Torfi and Signy, meet, he expresses his disapproval of the match.

‘There is great love,’ he says, ‘between us; I am not pleased that you should move away from the district with your wealth.’

She replies, ‘I have thought of a good plan to deal with this, brother. Do not change this arrangement, but I will make over to you all my wealth on these terms, that you are to pay my *dowry*, as much as my father has agreed to, and that will certainly amount to no less than twenty *hundreds*. I will give you this back in token of our friendship, excluding my two treasures, the ones I place greatest store by. One is my fine necklace, and the other is my horse Svartfaxi (black-mane).’

Torfi expressed his satisfaction with this and spoke kindly to her.

4

Now people got ready to go to the wedding. Koll from Lund was invited to the wedding as one of the most honoured. Father and son asked him to lead the guests, for Valbrand was so old that he did not feel like going, and Torfi did not wish to go. Koll set out on the journey with the bride, and they were thirty people in all. They lodged at Thverfell in the southerly Reykiardal.

Grim the Small, Signy's foster-son, was to look after the horses at the lodging, and in the morning, when he looked for them, he could not find Signy's horse Svartfaxi. Grim then went to search north over the ridge to Flokadál. He followed a track in the dew. He found the horse dead in a landslide there in the valley. He took off the hobble that it had had on it during the night, and then went back and told Signy that that fine horse of hers was dead and how it had come about. She replies:

'That is a bad omen and bodes no good. I shall turn back and go no further.'

Koll said that was impossible and it would not do to alter her plans of this kind for this reason, and it had to be as Koll wished; and they all travel on together and they come to Olfusvatn and Grimkel had there a large number of guests from his side to meet them. There was a most magnificent feast there. It all went forward satisfactorily and splendidly.

After the feast had finished Koll went away, and the other guests, but Signy stayed there and her nurse who was called Thordis, and Grim the Small. Grimkel had given Koll good gifts and had spoken friendly words to him, but the father and son were considered to have treated the business with clear contempt, when they did not attend the wedding. He also heard about Torfi's verse and could do nothing about it. There was now no warmth between them. Grimkel was unbending in mood, while Signy was quiet, and there was little warmth between them, for they could not have any friends in common, except for Grim the Small. He managed to go on so that they were both happy. So the first year passed.

5

Grim the Small came to talk with Signy in the spring, he said he wanted to leave.

‘I find it hard to go between you,’ he says, ‘and it is best to part while both still feel well-disposed.’

Signy said, ‘Discuss it first with Grimkel and take his advice, for then you will be better off, and I am very keen that you should be well off, and I think he is well disposed towards you.’

Now Grim does this, he speaks to the farmer, says he wants to leave if he will agree to it. Grimkel replies:

‘My advice is that you should stay put. You shall also be better off than before, because you depend greatly on Signy, and we depend on you very much to compensate for our tempers.’

And Grim did this, he stayed put that year and they were both pleased with him. But the following spring Grim spoke to the farmer, that he did indeed want to leave, but Grimkel was rather against it.

‘Then ask for the hand of Gudrid, Hogni’s daughter, on my behalf,’ says Grim, ‘if you want me to stay with you.’

Grimkel replies, ‘You are putting a high price on yourself now, for there is a great difference of rank here; you are of small means, while Hogni is very rich.’

Grim said, ‘Nevertheless you can arrange this.’

Grimkel replies, ‘I can try.’

He now goes to Hagavik and he is well received there. He now asks for the hand of Gudrid on Grim’s behalf.

‘There is this to be said of the man, that he is an intelligent person and well endowed with skills. He will also be very helpful on the farm and be able to achieve a great deal that will be of benefit to it, while you are getting on in years, and such a connection seems to me to be very advantageous for you.’

Hogni replies, ‘You have often tried to bring about things of greater honour to me than anything of this kind; but mother and daughter shall have the greatest say in this.’

Grimkel said they would not need to lay out a great deal of money.

‘And nothing is of greater importance than that you should yourself persuade your daughter for me; but I am confident about Grim, that he will turn out well.’

There is no need to make a long tale about it; the outcome of their

talk was that Grim got Gudrid. Their wedding was at Olfusvatn and this went off satisfactorily. They got on well together. They were there for the winter, and they were happy with each other.

But in the spring Grim and his wife wanted to leave. He told Signy, but she said he must tell Grimkel and said everything would turn out for the best if he let Grimkel decide. Now he raised it with the farmer that he wanted to leave. Grimkel replies:

‘I think it now right to do what is best for you and let you have your way, because it is likely that you will turn out well.’

Grim then bought land south from Kluptir which he called Grimsstadir and lived there from then on. Grimkel provided all the stock, and Hogni paid for the land. Grim quickly piled up wealth; there were two heads on everything that he had.¹ He was soon reckoned among the best farmers.

6

It is said that Signy daughter of Valbrand dreamed a dream. She seemed to see a great tree in her and Grimkel’s bed, very beautiful and with such large roots that the roots of the tree reached all the buildings at home there on the farm, but the blossom on it did not seem to her to be as great as she wished. She told the dream to her nurse Thordis, and she interpreted it that she and Grimkel would have a child and it would be great and honourable. She said she thought it was a boy.

‘And many will be very impressed by him because of his achievements, but I wouldn’t be surprised if his circumstances did not flourish with the greatest blossoming by the end, since that great tree did not seem to you to have as great blossom as you wished, and it is not certain that he will enjoy much affection from most of his kinsmen.’

7

Soon after Signy gave birth to a baby boy. He was called Hord. He was at an early age of great size and handsome in appearance, but not all that precocious in this respect, that he could not walk on his own when

¹ I.e. all his animals seemed to double in number.

² The story of how gold came to be called ‘giants’ words’ is told in Snorri

he was three years old. People thought this strange and not a sign of early development, he being an outstanding person in everything else.

And on the day when a temple festival was being held at Olfusvatn, Grimkel being a great man for heathen sacrifices, Signy was sitting on her seat in the middle of the living-room floor. She was then adorning herself, and her fine necklace was lying on her knees. The boy Hord was standing by the foot of the *platform* and walked now for the first time from the *platform* to his mother and stumbled onto her knees. The necklace was flung down onto the floor and broke apart in three pieces. Signy was very angry and said:

‘Evil were your first steps, and many other evil ones will follow this one, but your last ones will be worst.’

She uttered a verse:

Broke asunder for lady
good Sirmir’s voice² necklace.
I believe that none of mankind will repair
this again for wealth-slope [lady, Signy].
The first walk of the young gold-desirer [man, Hord]
was not good. Each hereafter will be worse.
Yet meanest will be the last.

Grimkel came into the living-room at that moment and heard what she said. He grabbed up the boy in silence and was very angry at these words and uttered a verse:

Wealth-seeker [man, Hord] has got himself a no good mother.
He was first of the woman’s children, having just begun to walk,
to hear temper-words from which sea-fire demander [man,
Hord]
will suffer. “People’s judgement lives longer than any man.”

Grimkel had become so angry that he did not want the boy to stay at home there. He went and saw Grim and Gudrid and asked them to take Hord in and bring him up there. They said they would be very pleased to do so and took him in joyfully and thought it to be a blessing. The

Sturluson’s *Edda*, p. 61.

³This conflicts with other chronological indications in the saga and probably ought to read ‘the year before Hord was born’.

previous year³ Grim and Gudrid had had a son whom they named Geir. He was early large and good-looking and well endowed with skills, only that he fell short of Hord in everything. They now grew up both together, and there soon came to be great affection between them.

Signy was now even less content after this than before, and there was now considerably less warmth between her and Grimkel than previously. Again she dreamed a dream, that she saw a great tree as before, greatest in its roots, with many branches and there came a great deal of blossom on it. This dream was again interpreted by her nurse as about a child being begotten between them, and it would be a daughter and much progeny would live after her, as the tree had seemed to her to have many branches.

‘And your thinking it had much blossom must mean the change of religion which will come about, and her descendants will hold that faith which is preached then, and it will be a better one.’

8

After the *assembly* in the summer Signy asked Grimkel to let her go north to her relations. He said he would let her do that, but said that she should not stay longer than a fortnight. Two servants went with her, and her nurse Thordis. They rode north into Reykiardal. Torfi received them very warmly and invited her to stay for the winter, and said that otherwise he would feel that he had lost her affection. She said she had been permitted to be away a fortnight and no longer. Torfi said that was not important. She then gave in to his request and urging. They went then on some visits during the winter and when they were on a visit down in Bæ, Signy’s nurse died suddenly and is buried at Thordisarholt. This is a little way from Bæ. Signy was greatly affected by this. Then they went back to Breidabolstad.

And soon afterwards Signy was taken ill with childbirth labour, and her illness was looking very serious. Torfi spoke to her, said he had never felt happy about her marriage, declared that he had always been very much against Grimkel. She said it was not unlikely that it

⁴ Many sagas record that in heathen times there was a ceremony used similar to Christian baptism.

would have grave consequences. She gave birth to a girl-child, large and healthy. Torfi would not have the child sprinkled with water⁴ until Signy's fate was clear. She died straight away without getting up from childbirth. Then Torfi got so angry that he wanted to have the child exposed to die. He told his foster-brother Sigurd to pick up the child and take it to Reykiardalsa and destroy it there. Sigurd said that was a very bad thing to do, but yet did not care to disobey Torfi in this. Sigurd now picked up the child and went on his way. He thought the child looked pretty and so did not feel like throwing it out into the river. He set off now up to Signyiarstadir and put the child down in the farmyard gateway and felt sure it would soon be found. Farmer Grim was standing out under the gable of the house, Signy's son. He saw this, went up and picked up the child and took it home with him and made his wife Helga pretend to be ill and say that she had given birth to this girl. He had her sprinkled with water and named her Thorbiorg.

Grim set out for Breidabolstad. He saw a large number of people coming out of the farm. Signy's body was being taken to burial. Torfi told Grim of his mother's death.

'And I will hand everything over to you, and yet we ought to pay this wealth to Grimkel, but we want to do the best we can by you.'

Grim said he spoke well. Then they buried Signy and left afterwards.

Now Sigurd and Grim meet. Sigurd says he knows that Torfi will be angry with him when he knows that he has allowed the child to live.

'I know how to deal with this,' says Grim, 'I shall get you abroad and thus reward you for the chance that has befallen you.'

And he did so. He sent Sigurd south to Eyrar and gave him two horses, and there were packs on one of them. From there he went abroad.

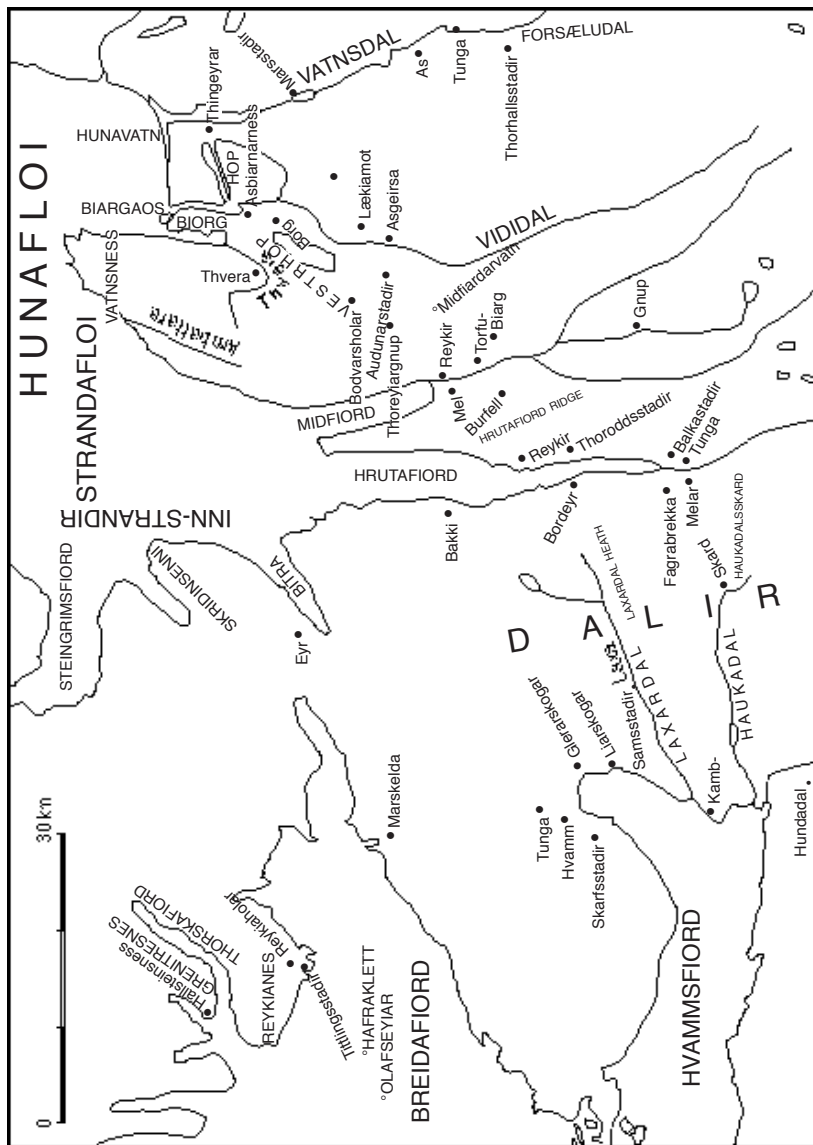
The next day Torfi came to Signyiarstadir and asked why Helga was in bed, for he did not have any previous knowledge of her sickness. He now recognised the child that lay by her and said:

