

Thordis recognised it. When she bent down to pick up the spoons, she grabbed it by the hilt and thrust out at Eyjolf, meaning to strike him in the guts. But she had not noticed the blade-guard which turned upward and caught against the table. Moreover, she struck at him lower than she intended, hitting him in the thigh and thereby wounding him sorely.

Bork grabbed hold of Thordis and wrenched the sword away from her, and the others all jumped to their feet and overturned the tables and the food. Bork left it in Eyjolf's hands to decide the penalty for this deed, and he claimed full *compensation* – the same as was imposed for slaying a man – and said he would have demanded more if Bork had handled this matter less fittingly.

Then Thordis named witnesses and declared herself divorced from Bork, saying that she would never again share his bed – and she stood by her word. She left and went to live at Thordisarstadir, out at Eyri. Bork, however, remained at Helgafell until the chieftain, Snorri, drove him out. After that he went to live at Glerarskogar. Eyjolf went home and was greatly displeased with his visit.

38 Vestein's sons went to Gest Oddleifsson, their kinsman, and urged him to use his power to get them out of the country along with their mother, Gunnhild, Gisli's wife, Aud, Ingjald's daughter, Gudrid, and Geirmund, their brother. They all went to the Hvita river and Gest paid for their passage abroad.

They were only at sea for a short time before they reached Norway. Berg and the other two men walked around town and tried to find a place to lodge. They met two men, one of whom was a young, well-built lad, dressed in fine red clothes. He asked Berg his name, and Berg told him his true identity and kin since he expected to gain more by using his father's name. The man in red pulled out his sword and dealt Berg a death blow on the spot. He was Ari Sursson, brother to Gisli and Thor- kel.

Berg's companions went back to the ship and told what had happened, and the skipper helped them escape, finding a place for Helgi [Vestein's son] on board a ship bound for Greenland. Helgi arrived in that country, became prosperous and was held in great esteem there. Some men were sent out to kill him, but nothing came of it. He eventually died on a hunting expedition, and this was considered a great loss.

Aud and Gunnhild went to Hedeby in Denmark, took the Christian faith and then went on a pilgrimage to Rome. They never returned.

Geirmund remained in Norway, married and prospered there. Gudrid, his sister, also married and was thought to be a woman of wisdom. Many can be counted as her descendants.

Ari Sursson went to Iceland and came ashore at Hvita river. He sold his ship and bought himself some land at Hamar, where he lived for several years. After that he lived in several other places in Myrar, and had many descendants.

And here ends the saga of Gisli Sursson.

Translated by MARTIN S. REGAL

THE SAGA OF GRETTIR THE STRONG

WRITTEN C. 1400

GRETTIS SAGA

Grettir's Saga is translated from Örnólfur Thorsson's edition (Mál og menning, 1995). The saga is preserved in some 16th-century vellum manuscripts. AM 551 A 4to, on which this translation is based, includes Bard's Saga and Viglund's Saga. A prelude relates how Grettir's ancestors, who are related to the kings of Norway, settled in Iceland. Grettir was born in Midfjord, north Iceland, but the setting follows him to Norway and all around Iceland, and the saga ends in Constantinople where his death was avenged.

Grettir's Saga is unique in that although it was written around 1400, it ranks in terms of depth and characterisation with the classical 13th-century tragic sagas. Another unique feature is its masterful fusion of the classical saga-style and highly varied content of very diverse origin: folk tales, adventure motifs (one of which shows intriguingly close parallels to the Old English Beowulf), local tales from the Book of Settlements, ghost stories and slapstick. This colourful tapestry forms the background to the portrayal of Grettir, which stands out from other saga characterisation for its psychological depth. In a single character we see a hero, an outlaw, the peasant society's defence against outside threats, a picaresque rogue, a villain, an implied womaniser and a victim of fate whose only flaw is his fear of the dark. The saga is a conscious literary composition by an author, which draws upon an entire tradition of writing and story-telling, and by criticising its own tradition as well as society points towards the modern novel. At the same time, no other saga hero has held such appeal to the Icelanders themselves, and is widely seen as personifying the national character. As the clergyman and poet Matthías Jochumsson said around the end of the 19th century, "You, Grettir, are my nation."

1 There was a man called Onund. He was the son of Ofeig Hobbler, whose father was Ivar Horse-cock. Onund's sister Gudbjorg was the mother of Gudbrand Lump, whose daughter Asta was the mother of King Olaf the Holy. On his mother's side Onund was from Oppland, while his father's family mainly came from Rogaland and Hordaland.

Onund was a great viking and raided in the countries west of Norway. Balki Blaengsson from Sotanes and Orm the Wealthy went with him on his raids. Their

third companion was called Hallvard. They had five ships, all well manned. They went raiding in the Hebrides and when they reached the Barra Isles, they came across a king called Kjarval who also had five ships. They launched an attack on him and a heavy battle ensued. Onund's men fought fiercely. Many men were killed on both sides, and in the end the king fled on one of his ships. Onund's men seized both the ships and a great amount of wealth, and set up winter quarters there. They spent three summers raiding in Ireland and Scotland, then went to Norway.