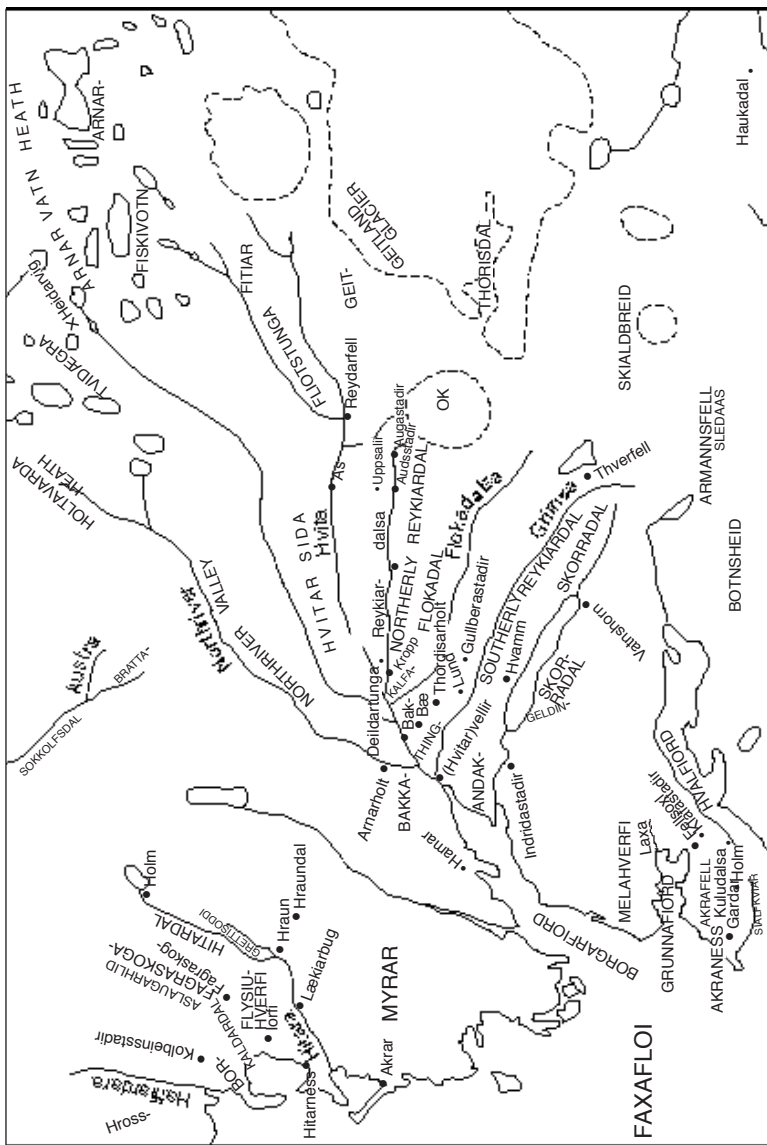
'This is a very bold thing to do, that you dare to nurture a child that I had had exposed to die.'

Helga replied, 'This child was very closely related to Grim, and he is justified in saving it.'

Then Torfi asked where Grim was. She said he had gone to see the farm-workers. Torfi went there and saw Grim. Torfi went on in the

⁴ Breaker of rings (i.e. of swords) means warrior; or spender of rings, generous man, i.e. Illugi.





CENTRAL WEST ICELAND

most awful manner and said Grim was acting towards him with extraordinary boldness and asked what he knew of Sigurd, said he deserved to be punished for having broken his orders, declared that Grimkel had deserved to be treated in this insulting way by him. Grim said he had sent Sigurd to the Western Fiords to a ship. Torfi was angry at this. He took the girl and did not feel like having her killed, for it was said to be murder to kill children once they had been sprinkled with water. He took the girl home and gave it for fostering to a certain slave-woman, and provided nothing for its clothing and would not remit any of the slave-woman's labour.

9

There was a man called Sigmund. He went around begging from house to house and his wife and son who was called Helgi. Usually they stayed in guests' quarters wherever they arrived, unless Sigmund was let inside to provide entertainment. That same autumn Sigmund and his family came to Breidabolstad. Torfi welcomed them and said to them:

'You are not to stay in the guests' quarters, for I like the look of you, Sigmund, and you seem to promise well.'

He replies, 'You would not be mistaken if this was your opinion.'

Torfi said he wanted to do him an honour, 'for I shall accept the fostering of a child from you.'

Sigmund replies, 'There is a difference of rank between us, if I foster a child for you, for it is said that he is a lesser man who fosters a child for another.'

Torfi said, 'You shall take the child to Olfusvatn.'

Sigmund agrees to this. He now picks Thorbiorg up and ties her on his back and then goes off. Torfi was intending all this as an insult to Grimkel, and thought this man the right person to take the girl into beggary; he also did not want to risk a better person for it than Sigmund, for he thought there was nothing that Grimkel might not do if someone had brought the child to his house whom he would have thought worth taking vengeance on.

Sigmund now found himself well off for lodging-places, for everyone felt themselves obliged to treat the girl well and those who travelled with her, wherever she went, and so Sigmund decided to take the longest way round. He went out round Andakil and Melahverfi and all along

the coastal route round the Nesses and round past Grindavik and Olfus.

One day in the evening Sigmund and his family arrived at Olfusvatn. Sigmund was wet and very frozen. He sat out near the door, but Grimkel sat in his place and had a sword across his knees. He asked what sort had come. Sigmund replies:

‘It is Sigmund, fosterer of your child, who has come, my dear sir, and your daughter Thorbiorg. She is the very best of children.’

Grimkel said, ‘Listen to what this beggar says. You, to be fosterer of my child, the most miserable of vagrants? And Torfi’s enmity towards me is not all of a piece. First he caused the mother’s death, and now he has driven the child into beggary.’

Grimkel then uttered a verse:

Torfi did not hold back from killing
thread and embroidery prop [woman, Signy].
He acts insultingly indeed towards sword-harmer [warrior,
Grimkel]
in all this. Sword-snatcher sent this silver bowl Gna [woman,
Thorbiorg]
into beggary wrongfully. It is time to pay back this suffering.

Grimkel knew all about what Torfi was planning and so did not want the girl to be left there. Grimkel told Sigmund to be off as quickly as he could if he did not want to be beaten up and then suffer worse. They now had to go straight off with the child. They went over Grimsness and across Laugardal and began to neglect the child, for they felt uncertain whether they would ever get rid of it. They now found it hard to get lodging. Sigmund felt he had just snapped up a fly when he took the girl from Torfi.

They arrived at Grimsstadir one day for breakfast. They tell Grim that they had with them a young child. Grim says he wants to see this young child that people are now talking so much about.

Sigmund said it was a lot of trouble to unwrap the child, and said that even then it would not be easy to quieten her down again. Grim said no one would bother about that. The child was now unwrapped and shown to Grim. He then said:

‘This is truly Signy’s child; it has her eyes and she would expect this of me, that I would not let her child go from house to house if I could do anything about it. But Torfi wants to bring great shame upon all this child’s relations and even on himself. I shall now, Sigmund,

take off you this child and dependant.'

He was very pleased at this. They stayed there that day and then went down over Botnsheid. There were many who said that Grim would be putting himself at risk from Grimkel *Godi* in this affair with his temerity.

10

About the time of the *moving-days* Grimkel *Godi* set out to Olfus past Hialli and out round Arnarbæli and up along Floi to Oddgeirsholar, from there into Grimsness, and stayed in Laugardal and so back home. He summoned all the farmers to a meeting with him at Midfell, those he had just met, after an interval of two nights, for Grimkel had the *godord* over all these areas. To Midfell came sixty of his *assembly-men*. Grimkel told them of his need to take up a suit against Torfi and declared his intention of going to serve a summons on Torfi. They all thought this was justified. They rode past Giabakki, so to Kluptir and round Ok, so the lower route down by Augastadir and so to Breidabolstad. Torfi was not at home and had gone up into Hvítarsíða. Grimkel summonsed Torfi for plotting the death of Thorbiorg and for Signy's *dowry*. He referred the cases to the Althing and afterwards rode home, and there was now hardly anything that was more talked about than the case of Grimkel and Torfi.

And when Grim the Small heard about this, he set off out to Reykiarvík to see Thorkel Mani (moon) the *lawspeaker*. They came to discuss the case of Grimkel and Torfi. Grim asks what he thinks about how this will be concluded between them. He says he thinks it does not look good, since it was very contentious people that were involved. Grim said:

'I would very much like you to do what you can to bring about a settlement between them, for you are both clever and well-disposed.'

Thorkel replies, 'Your request becomes you well and shows your good nature, and I will do what I can to reconcile them.'

Grim said, 'I will give you money to bring about a settlement between them.'

He poured into his lap a *hundred* of silver and thanked him for his promise to try to reconcile them. Thorkel said he was acting nobly.

‘But understand this, that I am giving you prospect of a settlement, but I do not promise it.’

Grim replies, ‘Your offering a prospect is more valuable than when most other men promise absolutely.’

Grim left after that.

Time passed until the *assembly*. Both sides came with great followings. Grim was at the *assembly*. He went to see Thorkel Mani and asked him to seek a settlement. He said he would gain great honour from this if he was able to reconcile the leaders. Thorkel now did this. He went first to see Grimkel *Godi* and raised the question of the case with him. Grimkel replies:

‘I can tell you in brief that in relation to all our dealings as well as Torfi’s enmity towards me I shall accept no one’s adjudication but my own, except only if it is stipulated as a basis that he pay no less than twelve *hundred* triple units of cloth.’

Thorkel then offered to arbitrate between them.

‘But you can see what is at stake here, for there will be open hostility if you do not reach a settlement, and we shall support the side that acts more in accordance with our words and that is willing to respect our decision, and that is more important than what is causing the difference between you.’

Then Grimkel said, ‘I agree that Thorkel shall adjudicate in the case. He is known for consistently correct judgements.’

Now Torfi sees that this alone is acceptable. He says now that he too agrees to this.

Thorkel said, ‘This is my decision and judgement, that Torfi shall pay Grimkel six *hundred* triple units of cloth and have it on loan for six winters and then pay twelve *hundred*.’

He said that he had now adjudicated as seemed to him most just. Grimkel replies:

‘I shall accept this arbitration because I have myself proposed it, but it seems to me the matter has been greatly diminished. Hord, my son, shall have this money, and have it as his inheritance from his mother.’

Torfi said he would not pay Hord this money unless he did not turn out a worse man than his father. Grimkel said that to be sure it was impossible to know this, how it would turn out, but said that Hord would be no better off if the saying proved true that “men take most after their maternal uncles”.

‘For you are a shape-changer, and I think it would be worse for him to inherit that from you than not.’

Then there was a great outcry. Neither side was pleased with the judgement, yet it was abided by more or less.

This year passed and then another. Then Grimkel proposed a wife for himself, Sigrid daughter of Thorbiorn of Skalmarness. This suit was given a good response, for the man was considered noble and of great family, even though he was rather past his prime. She was married to him. Their wedding was at Olfusvatn, at Grimkel’s home. It went forward satisfactorily and splendidly. They got on very well together. Grimkel now kept to himself.

11

There was a man called Illugi who lived at Holm on Akraness. He was son of Hrolf the Geitlander, son of Ulf, son of Grim the Halogalander. Illugi’s brother was Solvi, father of Thord, father of Magnus, priest at Reykiaholt. Illugi’s sister was Halldora (who was married to Gizur the White), mother of Vilborg, mother of Iorun, mother of Gudrun, mother of Einar, father of Bishop Magnus. Illugi was a big man and strong and had great wealth. He went to Olfusvatn on a wooing journey and asked for the hand of Thurid, Grimkel’s daughter by his first marriage. Grimkel responded well, for Illugi was known to him. This engagement took place there. Hord was not present when this match was arranged. The wedding was to be in *Double-month* at home at Olfusvatn.

And when the time arranged for this came, Illugi set out from home with thirty people for his wedding. With him was Thorstein Oxnaþrodd (oxen-goad) of Saurbæ, a great farmer, and Thormod of Brekka from Hvalfiarðarströnd. They went over the fiord to Kialarness and to the north of Mosfell and so up by Vilborgarkelda, on to Iorukleif and so to Hagavik and so in to Olfusvatn and they arrived early in the day. Illugi said:

‘Where is Hord, as I do not see him, or has he not been invited?’

Grimkel said he was invited as a matter of course.

‘But I have not named him in particular for this.’

Illugi replies, ‘That is not proper, however.’

He rides to Grimsstadir. The doors there were closed. They knocked on the doors. Geir went to the door and asked who had come. Illugi said

who he was and asked for Hord. Geir said he was inside. Illugi said:
'Ask him to come out, for I wish to see him.'

Geir went in and came out, said Hord was in bed and was ill. Illugi went in, as Hord would not come out. Illugi said:

'Of what nature is your sickness, Hord?'

He said it was nothing much. Illugi said:

'I would very much like you to come to my wedding with me and make friends with me.'

Hord said he might have said this before if he thought it was very important.

'I am going nowhere, for you have not involved me much in this business.'

Illugi gets nothing from Hord but strong words. He rides away without achieving anything further.

A little later Geir said to Hord:

'It is more seemly that we go to the wedding. I shall fetch us some horses.'

Hord said he did not much care to. Geir said:

'Do it for the sake of my asking, and your honour.'

Hord now did so. They then rode after them, and when they met, Illugi was very glad and disregarded Hord's strong words. They now rode to the wedding and they were welcomed. Hord sat on one side of Illugi. The wedding went forward satisfactorily and splendidly.

They all rode from the wedding together, right to Vilborgarkelda. There the paths divided. Then said Illugi:

'Now, Hord we shall part here, and I would like us to be good friends, and here is a shield that I would like to give you.'

Hord replies, 'My foster-father Grim has got plenty of bits of wood,' and uttered a verse:

A shield gave me the generous weapon-reddener [warrior,
Illugi],

and not a good one. He will need this thane [shield]
in Hild's rain [battle].

Let him keep his treasure himself, this sharp one,
who desires my land-thong-slope Aud [woman, Hord's half-
sister],

breaker of oaths and rings.⁵

Then Illugi said, 'Accept this ring from me, then, as a token of friendship, if you do not want the shield.'

Hord took the ring. It was a fine treasure.

'I do not know,' says Hord, 'why I have the feeling that you will not be a good brother-in-law to me, but yet we shall find out later on.'

Then they parted, and there were few expressions of goodwill, but yet they separated on good terms for the time being. But when Hord got home, he spoke to Thorbiorg:

'I would like to give you this ring, which Illugi gave to me, because I love you best of everyone. But you remember this gift when I am dead, for I know that you will live longer than I.'

Thorbiorg replies and uttered this:

If you are, to my certain knowledge,
slain with weapons, or felled in battle,
to that man shall my bitter designs
for sure cause death.

Hord was now twelve years old when the saga had reached this point. He was then equal in strength to the strongest men in the area. So time passed until Geir was sixteen years old and Hord fifteen. He was then a full head higher than most other men. His eyes could never be deceived by false appearances, for he saw everything as it was. His hair was the finest of anyone's and he was of mighty strength, the best of swimmers and in every respect well endowed with skills. He was white of skin and light of hair. He was broad-faced and full-faced, with a bend in his nose, blue-eyed and keen-eyed and rather wide-eyed, broad-shouldered, thin-waisted, broad under arm, with slender extremities and in every way well grown. Geir was rather less strong, and yet there were almost none his equals. He was one of the greatest men of skills though he did not come up to Hord.

12

⁶ I.e. so as to be close to the ship and ready to load; Fell is near the south coast of Iceland, on the Olfus river.

That same summer a ship came from the sea to Eyrar. It was owned by a man called Bryniolf, son of Thorbiorn, son of Griotgard, a man from Oslofiord. There were thirty men on the ship. They arrived before the *assembly*. Bryniolf rode to the *assembly* and stayed in Grimkel Godi's *booth*. He often said that he had a desire to see Hord.

'For much has been told me,' he says, 'of his good looks and abilities.'

And now it happened that Hord came to the *assembly*, he and Geir too, for they were never apart. There was amazing affection between the foster-brothers, for neither word nor deed ever came between them. They and Bryniolf now met. They got on well together. Bryniolf said that there had been no exaggeration about Hord as to his size and good looks.

'You seem to me, Hord,' says Bryniolf, 'a very good person to go abroad and be among noblemen. I would like to be your friend and give you half share in my ship with me.'

Hord said, 'You are taking on a great deal with an unknown person, but yet I will give a good response to your proposal, and yet I shall not promise to go away until I know what I shall have to take with me, for I have not got much so far.'

Geir said, 'This is a good suggestion, foster-brother, and it seems to me a promising plan. I shall be much in favour of it.'

Hord said, 'I am not keen to ask Grimkel to provide for me.'

Geir told him not to be like that, 'for he is very fond of you. Now I would like you to be straightforward in these plans, and also that you should accept gratefully what Bryniolf is offering you.'

They now travel home from the *assembly*, and when Hord got home, he told his sister Thorbiorg. She said Bryniolf must be a good fellow. Geir then again urged the journey abroad.

'I would like,' he said, 'you to take Helgi son of Sigmund as your servant.'

Thorbiorg answers, 'I would be rather against that, because all Sigmund's people seem to me prone to disaster. The grief will never leave my breast which I got from when they took me begging from house to house.'

Hord answers, 'I am not very keen on Helgi, for they have been the cause of the greatest disgrace to us,' and he uttered a verse:

This grief in Thorbiorg's Hlokk's storm [mind]

that I tell of is the greatest in many men's memory
 when destroyer [warrior, Torfi] of sleeve-plain brands [swords],
 her mother's brother, asked Sigmund to bring her up in beggary.

Helgi was very persistent in asking, and Geir supported his suit very much. The conclusion was, by the time they had finished, that Helgi should go with them, and Hord said that they would find out rather more clearly how mistaken it was.

After this Hord asked Grimkel for capital and requested sixty *hundreds*, and of this twenty *hundreds* was to be brown-striped. Grimkel said:

'Your arrogance and greed is clearly apparent in this.'

He went away in silence. Grimkel's wife Sigrid said this was equivalent to consent.

'For this will be more or less what he had intended for trading in.'

Grimkel handed over the capital, and they transported all the wares under Fell to Sigurd Muli,⁶ went abroad after that with Bryniolf straight away that summer and reached Bergen with ship unscathed.

13

King Harald Greycloak was then ruling over Norway. They straight away looked for private lodgings for themselves and found them with Bryniolf's help, for he did the best he could for them in everything.

There was one day when Bryniolf had ridden up into the country, that Geir was walking out on his own. He had a furry homespun cloak on. Then Geir sees where a troop of men was going and one of them was in a *blue* cape. They soon meet. They ask him his name. Geir tells them what it is and asks who they are. Their leader says his name is Arnthor, and that he is the treasurer of Gunnhild Mother of Kings. They asked to buy Geir's cloak, but he was not willing to sell. Then one of them snatched the cloak from him. Geir was left standing with his hand on his sword. They laughed then a great deal and mocked him, saying that the landsman⁷ had not held on to his cloak very hard. Both these things then made him angry, their mockery and losing the cloak. He

⁷ I.e. Icelandic.

⁸ Probably one of the supports for the edge of the side-*platforms* of the hall.

then grasped hold of the cloak, and they jerk at it for a while. Arnthor then reached for the cloak and tried to wrench it from him. At this Geir drew his sword and struck at Arnthor's arm above the elbow, cutting it off. He then got hold of his cloak and after this went back to his lodging, for he had taken them aback. His scabbard was left behind. They attended to Arnthor, for he was weak from loss of blood. Hord asked, when Geir came back, why there was blood on his sword. Geir said what had happened. Hord answers:

'What you did was quite proper. Now we must waste no time.'

Now Arnthor was overcome from loss of blood and he collapsed in the arms of those who were with him, and died a little later from loss of blood. Hord now sent for the Icelanders who were there. There was Tind son of Hallkel, brother of Illugi the Black. They quickly responded and came to meet Hord and numbered twenty-four in all. Then a horn was blown in the town and the king was sent for and told that one of the king's men was slain. The king came quickly and ordered Geir to be handed over.

'For he has killed a friend of mine and my mother's treasurer.'

Hord answers, 'It is not right for us to surrender our man to your weapons. We are willing to offer you *self-judgement* for the man as long as Geir keeps life and limb unscathed.'

Just then Bryniolf came back, while they were discussing this, and said:

'Lord, be so good, take payment for the man, and pay regard to your honour and my friendship, for many a man will lose his life before Geir is killed.'

The king replies, 'I shall do that, Bryniolf, at your request, make a settlement with Geir and accept compensation for my part, but not on my mother's part.'

Bryniolf thanked him. He paid over all the money for Geir and furthermore gave the king good gifts, for he had plenty of wealth and was the most decent person.

But when the king had gone away, Bryniolf said:

'I am not confident that I can keep you here because of Gunnhild. I shall send you east into Oslofiord to my father Thorbiorn for safety and protection.'

Hord replies, 'I shall rely on your guidance, for you are a decent

⁹ I.e. without either weapons or other possessions concealed under their clothing.

person.'

They now went quickly east to Oslofiord. Thorbiorn welcomed them because of his son's recommendation. They were well treated there and were considered to be splendid men. Most people did not think Helgi was any compensation for Hord's character. Early in winter Bryniolf came there to the east. They all stayed there together in friendship.

In the spring Thorbiorn discussed with Hord and his friend that he wanted to send them east to Gautland 'to see my friend Earl Harald with unequivocal tokens, for I know that Gunnhild will come here soon and then I shall not be able to protect you from her.'

Hord said that the father and son should decide. They now prepared their ship.

14

When they were ready the foster-brothers and the father and son parted in great friendship. They now make east for Gautland, go to see Earl Harald. He received them well as soon as he saw his friend Thorbiorn's tokens. The earl had a son who was called Hroar, and he was out raiding, and a daughter who was called Helga, the most handsome of women. Earl Harald made Hord sit next to himself, in his son Hroar's seat. They stayed there the summer.

In the autumn Hroar came back from raiding. He was made welcome. Hord gave up his place to Hroar. So time passed until Yule, and when people had taken their places on the first evening of Yule, Hroar stood up and said:

'Here I step on the stock⁸ and make this vow, that I shall have broken open the *viking* Soti's grave-mound by next Yule.'

The earl said, 'A great vow, and you will not have the power to fulfil it on your own, for Soti was a great troll in his life and has been twice as great a one since he died.'

Hord then stood up and said, 'Will it not be proper to follow your customs? I make this vow to go with you into Soti's mound and not to leave it before you.'

Geir made a vow to accompany Hord, whether he wanted to go there or anywhere else, and never to part from him unless Hord wished it. Helgi also made a vow to accompany Hord and Geir wherever they

¹⁰ Viking swords sometimes had narrow strips of harder metal welded along

went if he could, and to value no one more highly while they both lived. Hord replies:

‘It is not certain that there will be long between us, and take care that you are not the cause of both our deaths, or even of other people’s too.’

‘I would hope to do so,’ says Helgi.

The earl was well disposed to Hord and said he looked chiefly to where Hord was for facilitating his son Hroar’s advancement.

15

And when spring came, Hroar set out in a party of twelve for Soti’s mound. They rode through thick forest, and in one place Hord saw where a small hidden path led off the forest road. He rode this path until he came into a clearing. There he saw a building standing, both large and splendid. A man was standing outside in front of the building in a *blue*-striped hooded cape. He greeted Hord by name. He responded well and asked what he was called.

‘For I do not recognise you, though you behave as if you know me.’

‘My name is Biorn,’ says he, ‘and I recognised you when I saw you, even though I have not seen you before. But I was friend of your kinsmen, and I will let you benefit from this. I know that your party is planning to break into the *viking* Soti’s mound and you will not easily manage this if you are left to your own devices. But if it goes as I suspect, that you do not manage to break into the mound, then come and see me.’

Now they part. Hord rides now to meet Hroar. They get to the mound early in the day and begin to break into it and in the evening reached the timbers. But the following morning the mound was undisturbed as before. So it went the second day. Then Hord rode to see Biorn and told him how far they had got.

‘And it went,’ said Biorn, ‘as I expected, for it was not unknown to me what a troll Soti was. Now here is a sword that I shall give you, and you stick it into the opening in the mound and then see whether the mound closes up again or not.’

Now Hord goes back to the mound. Hroar says then he wants to give up and not struggle with this devil any longer. Others were in favour of this. Hord replies then:

‘It does not do to fail to fulfil one’s vow. We shall have another go.’

The third day they set about breaking into the mound. They again reached the timbers as before. Hord now stuck the sword Biorn's gift into the opening in the mound. They sleep through the night and come to it in the morning and then nothing had changed there. The fourth day they broke up all the long beams and the fifth day they took out the door. Hord then told men to beware of the blast and stench which was blowing out of the mound, and he himself stood behind the door while the stench was at its greatest. Then two men were struck dead by the foul air which blew out, but they had been curious about it and not followed Hord's advice. Then Hord said:

'Who wants to go into the mound? And it seems to me that he who made a vow to overcome Soti is the one who ought to.'

Hroar was silent then. And when Hord saw that no one was prepared to go into the mound, he drove into the ground two rope-pegs.

'Now shall I,' he says, 'go into the mound, if I may keep the three treasures that I choose from the mound.'

Hroar said he would say yes to this for his part, and all agreed to it. Then spoke Hord:

'What I want, Geir, is that you should hold the rope, because I trust you best to do it.'