2 In those days there was great turmoil in Norway. Harald Tangle-hair, son of Halfdan the Black, had been the king of Oppland and fought his way to control of the realm. After that he set off for the north and fought many battles, all of which he won. Then he went on making war southwards and conquered everywhere he went. When he reached Hordaland, a massive band turned out to face him, led by Kjotvi the Wealthy, Thorir Long-chin, the people of South Rogaland and King Sulki.

Geirmund Dark-skin was in the British Isles then and did not take part in that battle, even though he had land in Hordaland.

That autumn Onund and his companions sailed back from the west. When they heard this news, Thorir Long-chin and King Kjotvi sent men to meet them and ask them to join forces, promising them worthy rewards. They joined forces with Thorir and the others, because they were eager to put their strength to the test, and said they wanted to be put in the thick of the battle.

They clashed with King Harald in Rogaland, by the fjord called Havsfjord. Both sides had great armies, and the battle was one of the greatest ever fought in Norway. Most sagas refer to it, because it is such matters that sagas usually relate. Troops arrived from all over Norway, and many from other countries, and a large number of vikings.

Onund drew his ship up alongside Thorir Long-chin's, right in the midst of the fray. King Harald sailed up to Thorir's ship, because Thorir was a great *berserk* and brave fighter. Both sides fought fiercely. Then the king urged his berserks on. They were called Wolf-skins; iron weapons would not bite on them, and when they charged they were unstoppable. Thorir fought valiantly but was killed on his ship after a brave stand. Then the attackers cleared the ship from stem to stern and chopped through the ropes that tied it to the others; it drifted back among the ships. After that the king's men attacked Onund's ship. Onund was at the bow and fought bravely.

Then the king's men said, "That man in the gunwale is putting up a tough fight. Let's leave him with some reminders that he has been in a battle."

Onund was standing with one foot on the gunwale, striking a blow, when someone lunged at him, and as he warded off the attack he buckled at the knees. At that moment one of the men in the prow of the king's ship struck at him, hitting him just below the knee and chopping off his leg. Onund was put out of action immediately and most of his men were killed.

Onund was carried to the ship owned by a man called Thrand, who was the son of Bjorn and the brother of Eyvind the Norwegian. He was on the side fighting against King Harald and had drawn his ship up alongside Onund's.

After this, the main fleet split up. Thrand and other vikings got away as best they could, and sailed off west. Onund went with him, and so did Balki and Hallvard Surf.

Onund's wound healed but he wore a wooden leg for the rest of his life, and so he was nicknamed Onund Tree-leg as long as he lived.

3 Many excellent men were in Britain at that time; they had fled their lands in Norway because King Harald outlawed all those who had fought against him and seized their property.

When Onund's wounds had healed, he and Thrand and eight others went to see Geirmund Dark-skin, since he was the most renowned viking in the territory west of Norway then, and asked him if he did not want to try to recover the land he had ruled in Hordaland, offering him their support. They thought that they would come to regret the loss of their property sorely, for Onund came from a great family and was a wealthy man. Geirmund replied that, since King Harald had grown so strong by then, he thought there was little hope of their recovering much by force now, because others had suffered defeat when almost the whole country had opposed him. He had no intention of becoming the king's slave, he said, and begging for what he had previously owned himself, but would rather find another place to establish himself. He was also past his prime by now. Onund and the others went back to the Hebrides where they joined many of their friends.

There was a man called Ofeig, whose nickname was Grettir (Snake). He was the son of Einar, whose father was Olvir the Child-sparer. Ofeig's brother was Oleif the Broad, whose son was Thormod Skafti. Another of Olvir's sons was Steinolf, whose daughter Una married Thorbjorn Salmon-catcher. Steinmod was yet another of Olvir's sons. He was the father of Konal, whose daughter was Alfdís from Barra. Konal's son Steinmod was the father of Halldora, who married Eilíf the son of Ketil the One-handed. Ofeig Grettir's wife was Asny, the daughter of Vestar Haengsson. Ofeig's sons were Asmund the Beardless and Asbjorn, and his daughters were called Aldis, Aesa and Asvor.

Ofeig had fled west across the sea from King Harald's oppression, and so had his kinsman Thormod Skafti, with all the people from their households. They raided in many parts of the British Isles.

Thrand and Onund Tree-leg intended to go westwards to Ireland to meet Eyvind the Norwegian, Thrand's brother, who was in charge of defending the Irish realm. Eyvind's mother was Hlíf, the daughter of Hrólf Ingjaldsson, whose grandfather was King Frodi, while Thrand's mother was Helga, the daughter of Ondott Crow.

Thrand and Eyvind's father, Bjorn, was the son of Hrólf from Ar. He had fled from Gotland after he burned King Solvi's brother-in-law Sigfast to death in his

house. He went to Norway that same summer and stayed the winter with Grim the *Hersir*, the son of Kollbjorn Scurrilous. Grim tried to murder Bjorn for his money. From there, Bjorn went to Ondott Crow who lived in Kvinesfjord in Agder province. Ondott welcomed Bjorn warmly and he stayed there for the winter, but went raiding every summer until his wife Hlif died. Afterwards, Ondott married his daughter Helga to Bjorn, who then gave up raiding.