Then Hord went into the mound, and Geir held the rope. Hord found no treasure in the mound and now says to Geir that he wishes him to come into the mound with him and to take with him fire and wax.

'For both are things of great power,' says he. 'Ask Hroar and Helgi to look after the rope.'

They did so, and Geir went down into the mound. Eventually Hord found a door and they broke it down. Then there was a great earthquake and the lights went out. A great stench blew out. There in the side mound was just a little gleam of light. Then they saw a ship and great treasure in it. Soti sat in the bow and was horrible to look at. Geir stood in the entrance to the mound, but Hord went up and was going to take the treasure. Soti uttered this:

Why were you so keen, Hord, to break into
the earth-dweller's house, even though Hroar asked?
I have never to blood-serpent shaker [sword wielder, Hord]
done harm in my life.

Hord said:

This is why I came to find the fellow
and to take ancient treasure from the ghost:
it is widely known that there cannot be
anywhere in all the world
a worse man wielding weapons.

Then Soti leapt up and ran at Hord. There was a tough encounter in which Hord was greatly outmatched. Soti took hold of him so hard that Hord's flesh was bunched up into ridges. Hord told Geir to kindle the wax candle and see how Soti responded to that. And when the light spread over Soti, his strength diminished and he fell down. Hord then managed to get a gold ring off Soti's arm. It was such a fine treasure that it is said that no gold ring as good has reached Iceland. And when Soti lost the ring, he uttered this:

Hord plundered me of the fine ring,
twice as bad it seems to me to lose it
than the whole of Grani's burden.
It shall be the deadly destruction
of you and all those who possess it.

Hord said:

Though I was certain of this,
that all the pronouncements of the destroyer of good deeds [Soti]
would be fulfilled, yet should not the most ancient coward
longer enjoy sea's fire [gold].

'You shall know this for certain,' says Soti, 'that this ring shall cause the death of you and of all who possess it, unless it is a woman who possesses it.'

Hord told Geir to bring the light up to him and see how friendly he was, and at that Soti plunged down into the ground and would not wait for the light. So they parted. Hord and Geir took all the chests and took them to the rope and all the treasure that they found. Hord took sword and helmet that Soti had possessed, and they were the greatest treasures. They now gave a pull on the rope and realised that the men had gone away from the mound. Hord pulled himself up the rope and got out of the mound. Geir tied the treasure on the rope and Hord pulled it out.

This is to be told about Hroar and Helgi and their companions, that

when the earthquake happened, all the men panicked who were outside, except for Helgi and Hroar, and they had to hold those who were outside still. But when they met again, there was a joyful meeting. They felt they had recovered Geir and Hord from Hel. Hroar asked Hord what had happened, and he uttered a verse:

I did not have to deal with a wealth-maple [man]
either easy or cowardly.
That devil was hard to overcome under the heathen regime.
I know, when he began to see the light
Soti's look was ugly. The cruel keeper of spells
chose to plunge into the earth.

They now left with their booty. They could not find Biorn anywhere, and people assumed that it must have been Odin. Hord was thought to have achieved a famous deed in the mound-breaking. He then spoke with Hroar:

‘Now I consider that I have a right to the three treasures that I choose.’
Hroar said that was true, ‘and it is most fitting for you to have them.’
‘Then shall I,’ says Hord, ‘choose sword, ring and helmet.’

Then they shared out all the other treasure and there was no dispute between them. The earl did not want any of the treasure when they offered it to him. He said it was fitting for Hord to have the largest share of it. They now sat in great honour and stayed there for that year.

16

In the spring Hord said that he wanted to go to Iceland, but the earl and Hroar said they were very keen for him not to leave, and felt that such a man had never been there before. Hord said:

‘I shall propose an alternative to this for you: give me Helga, the earl's daughter, as wife.’

The earl said this would be given a good response. The match was fixed with the agreement of Helga and Hroar. Hord loved his wife Helga greatly. He then had a great deal of wealth. They set out raiding in the summer, all the foster-brothers, Hord, Hroar, Geir and Helgi, and they took four ships; each of them was in charge of one. They were well off for both wealth and fame and did well in their raiding.

Now the story is to be taken up where earlier it was left off, that Sigurd, Torfi's foster-brother, went abroad from Eyrar and reached Norway and was there the winter, and the following summer he got himself on a ship with merchants and went south to Denmark. At that time King Harald Gormsson was ruling there. Sigurd got on good terms with the king for he proved the most valiant man. He quickly increased both in wealth and reputation until he got into a band of *vikings* and proved the greatest hero, and so it went on for some summers right until Sigurd became leader of a *viking* band. He then was himself in charge of five ships.

There was one summer that he was sailing in the east past Balagards-sida, and when he got to the sounds that are called Svinasund, evening had come. They were there during the night. And in the morning the first thing they knew was that *vikings* were rowing towards them there on seven ships. They asked who was in charge of the ships. A man stood up on the poop on one ship, both great and swarthy. He says he is called Biorn Blasida (dark-side) and is son of Ulfhedin, son of Ulfham, son of Ulf, son of Ulfham the Shape-shifter, and asked who was their leader. Sigurd said who he was.

'Would you rather go ashore ungirded,⁹ and give us ships and possessions, or do you want to fight us?'

'We would rather choose to defend our possessions and freedom and would rather fall honourably.'

Then both sides got ready. The most violent battle broke out there. Sigurd went forward bravely, and eventually all Sigurd's ships had been cleared of defenders, and three of Biorn's. Then Sigurd stood up alone and defended himself for a long time and right on until shields were borne down on him. He was then captured, and he had by then alone killed seven men. It had then become the evening of the day. He was then tied fast by the arms and his legs were fettered and six men were got to guard him during the night, and he was to be executed in the morning, but the *vikings* all slept ashore. Sigurd asked who was going to provide the entertainment. The guards said he had no need of

entertainment 'when you are going to die tomorrow.'

'I am not afraid of my death, and I will recite you a poem, if you like.'

They said they would agree to that. He then recited so that they all fell asleep. He rolled himself over to where an axe was lying, managed to cut the rope off his arms and after that managed to kick off his fetters in such a way that it took off both his heel-bones. Then he killed all the guards. Then he dived into the water and swam ashore. Then he walked across the headland, for he did not want to risk playing about with the *vikings*. Then he saw four ships lying and *booths* on shore. He went boldly to the tents and it was then nearly morning. He asks who was in charge there. They said he was called Hord, who was their leader, Hroar and Geir and Helgi, and asked in return who he was. He told them. Then he went up to Hord and asked the latest news. Hord immediately realised who Sigurd was and invited him to join him. Sigurd said he would accept that and told him of his disastrous expedition and asked Hord to even things up with the *vikings* for him. He did not think this was likely to be possible, but yet said he would do as he asked. They set to straight away and cleared their ships of cargo and put rocks in its place, then rowed out past the headland. But when the *vikings* became aware of this, they got ready and thought they were lacking an expected friend in that Sigurd had gone. Now a battle broke out between them. The foster-brothers went forward strongly, and yet Sigurd acquitted himself blamelessly. But towards the end of the day, Hord attempted a boarding of the ship that Biorn Blasida was on, and Geir was right behind him. Each went along one side of the ship and slew absolutely every mother's child forward of the mast. Biorn Blasida then leaps against Hord. Hord was then come aft of the mast and Biorn strikes at Hord with a two-edged sword. Hord does not however get his shield in front of himself. He then jumped backwards over the mast-transom towards the bow, and the sword goes so hard into the transom that it sinks in over both edge-strips.¹⁰ And when Hord sees this, that Biorn is bending forward after striking the blow, he strikes both hard and swiftly across his shoulders cutting the man in two below his ribs with the sword Sotanaut, and thus Biorn Blasida lost his life. And by the time this had been done, Geir had slain every mother's child on the ship, and Hroar had cleared one ship together with Helgi. Sigurd had cleared one ship and the *vikings* the edges to improve their cutting-power.

¹¹ heath-cod = snake, whose solace is summer and whose sickness is winter

fled on the fourth. Hord and his men took there a great deal of booty. They now dressed their men's wounds. Sigurd healed so that it was no hindrance to him. He accompanied Hord all his life afterwards, as long as he lived, and was considered the most valiant man. They now sailed back to Gautland in the autumn and stayed the winter there with good entertainment.

18

Geir now became keen to go to Iceland and asked Hord to give him permission to leave. Hord told him to go as he wished, but still to maintain his friendship with him. Helgi remained behind with Hord, and Sigurd too. Geir went away. It took a long time to get favourable winds and they reached Oslofiord in the east and put up tents on shore. Gunnhild Mother of Kings found this out and sent her men to kill Geir. They came in the night and beat them up under the tents after letting down the tents upon them. Geir alone got away with his weapons and before that was the death of nine men. He travelled until he got to Bryniolf son of Thorbiorn and father and son got him on a ship and gave him some money. It was thought that Gunnhild had forced him to come to Norway by her magic. She was now very annoyed that Geir got away. Now they set out to sea.

Geir came out to Eyrar during the summer. Then Geir's father Grim was dead, and also his grandfather Hogni in Hagavik, but Gudrid and Thorbiorg had kept the farm at Grimsstadir. Geir went there and stayed there the winter, but in the spring he bought land at Nedri-Botn and moved his dwelling there and it was very profitable. Gudrid and Thorbiorg moved there.

19

Indridi son of Thorvald and Thorgrima Smith-woman set up a farm in lower Skorradal where it is now called Indridastadir, but his mother Thorgrima had been living at that time at Hvamm, while his father Thorvald was dead.

(because they hibernate in winter).

¹² Presumably an error for Hord.

¹³ I.e. fight a battle so that wolves may get carrion.

That summer, the first that Geir lived at Botn, a man came out who was called Orm, at Vikarsskeid by Thiorsa. Their ship was wrecked and all the goods were lost. There were fifteen men on the ship and they found no lodging. Orm had been two winters earlier at Hvita and had had lodgings with Indridi, and now Indridi rode from the north in a party of three to see Orm and said he could not accept his being unprovided for. He invited him home with him and all his crew. Orm accepted this and thanked him for the offer.

They all rode from the south past Bakkarholt, over Grafning and Bildsfell and so past Ulfiotsvatn and from there to Olfusvatn and got there at dusk. Grimkel greeted them but did not invite them in. Then Indridi asked for the hand of Grimkel's daughter Thorbiorg.

'You, farmer, know of my origin and also of my circumstances. I would like to know your answer immediately.'

Grimkel said, 'We cannot do that on the spur of the moment, and this cannot be arranged so quickly.'

There were no invitations to them forthcoming from him. Indridi rode to Hagavik in the evening. And when they were ridden off, the lady Sigrid said to Grimkel:

'Your attitude is very strange, not to give your daughter in marriage to Indridi, who seems to us to be the most remarkable man, and send after them, and do not sit in the way of your honour and that of your daughter.'

Grimkel said, 'Let us do as you wish.'

Then men were sent after them to Hagavik. They rode back with the messengers. Grimkel now received them very well. They now discussed the affair and it was decided that Indridi shall marry Thorbiorg and shall get with her forty *hundreds*, and the wedding was to be straight away at Olfusvatn. Indridi himself was to be responsible for how pleased those who were not present might be.

Indridi left his companions behind there and went in a party of three and went to fetch Thorbiorg from her home in Botn. He went over Iorukleif and so to Grimsstadir and from there over Botnsheid and so to Botn. Geir was not at home. Many people said that Geir must have wanted to marry Thorbiorg, but still she did not say anything in opposition to these arrangements nor to going with Indridi. They now travel until they get to Olfusvatn. Preparations have then been made for the wedding.

Grimkel went to Thorgerd Horgabrud's temple and was going to make a pronouncement about Thorbiorg's marriage, but when he came into the temple the gods were all in a great commotion and were getting ready to leave their pedestals. Grimkel said:

'What's the meaning of this and where are you off to, and where will you now direct good fortune?'

Thorgerd said, 'We shall not direct good fortune to Hord, since he has plundered my brother Soti of that fine gold ring of his and done much other disgrace to him. I will though instead direct good fortune towards Thorbiorg, and such a great light shines above her that I am afraid that it will cause a separation between us. But you will have only a short time to live.'

He then went away and was very angry with the gods. He went home for fire and burned up the temple and all the gods and said they should never again tell him grievous tidings. And in the evening when people were sitting at table, Grimkel *Godi* suddenly dropped dead and he was buried south of the farmyard.

All the property came into the keeping of Indridi and Illugi, because Hord was not here in this country. Indridi wanted to have nothing to do with looking after Grimkel's property except for Thorbiorg's *dowry*. Illugi took over the management straight away that autumn, but in the spring the property was divided with Sigrid and she had land at Olfusvatn and was considered a good mistress.

20

A few winters later Hord son of Grimkel came out to Eyrar and his wife Helga and Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother, Helgi Sigmund's son and thirty people. Hord was now thirty years of age. He had then been abroad fifteen years together and become well off for both wealth and honour. Illugi the Red from Holm came to the ship and invited Hord to stay and all his men and went himself to meet them and treated them in the most honourable way. Hord received this well and thought it was a princely offer. Hord went to Illugi's with twenty-five men and they were served beer all winter with the greatest splendour, and Hord was very pleased. Illugi offered him all his own property which he had taken into his care. Hord said he preferred to claim his property from his kinsman Torfi and said he would go to see him.

Then he went in a party of twelve men and came to Breidabolstad

and saw Torfi and claimed his property. Torfi said he was not sure about this claim, 'because I am not obliged to hand over the property to you if you turn out a worse man than your father.'

Hord said that had hardly been put to the test yet, but said he would pursue his claim on the property. Then Hord rode away and told Illugi, when he got back. Illugi told Hord to give way.

'And I feel sure that then things will be better between you, for Torfi is a clever and cruel-minded man.'

Hord said that was the last thing he would do.

'He has always treated us badly, and never well. I will go straight away and get men together.'

Hord rode and gathered men from round Akraness, and Illugi gathered them from below and from the west, round Heynes and Gardar to Fellsoxl, and round Klafastadir, and Hord west of Kuludalsa. They rode up over Midfell and so to Breidabolstad.

Torfi was outside and welcomed them. Illugi tried for a settlement and said it was essential for them to be reconciled, such closely-related people. Torfi said it was more than likely that Hord was in the right.

'He will surely become a man of consequence,' he says. 'He has responded much more quickly. I will grant him terms and make land available to him here. I will hand over to him here with the land thirty cows and thirty farm-hands. I will provide everything for the farm this year. I want to know what sort of man he will turn out to be. He shall be responsible for all the property he takes over, both land and stock.'

Illugi said this was a good offer, and Hord accepted it and they were reconciled on these terms. Hord moved there in the spring and Illugi handed over to him all his property. Hord's farm was profitable. He kept open house for travellers. No one tried anything on with Hord, and he did not interfere with others. He lived there two years.

21

There was a man called Aud. He lived at Audsstadir opposite Uppsalarir or a little lower down, an odd man and wealthy, of an insignificant family and yet somewhat quarrelsome. His son was called Sigurd. He had mares, dark piebald in colour, two of them. He was proud of these

horses. Illugi the Red had given Hord a stud of horses, five in all, when he left Holm, all of them black in colour. Aud's piebald mares began to consort with these and they ran away from their pastures. Hord said he thought it a pity that Aud had too little benefit from his horses. Hord did not have a very good relationship with Torfi. People did not contend much with Hord, and he was always on good terms with people. Torfi was then living at Uppsalar. He had a *godord* and was thought awkward and difficult to deal with. A second summer it went the same way, that Aud's horses went away from him and to Hord's horses. Hord ordered his horses to be taken over the mountain so that Aud's mares should not find them. This was done, yet still Aud's mares found the horses.

It happened during the mowing of the meadows that Sigurd son of Aud came back from the stud and had not been able to catch his horses. Then Hord sent Helgi son of Sigmund to give him help. Helgi went with Sigurd and was in a bad temper and said Aud was the entire cause of these troubles and difficulties. And when he gets to the horses, he sees that the boy had injured the stallion. Then he said:

'You have the makings of a wicked man, and you are not going to ruin many good animals from now on.'

Then he killed the boy. A little while later Hord came up and said:

'You are a wicked man, to have killed one who was only a young person, and moreover without cause. It would be fitting for me to kill you. I do not now feel like doing that, though it would be better for you not to live after such an evil deed. This will be the beginning of your ruin. It has now come about, what I had a feeling would happen, and it is very likely that it will somehow turn out to cause the death of both of us and of many others, along with the other things that will happen and that must be foreordained.'

Hord then threw a cloak over the body and after that first of all went home, and a little later Hord went to Audsstadir, and when Hord went from the western side into the enclosure, then Aud went from the northern side into the enclosure, and when they met, Hord said:

'This has turned out badly, and yet against my will, that your son was killed. I will now give you *self-judgement* and demonstrate that I believe this has happened most unfortunately and pay out all the money directly, and most people will reckon that you can hardly expect a better outcome to the case as it now stands.'

Aud replies, 'I have just been to see my friend Torfi and delegated the

case to him, and he has promised me to pursue it to the fullest extent of the law, and indeed I could easily have foreseen that you people of Breidabol would suffer a harsh fall.'

Hord said, 'That was very wrong of you to cause trouble between me and Torfi, and you shall now pay for it.'

Then he drew the sword Sotanaud and cut Aud apart in two pieces and his workman. Hord had then become so angry that he burned the farm and all the farm buildings and two women who refused to leave. And when Torfi learned of this he said that no one before had dared to do such a thing, 'to carry out such unparalleled wickedness against my friends, and yet it is not easy to rid oneself of Hord.'

And when he heard that Hord was not at home he set out to Breidabolstad on a summons and referred the cases to the Althing. After that he went home. And when Hord learned this, he sent Helgi south to his brother-in-law Indridi and asked him to ride to the *assembly* and respond to his cases and to offer terms. He said he could not bring himself to offer any terms himself because of his enmity with Torfi. Helgi went and saw Indridi and told him what Hord had said. Indridi replies:

'I have promised Illugi the Red to go to the Kialarness *Assembly*, but I will invite Hord to stay here with me.'

Helgi replies, 'There is less need for you to go to the Kialarness *Assembly* than to represent such a brave fellow as your brother-in-law, and you must be just a coward.'

Thorbiorg said, 'It would have been some help if a reliable man had come with the message, but now maybe nothing will come of it. This misfortune has also come about because of you.'

Helgi went back and did not tell Hord about Indridi's invitation, but said that he was not willing to give him any help. He was not very pleased with this and uttered a verse:

My brother-in-law proved unreliable to me in lawsuits,
and so is he to other wave-fire-junipers [men].
The useless heir of Thorgrima decided instead to stay at home.
Weapon-wielder [warrior, Indridi] is harsh to us,
and will be worse later.

And when people came to the *assembly* and the courts went into session, then Torfi asked if anyone was willing to bring forward compensation on behalf of Hord.

‘I shall,’ says he, ‘accept compensation if anyone is willing to offer it, but I am not inclined to let this case drop under my feet.’

There were no responses forthcoming and Hord was outlawed and Helgi too. And when Hord heard of his outlawry, he uttered a verse:

Great gold-ring keeper [man, Torfi] also managed indeed
at the Althing to make estuary-fire-cultivator [man, Hord]
outlaw throughout sword-trees’ households
in heath-cod’s solace and snake’s sickness.¹¹
This occasions us no fear.

He and Torfi did not meet for the time being.

22

A little later Hord went with all his people to his foster-brother Geir’s. Hord first burned all the buildings on the farm and also the hay; he said Torfi should gain little wealth from them. Some people say that Hord had been living at Uppsalir at this time and Torfi at Breidabolstad. Hord was sixteen and twenty years old when he fell into outlawry and went to Botn. All his household went with him and his followers and set up a garrison there. There was one day that Torfi¹² uttered this verse:

Certainly Torfi, scornful land-owner
will believe he can ride up to Botn against men.
Flingers of fire-red Nile sand [gold] will, I guess, offer
resistance.
I believe that thanes will give sustenance to the wolf¹³
if an equal number of targe-trees [warriors]
can be present here inside.

It was a drain on their resources that year, because supplies were less than they needed, and Geir did not look after the farm work as well as before. They then got through the livestock, so that the following summer the animals scarcely fed the people. The next autumn all the

¹⁴ It may be that these words are supposed to be spoken by Geir rather than by Hord. Otherwise Hord is distinguishing open plunder from furtive theft.

livestock were entirely slaughtered except for just a few cows.

And one morning during the winter before Yule, Geir touched Helgi on the legs. He got up straight away and they went over the ridge to Vatnshorn in Skorradal. The farmer was not at home. He was at a wedding at Lund in Reykiardal at Koll's. Geir said:

'Now we shall have to get supplies for the farm as best we can, and you must do one or the other: keep watch or go into the cowshed.'

Helgi chose to keep watch. Geir then went into the cowshed and untied the cattle. There were two men in a hay-store playing a board-game, and there was a light burning there. Then one of them said:

'Are the cattle loose in the cowshed?'

The other said it must be the women's fault and they had not tied the cattle up. Now one of them went out to the doorway, and when Geir saw this he leapt at him and killed him, and when the one who had gone first was a long time, the other went, and when he got to the doorway of the barn he met the same fate as the first. Geir killed this one too. Then they led off a seven-year-old ox.

And when they got back to Botn, Hord was very displeased and said he would leave if they were going to steal.

'It seems to me,' he said, 'much better to go raiding if there is no other way to survive.'¹⁴

Geir told him not to part from him for this reason.

'You alone shall make all our decisions.'

And so it was, that Hord did not go away.

But when women came to the cowshed at Vatnshorn, they thought it strange that all the cattle were loose. They thought the herdsmen must be asleep. They tied up the cattle, but when they got to the entrance to the barn, they found them there dead. Then word was sent to the farmer. He came back home. There was a great deal of talk about this thing.

Hord would not let the ox be used until a man had been sent to Vatnshorn to tell the truth about Geir's expedition. Some people also say that Hord must have compensated the farmer at Vatnshorn for his men and ox, and so he would not have brought a charge for the case afterwards.

¹⁵ The nature of this game is unknown.

¹⁶ There is a discrepancy in the numbers. It presumably ought to be twelve in both groups.

Kolgrim the Old, son of Hersir Alf of Trøndelag, was living at Ferstikla at this time. He was a settler. His son was Thorhall, father of Kolgrim, father of Stein, father of Kvist, father of Kali. Kolgrim sent word to the Botn-dwellers that they should hold ball-games and scraper-games¹⁵ with each other on Sand. They accepted. Now the games were begun and they continued over Yule. The Botn-dwellers generally got the worst of it, for Kolgrim contrived it that the men of Strond were stronger in the games. The Botn-dwellers used up a lot of hide for their shoes, having to walk frequently; then the ox-hide was cut up for footwear. People thought that Kolgrim had wanted to find out about the disappearance of the ox and that was why he had set up the games. He thought he recognised the ox-hide on their feet. They were then called Ox-men. Again they were treated roughly in the game. They then talked about it, when they got home, that they thought they had been treated roughly, and said they would soon give up the games. Hord spoke harshly to them and said they were not half cowards if they didn't dare to avenge themselves.

'And you are,' he says, 'only ready for evil deeds.'

At this time there had come to Hord these two, Thord Cat and Thor-geir Gyrdilskeggi (belt-beard), an outlaw. Now Hord had horn-scrappers made for himself during the night. Then they were all ready to go to the game if Hord was going, though before they had been rather reluctant. Onund son of Thormod of Brekka was set against Hord, a popular man and of great strength. This game was very rough, and before evening came there lay dead of the Strond-dwellers six men, but none of the Botn-dwellers. Now both sides went home. Onund was accompanied by all those who lived further out than Strond. And when they got to a little way in from Brekka, then Onund told them to go on ahead.

'And I am going,' he says, 'to tie up my shoe.'

They did not want to leave him. He sat down, and rather heavily. Then he died and is buried there. It is now called Onund's hillock. These cases were not prosecuted against Hord or his men.

At this time Thorstein Gullknapp (gold-button) lived at Thyril, mali-

¹⁷ *Kati*, in English 'cat', was a kind of small boat.

¹⁸ I.e. he was panic-stunned (literally, a war-fetter came over him).

cious and underhanded, crafty and well off, but Thorvald Blaskegg (dark-beard) lived at Sand, a worthy farmer and an important man.

24

There was a man called Ref, son of Thorstein, son of Solmund, son of Thorolf Smior (butter). He lived at Stykkisvoll in Bryniudal. He was a powerful *godords*-man and a strapping fellow. Later on he was known as Ref the Old. His mother was called Thorbiorg Katla. She lived at Hrisar. She had great skill in magic and was the greatest sorceress. Ref's brother was called Kiartan. He lived at Thorbrandsstadir, a big man and strong and with a nasty character, an unfair man in everything. As a result he was terribly unpopular with the generality of people. There was a man called Orm, son of Hvamm-Thorir, a popular man and a great smith. All these men were hostile to the Botn-dwellers.

Hord and his men got news from the *assembly* in the summer that there were men planning to gather together and kill them, and they realised that as the livestock had been slaughtered, they would now need to go raiding. Geir told them to build a fortification and said they would not easily be attacked. Hord said he thought they would have their food supplies cut off.

‘And I would rather have us go to the holm which lies here offshore in Hvalfiord opposite Blaskeggsaros beyond Dogurdarnes. This holm has sheer cliffs down to the sea and is as wide as a great cattle-pen.’