Eyvind had taken charge of his father's warships and grown to be an important chieftain in Britain. His wife was Rafarta, daughter of King Kjarval of Ireland. Their sons were Helgi the Lean and Snaebjorn.

When Thrand and Onund reached the Hebrides, they met Ofeig Grettir and Thormod Skafti, and a close friendship developed among them, because all the people who met up again after being in Norway at the height of the warfare there felt as though they had rescued each other from the dead.

Once, when Onund grew very quiet, Thrand asked him what was on his mind. Onund replied with a verse:

1.
I am not happy after facing
the arrow-hail pounding on shields.
Much happens too early; we flinched
at the ogresses' howling.
Most men, I feel, doubtless
deem me of little mettle;
this is what most has deprived
me of my delights.

ogresses' howling: axe

Thrand told Onund that he would always be thought a brave man: "You should settle down and marry. I shall support you in word and deed if you let me know whom you have in mind."

Onund said this was a noble gesture, but that he once had better prospects of making a good marriage.

"Ofeig has a daughter called Aesa," Thrand replied. "We can approach her if you wish."

Onund said he would like that.

Then they raised the matter with Ofeig. He responded favourably and said he was aware that Onund was of great family and a wealthy man – "but I value his land little. And he's only half the man that he was, while my daughter is still a child."

Thrand said Onund was in finer fettle than many men with both legs. And with Thrand's support, the matter was settled and Ofeig made over her *dowry* in the form of possessions, because neither of them was prepared to pay money for the lands in Norway.

Shortly afterwards, Thrand was betrothed to Thormod Skafti's daughter. Both women were to remain pledged to be married for three years afterwards. The men went raiding during the summers, but spent the winters on Barra.

4 There were two vikings called Vigbjod and Vestmar. They came from the Hebrides and were at sea in both summer and winter. They had eight ships and raided in Ireland, doing many evil deeds there until Eyvind the Norwegian took charge of defending the realm. Then they shifted to the Hebrides and raided there and all the way down to the Firths of Scotland.

Onund and Thrand went off to seek them out and were told that they had sailed to the island called Bute.

Then Onund and Thrand went there with seven ships. When the vikings saw how many ships the others had, they felt they had sufficient forces, took their weapons and sailed off to face them. Onund ordered his men to position the ships in a narrow, deep channel between two cliffs, which could only be attacked from one end with no more than five ships at once. Being a clever man, Onund took five ships into the channel but left them scope to retreat when they wished, since there was open sea behind them. There was also an islet on one side of them where he positioned one of his ships, and they brought many rocks to the edge of the cliff there, out of sight of the ships.

The vikings advanced boldly, thinking the ships were caught in a trap. Vigbjod asked who these people were that had been penned in.

Thrand told them he was the brother of Eyvind the Norwegian – "And this is my companion, Onund Tree-leg."

The vikings laughed and said:

2.
May the trolls swallow you whole, Tree-leg,
may the trolls topple you all.

"... It's not often we see men go into battle who can't even stand up for themselves."

Onund said that there was no telling until it was put to the test.

After that, they lined up their ships and a great battle ensued. Both sides advanced firmly, and when the battle reached full pitch Onund let his ship drift towards the cliff. When the vikings saw that, they thought he was trying to escape, so they pursued him under the cliff as fast as possible. At that moment, the men who had been placed on the cliff moved out to the edge and launched such huge rocks onto the vikings that they were unable to withstand the onslaught. A large number of the vikings were killed, and others were put out of action by their injuries. Then the vikings tried to sail away but were unable to do so, because by that time their ships had been driven by both the fleet and the current into the narrowest part of the channel. Onund and his men made a vigorous attack on Vigbjod, while Thrand attacked Vestmar, but they made little progress.

When Vigbjod's crew began to thin out, Onund and his men boarded the ship. Vigbjod noticed this and urged his men forward, while he turned to face Onund. Most of Onund's men yielded their ground, but he told them to wait and see the outcome of his encounter with Vigbjod, because Onund was a very strong fighter.

They wedged a log under Onund's knee so that he would stand quite firmly. The viking moved along the ship from the aft until he reached Onund, and struck at him with his sword, hacking his shield away where the blow struck. His sword rebounded into the log below Onund's knee and stuck there. As Vigbjod leaned over to jerk the sword back, Onund aimed a blow at his shoulder, cutting off his arm and putting him out of action. Once Vestmar knew that his companion was felled, he rushed for the outermost ship and fled, as did all his men who could make their way there. Afterwards, Onund and his crew examined the casualties.

Vigbjod was on the verge of death by then.

Onund went up to him and spoke a verse:

3.

See if your wounds bleed.

Did you see me flinch?

You did not deal a scratch to me,
the one-legged slinger of riches.