There they went during the *assembly* with everything they had. They took a great ferry from Saurbæ from Thorstein Oxnabrodd to assist them, and a six-oared boat from Thormod of Brekka, and a four-oared seal-boat from Thorvald Blaskegg. They made themselves a great long-house, and one end faced north-east and the other south-west, and there were doors in the middle of the long-house walls on the western side. The long-house stood right on the southern cliff-edge, but one could pass to the north between the cliff and the doorway that was in the gable-wall. Only from the north was it approachable, but to the west of the long-house were concealed ditches. It was their law that everyone should be thrown over the cliff if they could not get up for more than three nights. All were bound to go wherever Hord decided, or Geir, if they themselves were with them. Tasks were shared out between them. All the buildings had their timbers taken down

at Botn and were transported out to Holm. This holm is now called Geirsholm. It took its name from Geir son of Grim. A *hundred* and eighty people were on Holm when they were at their maximum and never fewer than in the seventies when they were at their minimum. These have been named: Hord and his wife Helga, the earl's daughter, their son Grimkel, and Biorn (he was two winters old), Geir and Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother, son of Gunnhild, Helgi son of Sigmund, Thord Cat and Thorgeir Gyrðilskaggi (he was one of the worst of all the Holm-dwellers for suggesting criminal deeds and kept urging all kinds of outrages). Nearly all the doubtful characters found their way there and swore oaths to Hord and Geir to be loyal and true to them and to each other. Thorgeir Gyrðilskaggi and Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother transported water from Blaskeggja in a group of twelve men and filled the seal-boat with water and poured it into the pool that was out on Holm. So time passed for a while.

25

Thorbiorg Katla boasted of this, that she said the Holm-dwellers would never do her any harm, she had such great faith in her magic. And when they heard of this on Holm, Geir said he wanted to put it to the test and set out in a party of twelve men after the *assembly*. Thord Cat went with him. And when they got to the valley they saw that the animals had wandered north over the mountain that stands between Bryniudal and Botn. Geir had two men look after the ferry. Thord Cat stayed on the ridge and kept guard. And when Thorbiorg Katla came out, she became aware by her magic and second sight that a ship was come from Holm. She then fetched her head-scarf and waved it up over her head. Then a great darkness came over Geir and his men. She then sent word to her son Ref that he should gather men together. They came to be fifteen in all and they came upon Thord Cat unexpectedly in the darkness and captured him and killed him, and he is buried on the lower part of Cat's Head. Geir and his men got to the sea. Then the darkness lifted and they saw them clearly, and Ref and his men attacked and fought. All the men were killed who were with Geir, and three of Ref's party. Geir got onto the ship and so to Holm and was badly wounded. Hord mocked his expedition a great deal and said

Katla had still not come to grips with them. Helga was a good healer and she made Geir completely better. The men on Holm were in great fear at all this.

And when Geir's wounds were dressed, Hord went aboard the ship in a party of twelve and went straight in to Bryniudal and said he wanted to put Katla to the test again. Two guarded the ship and ten went to find the animals. Katla again shook her scarf and sent word to Ref and said it would now be worth meeting the Holm-dwellers, 'when their leader is now the man with fine hair who thinks himself the greatest hero.'

Ref came in a party of six. Hord's sight was not obscured by Katla's magic and they carried on as they had planned and slaughtered animals onto their ship until they had fully loaded it, while Ref and his men looked on. Afterwards they transported it out to Holm, and thus they parted.

26

And when it was nearly the end of summer, Hord went in a party of twenty-four to Saurbæ, because Thorstein Oxnabrodd had boasted of this, that his nurse Skroppa, who was skilled in witchcraft, would be able to see to it by her magic that no harm should come to him from the Holm-dwellers. And when they came to land, seven guarded the ship in the water, and seventeen went ashore. They saw a great bull on the gravel bank above the boat-shed. They wanted to have a go at him, but Hord was against it. Two men from Hord's party went towards the bull and followed their own counsel. The bull brought its horns against each of them in turn; one of them aimed at its side, the other at its head. Each of their spears flew back and at their breast, and they were both killed. Hord said:

'Follow my advice, because not everything here is as it seems.'

Now they reached the farm. Skroppa was at home and the farmer's daughters, Helga and Sigrid, but Thorstein was in a *shieling* in Kuvallardal. This is in Svinadal. She opened all the buildings. She created an illusion, for where they sat on the *platform* there seemed to them to be three boxes. Hord's men talked about wanting to break open the boxes. Hord forbade it. Then they went north from the yard and were going to see if they could find some animals. Now they saw

where a young sow was running with two piglets north out of the yard. They got in front of her. Then they seemed to see a great crowd of men coming against them with spears and full armour, and now the sow was to the north of them shaking its ears with its piglets. Geir said:

‘Let’s go to the ship. We shall be up against odds here.’

Hord said it would be better not to run so soon without having a go. Just then Hord took up a great stone and struck the sow to death, and when they went up they saw that it was Skroppa lying there dead, and the farmer’s daughters were standing upright over her, where it had looked like piglets. Now they saw, as soon as Skroppa was dead, that it was a herd of cattle that was coming towards them, and not men. They drove these same animals to the ship and slaughtered them and loaded the ferry with meat. Geir forced Sigrid to go away with him and afterwards they went out to Holm. Skroppa was buried in from Saurbæ, between it and Ferstikla, in Skroppa’s Gill.

Thorstein Gullknapp was left in peace by the Holm-dwellers, because they had come to terms secretly that he should transport all vagabonds to Holm and keep them informed of all the schemes of the people of the mainland. He had sworn them oaths to fulfil all this and not to betray them in anything, and they had promised him not to do any raiding there.

27

During the winter before Yule twelve of them in all went to Hvamm to Orm’s at night-time. Orm was not at home. He was gone somewhere on business. He had a slave called Bolli who always looked after the farm when Orm was not at home. They broke into the storehouse and took out goods and food. They took Orm’s chest that had his valuables in and went off with it all. Bolli felt it had gone badly for him when no watch had been kept over the storehouse. He declared he would get the chest off the Holm-dwellers or die in the attempt and told them to tell the farmer that he should be in a party of eighteen at the boat-shed the fourth night from then and should not let himself be heard.

Now Bolli got himself ready. He wore tattered shoes and a simple hooded cloak. He stayed the first night in Bryniudal, but not at any of the farms. He came to Thorstein Gullknapp’s and said his name

was Thorbiorn, said he was an outlaw and said he wanted to go out to Hord and join his band. Thorstein Gullknapp took him out to Holm, and when Hord and Geir saw the fellow, he did not strike them both in the same way. Geir thought it was a good idea to take him on, but Hord said he thought he was a spy. Geir prevailed, however, and he swore them oaths before they took him on. He told them a great deal about the mainland but said he was tired. He lay down and slept through the day. Geir and his men could not get the chest open and asked Thorbiorn how he suggested they should go about it. Thorbiorn said there was no problem.

‘There is nothing in it,’ he said, ‘except the farmer’s workshop tools.’

He said that Orm felt the only real loss he had suffered in the Holmdwellers’ raid was that his tool-chest had gone.

‘And I was then,’ he says, ‘at Mosfell when the raid was reported. I shall take him his chest, if you like.’

Geir thought there was little advantage to be had from the chest, since there was nothing in it but only tools. Two nights Thorbiorn stayed there trying to persuade them to let the chest go. Hord was not keen to accept any advice of Thorbiorn’s, saying it would turn out badly. Geir would have his way, however, and six of them in all went during the night to Orm’s boat-shed. They carried the chest ashore and up into the boat-shed and placed it under the side of the hull of Orm’s ship. Then Thorbiorn called out that they were to stand up and take the thieves. Then they leapt up, those that had been waiting there, and attacked them. Geir then took hold of the stub of an oar and struck out on both sides, and thus defended himself very bravely. Geir then reached his ship. Four of Geir’s men were lost. Orm took a ferry and rowed after Geir. Back on Holm, Hord suddenly spoke:

‘It is more than likely that Geir is in need of men, and I am not sure how this Thorbiorn has proved for him.’

Then he took a ship and rows in along the fiord. He comes upon the chase between Orm and Geir. Then Orm soon turned back and to the shore. Geir went out to Holm with Hord.

Afterwards Orm gave Bolli freedom and land at Bollastadir and all he needed to set up a farm. He lived there afterwards and became a wealthy man and fearless.

After the *assembly* in the summer Hord and Geir went in a party of twenty-four men on a ferry one evening and landed in Sialfkviar, in front of the entrance to Holm. They left six to guard the ship, and eighteen went ashore. They drove animals from Akrafell. Hord saw that a man was coming out at Holm in shirt and linen breeches. It was at dawn. Hord recognised this as Illugi, for he was the keenest-sighted of all men. Now Illugi noticed what they were doing and immediately sent men to Gard[ar] and to Heyness and also to Kuvallara to gather men. He did not move to attack them until he had thirty men. And when Hord sees the gathering of men, he told Geir to choose which he preferred, to slaughter the animals and cut them up and load the ship or to keep off Illugi and his men so that they couldn't get to them. Geir said he would rather cut up the animals than deal with Illugi. Hord said:

'Now you have made the choice that I much prefer. I am also more used to this. I will keep them off in a group of twelve men, and we must always stay the same number, but you will be the fewer cutting up the animals as any of us fall.'

Thus they were fourteen who were cutting up the animals.¹⁶ Now began the attack between Hord and Illugi. It was extraordinary how bravely Hord defended the sheep-pens, for Illugi's party attacked hard. Men were continually coming to reinforce Illugi's party, so that in the end they became altogether forty men, but Hord's group were twelve in all. His men now had been badly wounded, for the difference in numbers was great. Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother put up a valiant show, as he always did. Helgi son of Sigmund also defended himself like a man. Thorgeir Gyrðilskeggi loaded the ferry. Geir was not backward in slaughtering the animals and then cutting them up. Nine fell of Hord's party before the ferry was loaded, and when they went aboard the ship, the others attacked hard, the men of the mainland, and then six of Hord's party fell before they could take cover behind the side of the ship. Hord was wounded by a double axe; everyone was wounded in some way.

Illugi then had ships got together, although Hord and his men had disabled all the large ships. A north-east wind was blowing against Hord's party. They bound their wounds and rowed along the northerly shore past Kataness and Kalmansarvik. They laid the cargo on a skerry, for the weather was pushing them back. Geir insisted upon

staying there and one man with him, but Hord thought it foolishness to risk themselves there. Hord held the ferry in down the fiord. Then they rested, for they had worked hard even though they were tough. Illugi's party pursued Hord's hard, and they were coming round the ness. Then Hord gave the ness a name and called it Kataness, because he thought there were a lot of cats¹⁷ going past it. As soon as Illugi's party came up with them, they immediately attacked them. Then Hord said:

'You are pursuing hard, brother-in-law, and I had a premonition of this long ago, which now has been fulfilled.'

Illugi said, 'You have also done much to deserve it.'

Then a hard attack took place. Hord defended one side of the ferry, and six the other side. A little later Holm-dwellers arrived on three ships and immediately leapt onto the ferry. Then Illugi retreats, and they chase him out along the fiord.

There was a man called Brand, son of Thorbiorn Koll (top) from under Midfell. He went at Geir on the skerry and fought with him and killed the one who was with him. Geir defended himself well, but Brand was in a party of seven. Then Hord came up at that moment and said Geir had fared not much differently from what he had expected. Then Brand fled. They made after him and killed him (it is now called Brand's Flats in from the skerry, that is east of Kalmansa) and five other men, but the sixth got away. But Hord and Geir took all the booty to Holm. Hord then uttered a verse:

Flood-moon-trees [men] fifteen had Illugi the Red felled before.
Homestead-Tyr [man, Illugi] was reluctant to make peace.
Rather well did fierce-minded Geir repay that onslaught.
Now have fallen of gold-giver [Illugi]
just as many wolf-feeders [warriors].

Now the summer came to an end.

The next winter, after Yule, Hord and Geir and forty men went up Alptarskard and so into Svinadal and from there into Skorradal and lay hidden during the day, but went down to some sheep-sheds during the night and drove away from there in the morning eighty wethers that Indridi had up along Vatn. Then there came a heavy snowfall and a storm caused by witchcraft against them. Then the bell-wethers became exhausted, when they got close to the mountain, and Geir and the men wanted to leave the sheep behind, but Hord said that would be unmanly, just because there were a few flurries of snow or a bit of damp weather against them. Hord then took the bell-wethers, one with each hand, and so dragged them on over the mountain. This made a deep track. They drove along it the rest of the animals. Thus it has been called Geldingadragi (wether-drag) there since. And when they got into Svinadal, there was no snow there. They went then to their ship and slaughtered the animals there. This has since been called Gorvik (gore-bay) there. They now go out to Holm. Now the winter went by.

In the springtime Hord and Geir and Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother, Helgi and Thorgeir Gyrdilskeggi went with sixty fighting men. They went north over Alptarskard to Indridastadir and lay hid there in the woods until cattle were being driven to pasture. The one who was guiding the cattle was called Svart, and a small boy with him. Hord and his party went to the cattle and drove them west of Vatn. Svart also kept with them. They went over Geldingadragi into Svinadal. There they killed Svart. Then they went to sleep up there in the valley. The boy guided the cattle back while they slept. Hord woke up and watched from beneath his shield. He let the boy go on his way and said to him:

'Go now, boy, for I would rather my sister had it than the Holm-dwellers.'

The boy came home and told Thorbiorg what Hord had said and said it was a great shame about such a man.

'And he was kind to me, but his men killed Svart.'

She made no reply to the boy. So it is now called Kuhallardal (cow-turn-valley), because there the cattle turned from them. Geir awoke and wanted to go after the cattle, but Hord said they should not. Then they collected together the farmers' swine from Svinadal and drove them down onto the sand and slaughtered the swine there and put them on the ship. It is now called Svinasand there. Then they went out to Holm.