Many breakers of battle-axes
are more brag than brains.

That man was not generous
with his strength when challenged.

*slinger of riches: noble (generous) man
breakers of battle-axes: good fighters*

generous with his strength: i.e. did not put up a good fight

They seized a great amount of booty and returned to Barra in the autumn.

5 The following summer they made preparations to sail west to Ireland. Balki and Hallvard set off across the ocean and went to Iceland, where there was said to be plenty of good land available. Balki then took land in Hrutasfjord and lived at two farms, both called Balkastadir. Hallvard took land in Sugandafjord (Surf Fjord) and Skalavik as far as Stigi, and settled there.

Thrand and Onund went to see Eyvind the Norwegian. He welcomed his brother warmly, but when he found out that Onund was with him, he became angry and wanted to attack him. Thrand asked him not to, saying there was no justification for aggression against Norsemen, especially if they were not causing any trouble. Eyvind replied that Onund had shown aggression towards King Kjarval in the past and would pay for it now. The two brothers talked the matter over at length until Thrand said that he and Onund would share the same fate, and Eyvind backed down. They spent a long time there that summer and went raiding with Eyvind, who considered Onund a very courageous man. They went to the Hebrides in the autumn. Eyvind bestowed all their inheritance on his brother, if Bjorn, their father, were to die before Thrand. Then they stayed in the Hebrides until they married their brides, and for several winters afterwards.

6 The next thing that happened was that Bjorn, Thrand's father, died. When Grim the Hersir heard this he went to see Ondott Crow and claimed the inheritance left by Bjorn, but Ondott said Thrand was his father's heir. Grim pointed out that Thrand had gone west to Britain, and Bjorn was from Gotland; the king was

entitled to inherit from all foreigners. Ondott said he planned to keep the inheritance for his grandson Thrand, so Grim left without gaining anything from his claim.

Thrand heard the news of his father's death and set off from the Hebrides at once, along with Onund Tree-leg. At the same time, Ofeig Grettir and Thormod Skafti left for Iceland with the people from their households, and landed at Eyrar in the south, where they spent their first winter with Thorbjorn Salmon-catcher. After that they took land in Gnuhverjahrepp. Ofeig settled on the western side, between the rivers Thvera and Kalfa, and lived at Ofeigsstadir near Steinsholt. Thormod settled on the eastern side and lived in Skaftaholt. Thormod had two daughters: Thorvor, whose son was Thorodd the *Godi* from Hjalli, and Thorve, the mother of Thorstein the Godi, who was the father of Bjarni the Wise.

To return to Thrand and Onund, they sailed over to Norway with such a strong wind behind them that their voyage went unreported until they reached Ondott Crow.

He welcomed Thrand warmly and told him about the claim Grim the Hersir had made to inherit from Bjorn: "It seems more proper to me for you rather than the king's slaves to inherit from your father. You have also had the good fortune to manage to come here without anyone knowing about your voyage. But I suspect that Grim will make a move against either of us if he can. I want you to take the inheritance for yourself and go abroad."

Thrand said that he would do so. He then took the inheritance and made preparations to leave Norway at once.

Before he put out to sea, Thrand asked Onund Tree-leg whether he did not want to go to Iceland. Onund said that he wanted to go and see his kinsmen and friends in the south of Norway first.

"Then we shall part now," said Thrand. "I would like you to support my kinsmen, because they will be the victims of revenge if I escape. I shall go to Iceland and would like you to go there too."

Onund promised he would do so, and they parted in great friendship. Thrand went to Iceland, where Ofeig and Thormod gave him a warm welcome. Thrand lived at Thrandarholt, west of the river Thjorsa.

7 Onund went south to Rogaland and met many of his kinsmen and friends there. He stayed there in secret with a man called Kolbein. He heard that King Harald had seized his property and entrusted it to a man called Harek, who was the king's agent. One night, Onund went to his house and made a surprise attack on him. Harek was led out to be executed. Onund took all the possessions that he and his men could find, then burned the house. He stayed in various places that winter.

That autumn, Grim the Hersir killed Ondott Crow for refusing him the inheritance in the king's name. Signy, Ondott's wife, carried all their valuables out to a ship the same night and left with her sons, Asmund and Asgrim, to stay with her father Sighvat. Shortly afterwards she sent her sons to Sokndal to her *foster-father* Hedin, but they were not happy there for long and wanted to go back to their

mother. They left and went to stay at Kvinesdal for Yule with Ingjald the Loyal. He took them in on the insistence of his wife Gyda, and they remained there for the winter.

In the spring, Onund went north to Agder, for he had heard of Ondott's death, and that he had been slain. When he met Signy he asked her what assistance they would accept from him. She told him they were eager to take vengeance upon Grim the Hersir for killing Ondott. Ondott's sons were sent for and when they met Onund Tree-leg they joined forces and kept a watch on Grim's activities.