30

During the Althing in the summer the Holm-dwellers went in to Dogurdarness. They went along Sildamannagata to Hvamm in Skorradal and took Thorgrima Smith-woman's oxen by Skorradal lake to the south and drove them south onto the ridge. One was a dapple-grey ox. It sniffed around a lot. It ran back towards them, and then one after another did the same, and out into the lake and they swam across where it was narrowest and then walked back to Hvamm. Then Hord said:

'There is power in Thorgrima's magic when cattle cannot do what they want.'

Thorgrima had been asleep and awoke sooner than expected and looked out. She saw the wet oxen and then said:

'You've had a hard time, but those fellows did not hold on very tight.'

Hord now asked his friends whether they did not now want to change their way of life and activities.

'It seems to me,' he says, 'that our situation is rather poor as it is, when we have only what we get by raiding to live on.'

They said it was up to him.

'Then I would like,' he says, 'us to go to merchants in Hvita and give them two hard choices, that they give up the ship to us or otherwise we shall kill them.'

Geir said he was quite ready to do this.

'But first I want us to burn in their houses Torfi son of Valbrand and Koll at Lund, Kolgrim the Old, Indridi and Illugi.'

Hord said, 'Less than that of your great plans will be fulfilled, and it is more likely that we shall all be killed, because people are not going to put up with all the unfairness with which we are treating them.'

There were more who were against going to the ship, but were in favour of crimes, with the exception of Sigurd Torfi's foster-brother. Hord said:

'“That will have to come to pass which is fated”, and the situation is that nothing can be done about it. But it is much more against my nature to be stuck in these crimes any longer.'

They went back to Holm the same night and stayed there three weeks. Then they went to the mainland, eighty men. Hord then said he was willing for them to burn Illugi or Indridi in their house.

'Since they have continually,' he says, 'been against me, and never on my side, such great troubles as I have been in.'

They went during the night into Svinadal and lay there in the woods during the day, and the second night they went into Skorradal and hid there.

31

The same night that Hord left Holm, Thorbiorg dreamed at Indridastadir that eighty wolves were running to the farm there and flames were burning from their mouths and one among them was a white bear, and it seemed rather sad, and they stayed a while at the farm and afterwards ran west from the yard to a little hill and lay down there. And Indridi said this represented the feelings of the Holm-dwellers towards him. Thorbiorg said she thought that it must be they themselves and that they were coming soon. She told Indridi to channel a well-stream to the house and to cover it over, for she claimed to dream true. This was now done. Thorbiorg had great chimneys built. She had valuables put up on the crossbeams because water was up to the middle of the walls. She had no small number of men there ready.

Soon after, Hord and his men came. He went up to the doorway and was ahead of his band. He knocked at the entrance. Thorbiorg went to the door and greeted Hord in friendly fashion and invited him to stay and his special friends. She tried to make him leave that band of hooligans and said that there were many who would then be on his side. Hord asked her to come out into the open to him and said she would be welcome to be with him if she separated from Indridi. She said that would be less right and declared she would not separate from him. Then they dragged a pile of wood to the doorway and set fire to the farm, but they fought it off with water, the people inside. The attack made little progress. Geir was surprised at this. Hord said:

‘I expect it is my sister who has suggested this water supply.’

They went to look and found the stream and channelled it away, but yet there was enough water in the farm, so much had already run in. Hord saw a man standing up in one of the chimneys and holding a bow. Hord shot the man with a javelin and killed him. After this Hord saw a troop approaching the farm that Thorbiorg had sent for. Geir said they would now have to withdraw. Hord was not against it. They then turned away. None of the buildings there was destroyed. A large number of men came to Indridastadir. The Holm-dwellers went home

and did nothing for a while.

32

Farmers held a meeting at Leidvoll near Laxa by Grunnafiord so as to put an end to the Holm-dwellers being allowed to continue all the crimes that they were committing. All the local leaders were sent word that they were to come to this meeting, and all the farmers and workers. And when Indridi was getting ready to go to the meeting, Thorbiorg asked where he was planning to go. He told her.

‘Then I shall go with you,’ she says, ‘for you must know that I shall be true to you.’

He did not want her to go to the meeting, and said it would be no fun for her to hear what was said there. She said she was aware of that. Then Indridi rode to the meeting.

A little later Thorbiorg had a horse saddled for herself and went with one other person to the meeting. There was there a large crowd of people and a lot of shouting, but when she came they were as if struck dumb and they were all silent. Then she said:

‘I think I know what you are up to and your intention, and I shall not hide from you what I have in mind, that I shall be the death or have it brought about of any man who kills my brother Hord.’

Then she rode away. At this *assembly* were Torfi son of Valbrand, Koll from Lund, Indridi, Illugi, Kolgrim, Ref and Thorstein Oxnabrodd and Orm of Hvamm and many other local leaders. Then Torfi said:

‘It is obvious to the people who are present here, and everyone can be in agreement about it, that these criminals should be put to death, otherwise first those who are closest by will be robbed of everything, and then all the other local people. You can see that they will not spare others, when Hord has tried to burn his brother-in-law’s family in their house. Let us quickly adopt some good plan so that no news of it reaches them. This is for everyone the most urgent thing to do.’

Illugi said they were the source of too many crimes for things to be allowed to stand, declared that there had joined the band the most evil people.

‘I shall pay no regard to any relationships in this. We have found out about them, that they were planning the same thing for us as for Indridi.’

Kolgrim said that those who were closest were feeling the greatest cold from this, but there would not be long to wait before others had

the same thing on their hands, though they were placed further off. Similar things were said by one after another. Ref said the only thing to do was for some one to be got out to Holm who would swear oaths to them that there would be no treachery used against them, and say that it was the wish of all the local people that they should go away from Holm, wherever they liked, and that they should then all be reconciled with each other. In this it was Torfi who was the greatest proponent of this plan, and in addition it was he who recommended that they should immediately that night ride in to the fiord so that the Holm-dwellers should not know about it.

‘For it seems to me,’ he said, ‘that some people on Strond are to be suspected.’

They rode immediately that night. They ate breakfast the following morning on the ness there in the fiord which they afterwards called Dogurdarness (breakfast ness). That same morning Thorgeir Gyrdiskeggi and Sigurd Torfi’s foster-brother went to fetch water in a party of twelve on a smack. The Holm-dwellers had no idea that people were gathering together or that there was any treachery being planned against them.

33

But when the people on the mainland found out about Sigurd and his companions’ expedition, they sent Koll son of Kiallak in a party of twenty-four men, and when they met, Thorgeir Gyrdiskeggi ran off straight away with six men, but Sigurd Torfi’s foster-brother made ready to defend himself with four men, and there was a very hard attack. Sigurd then again defended himself very bravely, for he was both strong and skilful with weapons. They went on fighting until all Sigurd’s companions were fallen, but he was then still not wounded. Thorvald Blaskegg then attacked hard and many others. Then five of Koll’s men were fallen. Sigurd then still defends himself superbly well. He then kills many more men; he then, however, suffers some wounds. Thorvald Blaskegg then went at Sigurd and thrusts through him with a spear. Sigurd had been fighting with an axe. He then threw the axe at Thorvald, and the axe hit his head, and both fell down dead. Sigurd had then been the death of nine men, and his companions had killed three. Altogether there fell there at the river-forks seventeen men from

the two parties. They are now called Blaskegg's rivers.

Thorgeir Gyrðilskeggi stopped on Arnarvatn Heath and took refuge in a cave at Fitjar and gathered together a band of men and remained there until the men of Borgarfjord went for them. Then Thorgeir fled north to Strandir and was killed there, as is told in the Tale of Alfgeir.

34

Now the leading men looked around for someone who could be got to go out to the Holm, but most declined to do this. Torfi then urged that the person that went would gain a great deal of prestige from it, and would be thought a greater man than before, and said it was probable that those who were on the Holm would have forfeited their good luck because of their crimes. Ref's brother Kiartan son of Katla—a very great fighter and the fastest of men—he said he would have a go at going if they would give him the ring Sotanauf if Hord was caught.

'But I have in any case something to pay the Holm-dwellers back for.'

They agreed to this, and he seemed the most promising for it of those who were there then. Then Kiartan said:

'Isn't the most obvious thing to use Thorstein Gullknapp's boat? He has often done us a bad turn.'

They all thought this was a good idea, and said that this would give the Holm-dwellers the least ground for suspicion.

Kiartan son of Katla now rowed out on Thorstein Gullknapp's boat. He was wearing a mail-coat under his cloak, and when he got to Holm, he told Hord that the people on the mainland wanted to make peace. He said Illugi and his friends had played a major role in letting them go free. Geir believed this and thought it was probably true, since he was using Thorstein Gullknapp's boat, for he had sworn oaths that he would never behave treacherously towards them. Many were keen to get away and were tired of being there and urged going with Kiartan away from Holm. Then Hord said:

'Geir and I have very often not been of one mind, for frequently we have seen things differently. I think it is an evil man they have chosen for this, in the person of Kiartan, to be the bearer of such important

matters, such great problems depending on it for both sides. There has also not been great friendship between us and Kiartan.'

Then he said: 'Let's not bring that up now, for that is not appropriate for those who are bringing proposals of peace, but it is nothing but the truth I am telling you, and I will swear to it if you find that more convincing.'

Hord said he looked to him as if his oaths would not be reliable, and then uttered a verse:

This weapon-storm-tree [warrior, Kiartan]
 who anxiously urges departure seems to me
 that he cannot fail to be spying.
 This wave-burning-Baldr [man, Kiartan] would never
 get away unharmed, who urged this,
 if bow-destroyer [warrior, Hord] had his way.

Then nearly all were in favour of leaving. Some took passage for themselves with Kiartan straight away. Hord said he would not go at all.

'But I am quite happy for them to find out how true Kiartan will be to them. But I think,' he says, 'that you will be less cheerful by the latter part of the day.'

Kiartan was the better pleased the more he took away. Many boarded the ferry. Kiartan said they would come themselves to fetch their fellows on the next trip.

They now left Holm. The gathering of men could not be seen until the ship came round the point. But when they had beached the ship, the farmers penned them in with their great numbers. And when they came ashore, they were all taken and held and sticks were twisted in their hair and every one of them was beheaded. Then the men of the mainland rejoiced that they had had so little trouble with such criminals, and they thought the prospects were now good that they would all be defeated.

Kiartan went a second time out to Holm. The Holm-dwellers asked why their comrades had not come to meet them. Kiartan said they had been so happy at their release that they had run ashore in high spirits.

Geir believed this and accompanied Kiartan aboard with many men. Hord was against this trip and said it would have dire consequences. He refused to go. Helgi son of Sigmund remained behind with him and Helga the earl's daughter and their two sons and six other men.

Geir and the others now went away from Holm, and Hord was not at all pleased that Geir wished to go with Kiartan. But when they rowed on round the ness, Geir saw the crowd of men on shore. He realised then that they must have been betrayed. Then he said:

“Bad counsels turn out badly”, and are often seen so too late, and Hord has often been closer to the mark than I. I think that once again it will be so, and it is now most likely that here there will be an end to all our activities, and it would be well if Hord got away, for he alone will be a greater loss than all of us together.’

They had now very nearly reached the shore. Geir then leapt overboard into the water and swam along by the rock. There was an *Easterner* called Orm who was with Indridi, a man of great strength. He could shoot better than anyone and was well equipped with all skills. He shot a javelin after Geir and it hit him between the shoulders and it caused his death. He was greatly praised for this deed. It is called Geir's point where the body drifted ashore.

36

Helga the earl's daughter was standing out on Holm and saw what happened. She told Hord and told him to look. It did not look the same to both of them. She said it would lead to dire consequences. The men of the mainland praised Kiartan highly and said he would prosper greatly from these trips. They said there were not many left now. Kiartan said he was now going to knock in the final nail by getting Hord and duping him into it also in the end. He used a six-oared boat and now goes out to Holm. Hord asked where Geir was and why he did not come to meet him. Kiartan said he had been kept on the mainland until he came.

‘Thus peace can be made between everyone at once.’

Hord said, ‘You are taking on a great deal, Kiartan, in transporting all of us Holm-dwellers to the mainland, and you must be getting a big reward from the people of the mainland. I shall not go anywhere. I have always mistrusted you, and one can never read anything from

a man's appearance if you turn out well.'

Kiartan said, 'Surely you are not so much more cowardly than your men, that you dare not go ashore.'

Hord then leapt up and could not put up with his goading and said he thought he would have no reason to taunt him about his courage by the time their dealings came to an end. Hord said Helga should go with him. She said she would not go and not her sons either, and said it had now come about, as they say, that "you cannot save a doomed man". Helga then wept bitterly.

Hord went aboard the ship in great anger and they go now until they come to where Geir was floating dead by a skerry. Hord then leaped up and said to Kiartan:

'Most miserable of men, and a short time shall you have to enjoy this treachery.'