Grim brewed a great deal of ale that summer, because he had invited Earl Audun to stay with him. When Onund and Ondott's sons heard of this, they went to Grim's farm and set fire to the houses, taking them by surprise, and burned Grim the Hersir to death inside along with some thirty men. They took many valuables away with them. Onund went and hid in the woods, while the brothers took their foster-father Ingjald's boat and rowed off to stay in hiding close to the farm.

Earl Audun arrived for the feast as planned, but his friend was nowhere to be found. He gathered men and stayed there several nights without finding a trace of Onund and his companions. The earl slept in a loft with two other men.

Onund knew about everything that was happening at the farm and sent for the brothers. When they arrived, Onund gave them the choice of keeping guard over the farm or attacking the earl, and they chose to attack him. They broke down the door of the loft with a battering ram and Asgrim grabbed the earl's two companions and dashed them down so hard that he almost killed them. Asgrim ran at the earl and demanded *compensation* for his father's death, because Audun had plotted with Grim the Hersir and joined in the attack when Ondott was killed. The earl said he had no money with him and asked to be able to pay later. Then Asgrim pressed the point of his spear against the earl's chest and told him to pay up at once. The earl took off his necklace, three gold rings and a velvet cloak. Asgrim took these valuables and gave him the nickname Audun Chicken.

When the farmers and local people became aware of the assault, they came out to try to help the earl. A fierce battle followed, because Onund had a large party with him, and many worthy farmers and earl's men were killed. Then the brothers went and reported to Onund what they had done with the earl.

Onund said it was unfortunate that the earl had not been killed – "That would be some sort of revenge upon King Harald for the losses we have suffered on his account."

They said that this was a greater disgrace for the earl, and then they left for Surnadal to see Eirik Ale-eager, who was a landholder. He took them all in for the winter.

That Yule they had drinking feasts with a man called Hallstein Horse. Eirik played host first, and served them well and honestly. When it was Hallstein's turn to be host, a disagreement occurred and Hallstein struck Eirik with a drinking-horn. Eirik was unable to take revenge, and went home at that.

Ondott's sons were furious at this, and soon afterwards Asgrim went to Hall-

stein's farm, walked in alone and dealt him a mighty wound. The people indoors leapt to their feet and attacked Asgrim, but he fought them off and escaped from their clutches out into the dark. They thought they had killed him.

Onund and Asmund heard about the incident. They assumed that Asgrim was dead and there was nothing for them to do about it. Eirik advised them to go to Iceland and said that they would not stand a chance in Norway once the king got round to dealing with them. They took his advice and made preparations to sail to Iceland, taking a ship each. Hallstein was laid up with his wounds and died before Onund and his men sailed off. Kolbein, who was mentioned earlier, joined Onund's ship.

8 Onund and Asmund put to sea when they were ready and sailed together. Then Onund spoke a verse:

4.

Once I was thought fit to brave
the howling winds of swords;
when the piercing shower of spears
roared down – and Hallvard too.
Now with one leg I must mount
my steed of the waves,
bound for Iceland's shores.
This poet is past his prime.

They had a rough time at sea, and the strong southerly wind drove them north off their course. They reached Iceland, and were north of Langanes when they got their bearings. Their ships were so close together that they could call out to each other. Asmund said they ought to sail to Eyjafjord, and they agreed to, but when they tacked towards land, a storm blew up from the south-east. Onund's crew tried to sail close-hauled, but their sailyard tore loose, so they lowered sail and were driven out to sea. Asmund reached shelter by Hrisey Island and waited there for a favourable wind into Eyjafjord. Helgi the Lean gave him the whole of Kraeklingahlid to settle in, and he lived at southern Glera.

His brother Asgrim went to Iceland several years later and lived at northern Glera. He was the father of Ellida-Grim, whose son was called Asmund.

9 To return to Onund Tree-leg, he and his men drifted for several days until a north wind blew up and they could sail to land. Those who had been to Iceland before recognised that they were west of Skagi. They sailed into Strandafloi bay and when they made land at South Strandir, six men rowed out towards them on a ten-oared boat and asked who was in charge of the ship. Onund told them his name and asked them where they were from. They told him they were members of Thorvald from Drangar's household.

Then Onund asked whether all the land had been taken along Strandir, and they told him that there was little left to settle in the inner part of Strandir, and none on

the way north there. Onund asked his crew if they wanted to go and look in the west or take what was given to them there. They chose to take a look at the land first, sailed into the bay and anchored in the creek by Arnes, put out a boat and rowed to land.

A wealthy man called Eirik Snare was living there and had taken the land between Ingolfsfjord and Ofaera in Veidilausa. When Eirik heard that Onund had arrived, he invited him to accept anything he wanted, but said there was little land left that had not been settled already. Onund said he would like to see what there was first.

They went across the fjords, and when they reached Ofaera Eirik said, "Look at this place. None of the land here is settled, all the way to Bjorn's settlement."

A large mountain jutted out on that side of the fjords, and snow had fallen on it. Onund looked at the mountain and spoke a verse:

5.

This spear-shooter's life wavers
a course from right to left,
leaving lands and rights: my ribbed ship
roams the seas like a tame horse.
I have left behind many kinsmen
and lands to reach this pass:
I have struck a harsh bargain, swapped
my fields for the cold-backed mountain.

cold-backed mountain: i.e. Kaldbak

"Many people have lost so much in Norway," Eirik replied, "that will never be made good. I think almost all the land has been settled in the main districts, so I would not encourage you to leave this place. I shall keep my word and you can have whatever of my land that you like."

Onund said he would accept the offer and took the land from Ofaera and the three bays of Byrgisvik, Kolbeinsvik and Kaldbaksvik, all the way to the cliffs at Kaldbakskleif. Then Eirik gave him the whole of Veidilausa and Reykjarfjord and the part of Reykjanes that was on his side. No agreement was made about harvesting the beach, because so much drifted in that everyone could take what he wanted.

Onund made a farmstead in Kaldbak and kept a large household. When his livestock began to increase, he set up another farm in Reykjarfjord.

Kolbein lived in Kolbeinsvik and Onund stayed there peacefully for several years.

10 Onund was so brave that few men were a match for him, even if they were completely able-bodied. He was well known all over Iceland because of his ancestry.

The next thing that happened was the quarrel between Ofeig Grettir and Thorbjorn the Champion of Earls, which ended with Thorbjorn killing Ofeig at Grettisgeil near Hael. Ofeig's sons gathered a large party to bring the case against his slayer. They sent for Onund Tree-leg, who rode south in the spring and stayed at

Hvamm with Aud the Deep-minded. She welcomed him warmly, since he had stayed with her in Britain.

Her grandson Olaf Feilan was a grown man by this time, and Aud was old and frail. She mentioned to Onund that she wanted her kinsman Olaf married, and wanted him to ask for the hand of Alfdís from Barra, who was a cousin of Onund's wife Aesa. Onund thought this was a good match, and Olaf rode south with him.

When Onund met his friends and kinsmen they invited him to stay with them. They discussed the case of Ofeig's killing and brought it before the Kjalarnes Assembly, because the *Althing* had still not been established at this time. The case was settled and heavy compensation was paid for Ofeig's killing, while Thorbjorn the Champion of Earls was sentenced to *outlawry*. His son was Solmund, the father of Kari the Singed. They lived outside Iceland for a long time afterwards.

Thrand invited Onund and his party to stay with him, along with Olaf and Thormod Skafti. They presented Olaf's proposal of marriage, which was readily accepted, because everyone knew what a generous woman Aud was. The bargain was settled, and Onund and his men rode home afterwards. Aud thanked Onund for supporting Olaf.

The same autumn, Olaf Feilan married Alfdís from Barra, and Aud the Deep-minded died, as is related in the *Saga of the People of Laxardal*.

11 Onund and Aesa had two sons. The elder one was called Thorgeir, and the younger one Ofeig Grettir. Aesa died soon after this episode, and Onund married a woman called Thordis. She was the daughter of Thorgrim from Gnup in Midfjord and was related to Skeggi from Midfjord. Onund had a son called Thorgrim by her. He soon grew up to be a tall and strong man, a dedicated farmer and a wise man.

Onund lived at Kaldbak into his old age. He died of illness and is buried in Treeleg's Mound. He was the bravest and nimblest one-legged man ever to live in Iceland.

Thorgrim was the most prominent of Onund's sons, even though the others were older. By the time he was twenty-five his hair was streaked with grey, so he was nicknamed Grey-head. His mother Thordis got married again, to Audun Shaft from Vididal in the north, and their son was Asgeir who lived by the river Asgeirsa. Thorgrim Grey-head and his brothers owned a great amount of property together, and never divided it out themselves.

Eirik Snare lived at Arnes, as was related earlier. His wife was Olof, the daughter of Ingolf from Ingolfsfjord. Their son Flosi was a promising man who had many friends. Three brothers, Ingolf, Ofeig and Eyvind, had come to Iceland and taken the three fjords named after them, and lived there afterwards. Eyvind's son Olaf lived in Eyvindarfjord at first, then moved to Drangar. He was a powerful man.

No quarrels occurred while the older men lived, but after Eirik died, Flosi claimed that the people from Kaldbak had no legal right to the lands that Eirik had given to Onund. A serious dispute developed among them, but Thorgrim and his

brothers remained there as before. The local people could not hold *games* together after that.

Thorgeir was in charge of the brothers' farm in Reykjarfjord and was in the habit of rowing out to fish, because the fjords were full of fish then.

Then the people in Vik made a plan. There was a man called Thorfinn who was one of Flosi's farmhands at Arnes. Flosi sent him off to kill Thorgeir, and he hid in the boat-shed. That morning, Thorgeir prepared to put out to sea and go fishing, taking two men with him, one named Hamund and the other Brand. Thorgeir led the way. He had a leather flask full of drink on his back. It was very dark, and as he was walking down from the boat-shed, Thorfinn ran up to him and struck him between the shoulderblades with an axe, which sunk in with a squelch. Thorfinn let go of the axe, because he assumed there would be no point in dressing the wound, and he wanted to escape at once.