Hord then struck at him with the sword Sotanaud and clove him lengthwise down to where his belt was, his whole body with double mail-coat. Just then the ship ran ashore and they were all captured who were on the ship. Indridi was the first to lay hands on Hord and tied his arms rather tightly. Then Hord said:

'Rather hard are you tying now, brother-in-law.'

Indridi answers, 'You taught me how to do that when you tried to burn me in my house.'

Illugi said to Indridi, 'Yet Hord has not got good brothers-in-law, and indeed he has not deserved them.'

Indridi answers, 'He has long ago forfeited the right for any such relationships to be paid regard to.'

He then pointed his axe forward and gave a sign that someone should strike at Hord, but no one would do it. Hord then twisted himself round hard and got free. He grabbed the axe from Indridi's hand and leapt out over the circle of men three deep. Helgi son of Sigmund got free and leapt straight after him. Ref mounted a horse and rode after them and could not catch them. Then war-paralysis came over Hord;¹⁸ he struck it off himself the first time and the second. A third time war-paralysis came over him and then they managed to pen him in and made a circle round him and he again jumped out over them, first killing three men. He took Helgi son of Sigmund on his back. Then he ran to the mountain. They chased hard after him. Ref was fastest, for he was on horseback, and he dared not attack Hord. Then came war-paralysis

again over Hord. Then the main rout got to him. Then he threw Helgi off his back. Then he said:

‘Powerful sorcerers are involved here, but you shall not have your will over anything I can do something about.’

Then he cut Helgi in two in the middle and declared they were not going to kill his foster-brother before his very eyes. It looked to people as though Helgi was more or less dead already. Hord was then so furious and terrible to look at that none of them dared to approach him from the front. Torfi said that anyone who dared to strike at Hord should have the ring Sotanaud which Hord had on his arm. Then they made a circle round him. Then Thorstein Gullknapp arrived from his home at Thyril. They then attacked Hord hard. He even then caused six men’s death. Then his axe came off its shaft. At that moment Thorstein Gullknapp struck at the nape of his neck with a long-shafted axe, for none of them dared to go for him from the front, even though he was without a weapon. From this wound Hord got his death. He had then killed of them thirteen men including the four he killed by the ship before he was captured. Everyone praised his valour, both his friends and enemies, and it is considered that there has been no one of his time who has been braver in every way and wiser than Hord, though he was not blessed with success. It was also his followers who were responsible for this, if he got involved in such crimes, and this also, that “there is no escaping fate”.

37

The men of the mainland praised Thorstein Gullknapp for this deed and gave him the ring Sotanaud and said they were very pleased for him to have it. But when Thorstein heard of Thorbiorg’s pronouncement, he heartily wished he had never done the deed. Nearly sixty men were killed of the Holm-dwellers besides the foster-brothers on Dogurdarness. Now the leading men talked about it being advisable to fetch Helga and kill her and Hord’s sons. Then some thought it too late in the day. Then they made a compact about this that they should be granted no truce nor given any help, otherwise they would all take vengeance. Thus it was laid down with great emphasis. They planned to go out in the morning, but stayed there during the night.

Helga remains now on the island and feels certain now of all the tricks and treachery of the people of the mainland. She now considers her position. What she now decides to do is that she throws herself into the water and swims ashore from the Holm during the night and carried with her her four-year-old son Biorn to Blaskeggsa, and then went to meet her eight-year-old son Grimkel, for his swimming was then getting weak, and carried him ashore. This is now called Helga's sound. They went during the night up onto the mountain from Thyril and rested in the ravine which is now called Helga's ravine. She carried Biorn on her back, but Grimkel walked.

They go on until they and she come to Indridastadir. She then sat down out under the enclosure wall and sent Grimkel to the house to beg Thorbiorg for sanctuary. Thorbiorg was sitting on the *platform* when the boy came in. He asked her for sanctuary, and she stood up and took him by the hand and went out with him and asked who he was. He told her. She asked what had happened and where Helga was. Grimkel told what he knew and took her to Helga. Thorbiorg then could not speak, she was so overcome. She took them to an outhouse and locked them in there.

Late that day Indridi came and a lot of men in his party. There was no sign that anything was wrong with Thorbiorg, and she served food to the guests. But when they told her the news and that it was Thorstein Gullknapp who had killed Hord and attacked him from the rear while he had stood before him motionless, then Thorbiorg uttered a verse:

There was in hard Unn's storm [battle]
 Hord felled to earth.
 He has beaten eight
 and five in battle.
 Magic of mighty spells was able to hold rather strongly.
 Brand of bitter brands [warrior, Hord]
 would otherwise still be standing.

And when they got into bed in the evening, Thorbiorg drew a knife and tried to stab her husband Indridi, but he held it off and was wounded deeply in the hand. Then he said:

‘There are now two things, Thorbiorg, that we have a serious problem, and you want to take serious steps about it; so what must be done to bring about a reconciliation between us?’

‘Nothing but this, that you bring me Thorstein Gullknapp’s head.’

Indridi agreed to do this.

He set out in the morning on his own and rode straight to Thyril. He then dismounted and walked down Indridastig (Indridi’s path) past Thyril and waited there until Thorstein went to his sacrificial temple as was his custom. And when Thorstein came, he went into the temple and prostrated himself before the stone where he sacrificed which stood there in the temple, and prayed. Indridi was standing outside near the temple. He heard this uttered from inside the stone:

You have here
for the last time
with doomed feet
trodden the earth.
On you shall rightly
before the sun shines
harsh Indridi
repay hatred.

Then Thorstein went out and towards his house. Indridi easily saw him going. Indridi told him not to run so hard. He then got round in front of him and immediately struck him with the sword Sotanaut under the throat so that it took off his head. He announced this killing as his deed back at Thyril. He said Thorstein had long been disloyal. He rode home and gave Thorbiorg the head. She said she was not bothered about it, now it was off the body.

‘Now you will,’ says Indridi, ‘be reconciled with me.’

She said that would not happen until he took Helga and her sons in, if they chanced to come there, and gave them all the support they needed.

‘Then I shall,’ she said, ‘give you all my love from then on.’

Indridi said he thought they must have jumped into the sea and drowned, as they were not found on the Holm.

‘And I will promise you this, since I know that there will be no need to take it up.’

Then Thorbiorg fetched Helga and the boys and brought them in.

Then Indridi spoke and was not pleased:

‘I have opened my mouth quite wide enough, and yet the only thing to do now is keep one’s word.’

And he did fulfil all his promises and no one blamed him for this. Everyone thought Thorbiorg had behaved magnificently.

39

There was a man called Thorolf and he was known as Starri (stiff), skilled with his hands and quite wealthy, uncaring and irreverent, bold and aggressive and tough in everything. He came the same autumn to Indridastadir and offered the farmer his services. Thorbiorg said he should certainly take him on, and he did so. He stayed there for a while doing smith’s work. Helga the earl’s daughter was pleasant with him, and Thorbiorg was too. He believed he was having an affair with the earl’s daughter, and she was not unresponsive. Thorolf had been with Ref that summer and had not liked it there. He now asked Thorbiorg if he could stay the winter. She replies:

‘I will let you stay the winter and give you the ring Sotanaut, Helga the earl’s daughter and much other wealth if you kill Ref in Bryniudal.’

He replies, ‘That is not a bad job for me. I believe I am just the man to be able to get that done if I have the sword Sotanaut. And it is not to be expected that I would do a small service and take a great reward.’

They made it a bargain. It was not easy to get the sword, for Indridi had it always on him wherever he went. One day Thorbiorg took the sword Sotanaut and made gaps here and there [in the scabbard] so that the sword could fall down of itself. And when Indridi went to gird on the sword it fell down out of the sheath. He found this strange, but Thorbiorg said that was the nature of the sword if it knew something was going to happen. He told her to mend the sheath. She said she would do it when she had time.

Indridi had to go west to Myrar to settle a dispute between his friends. He did not take the sword with him. And when he had gone, Thorbiorg gave Thorolf the sword Sotanaut and told him to use it like a man if he wanted to be married to Helga.

Thorolf went to Ref’s and got there late in the day. He hid in a pile of turf and heaped peat round him so that nothing showed except just his nostrils. Ref was wary, so that he bolted the doors every evening and had torches taken round all the buildings twice, first before the

evening meal and again before people went to bed, and this was done now as well. Thorolf was still not discovered. Thorolf could imitate anyone's voice. He stood up, as soon as they had gone to bed. He woke up Ref's servant-woman and said he was a shepherd. He told her to ask Ref for some shoe-leather, because he said he had to go up on the mountain in the morning. She said he did not stint his work, said he should not by any means have less than others.

'And there is none of the workers who is more useful than you.'

He said that should be so by the time he was finished. Ref slept in a *bed-closet* and he would not allow anyone to go to him there at night. Nevertheless she went and told Ref of the shepherd's request for shoe-leather. She said it wasn't right for him to be without shoes or anything else that he needed to have 'when he is concerned all the time for your property, both night and day.'

Ref was cross with her for coming with such a matter to him at night.

'But there is a bit of poor shagreen out in the peat-shed, and he can take some shoe-leather for himself from that.'

And when she had gone, Thorolf pushed a piece of wood in the shutter so that it did not close. He had been standing up over Ref while they had been talking, and he was afraid to do anything. Ref fell asleep, but Thorolf daredn't attack him. Ref's mother, Thorbiorg Katla, called out:

'Wake up, my son, the devil is standing over you and is going to kill you.'

Then Ref went to stand up, and at that moment Thorolf struck off both his feet from under him, one where the calf was narrowest, the other at the ankle. Then Thorolf leapt out into the room from the *bed-closet*. Then Thorbiorg Katla went up to him and grabbed him and forced him under her and bit his windpipe in two and so left him dead. Ref took the sword Sotanaut, but the ring disappeared from Thorolf, the one that Thorbiorg and Helga had given him, and which Hord had taken from Soti. Ref was healed and carried on a chair ever after, for he never managed to walk, and yet he lived on a long time after this, so that he came to be called Ref the Old, and was always considered the most worthy man.

A little later Indridi came home and heard what had happened. He felt sure that Thorbiorg must have been involved in the plot. But he did not want to lose the sword. Afterwards he went to see Ref and asked him to hand over the sword.

‘For I have had nothing to do with this plot,’ he says.

Ref gave him the sword.

‘I do not want to lose your friendship,’ says Ref.

Indridi then took his sword and rode home afterwards. It can be remarked by this what a leader Indridi has been, that such a warrior as Ref was dared do nothing other than hand over the sword to Indridi when he asked, such a great mutilation as he had suffered from it.

A little later there was a meeting between Thorgrima Smith-woman and Ref’s mother, Thorbiorg Katla, and afterwards they were both found dead on Mulafell. They were all torn and cut asunder in pieces, and it has been thought to be haunted there afterwards near their grave-mounds. People assumed that Indridi’s mother Thorgrima must have wanted to get the ring Sotanaut for Indridi, but Katla wanted to keep it from her and would not let it go and so they killed each other off. The ring was never found afterwards.

41

A few winters later a ship came to Breidavik. On it was Tind son of Hallkel and Thord son of Kolgrim from Ferstikla. They rode from the ship, Tind to Hallkelsstadir and Thord over Hvita and was making for home. And when Helga the earl’s daughter found out this, she said to her son Grimkel that his father’s death was slow to come into his mind. She told him then to lie in wait for Thord son of Kolgrim.

‘For his father was your father Hord’s greatest opponent.’

Grimkel was then twelve years old.

‘I would like you, kinsman,’ she says, ‘to kill Thord, for valid vengeance is in him.’

Grimkel was in a party of three. They met near Bakkavad on the eastern side of Hvita below some stacks of turf. A little later they were all found dead from both parties. There was a man called Skeif who lived at Hvitarvellir, a man of small means. Some supposed that he must have killed wounded men and then taken fine possessions that Thord

had had with him and were never heard of again. Skeif went abroad and never came out again and got to be rolling in money.

Indridi did not want to risk Helga here in this country and her son Biorn. They went abroad from Eyrar to Norway and then on to Gautland, and Hroar was still alive then. He was glad to see his sister Helga, but thought Hord was a great loss. Helga did not marry again as far as is told. Biorn became a great man and came back to Iceland and killed many men in vengeance for his father and became the most valiant man. Twenty-four men were killed in vengeance for Hord. Compensation was paid for none of them. Some were killed by Hord's sons and kinsmen and relatives by marriage, and some by Hroar. Thorbiorg daughter of Grimkel was involved in the killing of nearly all of them; she is thought to have been a most remarkable woman. She and Indridi lived at Indridastadir until old age and were considered very great people, and there are many people descended from them.

Hord was nineteen and twenty winters old when he was killed, and most of these years had brought him honour and esteem, except for the three winters that he was in outlawry. The priest Styrmir the Wise also says that he thinks he was in the first rank of outlawed men because of his wisdom and skill with weapons and all kinds of abilities; and because of this also, that he was so highly esteemed abroad that the earl in Gautland gave him his daughter in marriage; and thirdly because for no single man in Iceland have so many men been killed in vengeance, and they were all uncompensated for. Now here we end the saga of the Holm-dwellers. God give us all good days without end. Amen.