So Thorfinn ran off to Arnes and arrived there before it was completely daylight. He announced that Thorgeir had been killed and said he would need Flosi's protection.

The only action they could take would be to offer a settlement, he said, "and that will make our case look a little more favourable, considering how serious it is."

Flosi said he would wait to hear what had happened first, "and I can see you're pretty scared by your mighty deed."

To return to Thorgeir, he had spun round when the blow struck him, so that the axe went into the leather flask without wounding him. Because it was dark they did not search for the attacker, but rowed out along the fjords to Kaldbak, where they told what had happened.

They made great fun of the incident and called him Thorgeir Bottle-back, and the nickname stuck with him. This verse was made about the attack:

6.

In the old days, heroes would bathe
shield-biters like shimmering fish
in a sea of blood flowing from wounds
deep as sharp-pointed roofs.

Now the weakling who never won
renown far and wide has smeared,
from sheer cowardice, both sides
of his axe with curdled whey.

shield-biters: swords

12 At this time a great famine occurred in Iceland, the like of which has never been seen since. Almost no fish were caught, and nothing drifted ashore either. It lasted for many years.

One autumn some merchants on a trading-ship were driven off course and shipwrecked in Vik. Flosi took four or five of them into his house; their leader was

called Stein. They stayed in various places around Vik and planned to rebuild their ship from the wreckage, but it proved too much for them. The ship was too narrow at the stem and stern, and too wide-beamed.

That spring, a mighty northerly gale set in, lasting for almost a week. After it died down everyone went out to see what had been brought ashore.

There was a man called Thorstein who lived at Reykjanes. He found a whale beached on the inner side of the promontory, at a place called Rifskei (Reef Skerry or Rib Skerry). It was a huge finback whale. He sent a messenger off to Vik at once to tell Flosi, and then to the neighbouring farms.

There was a man called Einar who lived at Gjogur. He was a tenant of the people from Kaldbak and was supposed to keep track of everything that drifted ashore on their side of the fjord. He saw that the whale had beached and set off in his boat at once and rowed across the fjord to Byrgisvík. From there, he sent a messenger to Kaldbak. When Thorgrim and his brothers heard the news, they made ready to leave as quickly as they could and set off in a ten-oared boat, twelve of them in all. Kolbein's sons Ivar and Leif went with them too, in a party of six, and every other farmer who could make it went out to the whale.

To return to Flosi, he sent for his kinsmen from Ingolfssford and Ofeggsford to the north, and for Olaf Eyvindarson, who was living at Drangar then. Flosi and the people from Vik arrived first. They began flensing the whale straight away and hauling the pieces up onto land. There were almost twenty of them to begin with, and their numbers soon grew.

Then the people from Kaldbak turned up in four boats. Thorgrim claimed the whale as his own and forbade the people from Vik from cutting up the whale, sharing it out or taking it away. Flosi asked him to prove that Eirik had specifically granted Onund Tree-leg the right to everything that drifted ashore there, otherwise he would defend it by force. Thorgrim thought he had too few men, so he did not mount an attack.

Then some men in a boat came rowing furiously over to that side of the fjord. They soon came ashore; it was Svan from Hol in Bjarnarfjord and his farmhands. When he joined Thorgrim he told him not to let himself be robbed. They were already close friends and Svan offered his support, which the brothers accepted. Then they launched a fierce attack. Thorgeir Bottle-back jumped up on the whale first and went for Flosi's farmhands. Thorfinn, who was mentioned before, was flensing the whale, standing just down from the head in a foothold he had cut for himself.

"I'm returning your axe," said Thorgeir.

Then he struck a blow at Thorfinn's neck, chopping his head off.

Flosi was standing on the beach when he saw this and urged his men to fight back. They fought for a good while, and the people from Kaldbak came off better. Hardly anyone had any weapons apart from the axes and knives they were using to cut up the whale. The people from Vik were driven away from the whale and onto the beach, but the Norwegian merchants were armed and proved dangerous. Stein, their skipper, chopped off Ivar Kolbeinsson's leg, but Ivar's brother Leif clubbed

one of Stein's companions to death with a whale rib. They fought with everything they could lay their hands on, and men were killed on both sides.

After this, Olaf from Drangar arrived with several boatloads of men who joined Flosi's side. The people from Kaldbak were outnumbered then, but had already loaded their boats, and Svan ordered them aboard. They made their way towards the boats, with the people from Vik pursuing them. When Svan reached the sea he struck out at Stein the merchant, inflicting a bloody wound on him, then leapt onto his boat. Thorgrim dealt Flosi a heavy wound and managed to get away. Olaf struck at Ofeig Grettir, dealing him a fatal wound. Thorgeir snatched Ofeig up in his arms and leapt aboard the boat with him. The people from Kaldbak rowed back across the fjord, and the two sides parted then.

This verse was made about the incident:

7.

I heard they were rather hard,
the weapons wielded at Rifsker:
many men struck out, armed
only with strips of whalemeat.
The metal-Goths gave
as good as they got:
they lobbed lumps of blubber.
That was a brawl, not a battle.

metal-Goths: (legendary) warriors

Afterwards a truce was arranged between them and they presented the case to the Althing. Thorodd the Godi, Skeggi from Midfjord and many men from south Iceland supported the people from Kaldbak. Flosi was outlawed along with many others who had been with him. The case impoverished him, because he insisted on paying all the compensation by himself. Thorgrim and his brother were unable to prove that they had paid for the lands and drift rights which Flosi had laid claim to.

Thorkel Moon was the *lawspeaker* then and was asked to rule on the matter.

He said that in a legal sense some payment appeared to have been made, although not the full price, "because Steinunn the Old and my grandfather Ingolf did likewise when she accepted the whole of Rosmhvalanes from him in return for a coloured hooded cloak. That settlement has never been invalidated, even though it is a much weightier case. I propose," he said, "that the disputed land should be shared out equally between the two parties. Then it will be agreed as law that each shall have the right to whatever drifts ashore on his own land."

This was done, and the land was divided up. Thorgrim and his brother handed over Reykjarfjord and all the land on the far side of it, but kept Kamb. A large amount of compensation was paid for Ofeig, but Thorfinn had forfeited his right to compensation. Thorgeir received compensation for the plot to kill him. After this they were reconciled.

¹ Arnarson, the first settler of Iceland.

Flosi set off for Norway with Stein the merchant, and sold his lands in Vik to Geirmund Wobbler, who lived there afterwards. The ship built by the merchants bulged out wide and was nicknamed Trekylli (Pouch of Wood). Trekyllisvik bay is named after it. Flosi set off abroad on it but was driven back into Oxarfjord. What happened after that is told in the Saga of Bodmod, Grimolf and Gerpir.¹

13 After this, Thorgrim and Thorgeir divided up all they owned: Thorgrim received all the money and possessions, and Thorgeir the land. Then Thorgrim moved to Midfjord and bought land at Bjarg with Skeggi's support. Thorgrim married Thordis, the daughter of Asmund from Asmundargnup who had taken land in Thingeyri.

Thorgrim and Thordis had a son called Asmund. He was tall, strong and wise, and had a fine head of hair, although he went grey at an early age. Because of this, he was nicknamed Grey-locks or Grey-fluff.

Thorgrim turned out to be a dedicated farmer and made all his men work very hard. Asmund was reluctant to work and the father and son did not get on well together. This continued until Asmund was grown up, when he asked his father for the means to travel abroad. Thorgrim replied that he would not give him very much, but let him have a few goods to trade. Asmund went abroad and soon started acquiring much wealth. He sailed to a number of countries and was an outstanding merchant, becoming very rich. He was a popular and trustworthy man, and had many kinsmen of high standing in Norway.

One autumn, Asmund was staying in Vik in Norway with a man of high standing called Thorstein, who was from Oppland and had a sister called Rannveig. She was a very good match, so Asmund asked to marry her, which was arranged with Thorstein's support. Asmund settled there for some while and became highly respected.

He and Rannveig had a son called Thorstein who was very handsome and strong, with a powerful voice, tall but rather slow in his movements. Because of this he was nicknamed Dromund (Galleon).

While Thorstein was still a young boy his mother fell ill and died. After her death, Asmund grew restless in Norway, so Rannveig's family looked after Thorstein and his possessions, while Asmund set off sailing again and became a man of renown.

Asmund landed in Hunavatn when Thorkel Scratcher was the chieftain in Vatnsdal. When he heard of Asmund's arrival, Thorkel rode out to his ship and invited him home to Masstadir in Vatnsdal. Asmund went there to stay. Thorkel was the son of Thorgrim, the Godi of Karnsa, and was a man of great wisdom.

All this took place after Bishop Fridrek and Thorvald Kodransson had arrived in Iceland. They were living at Laekjarmot at this time and were the first Christian missionaries in the north of Iceland. Thorkel and many others took the sign of the

¹ This saga, also referred to in the *Book of Settlements*, is unknown.

cross. Many incidents occurred between the bishop's men and the people of the north which are not part of this saga.

There was a woman called Asdis who was brought up in Thorkel's household. She was the daughter of Bard, the son of Jokul, whose father was Ingimund the Old. Ingimund was the son of Thorstein and grandson of Ketil the Large. Asdis's mother was Aldis, who was the daughter of Ofeig Grettir, as mentioned earlier. She was unmarried and considered an outstanding match on account of both her family and her wealth.

Asmund had grown bored with sailing and wanted to settle in Iceland, so he asked for Asdis's hand in marriage. Thorkel was well aware of Asmund's background and knew him to be both wealthy and clever with his money, so it was arranged that he would marry Asdis. Asmund became a close friend of Thorkel's and a good farmer, well-versed in law, and ambitious.

Shortly after this, Thorgrim Grey-head died and Asmund inherited the farm at Bjarg from him.

14 Asmund Grey-locks set up a farm at Bjarg, a large and impressive place with many people in the household. He was a popular man.

These were the children he had with Asdis: Atli was the oldest, a straightforward and gentle man, quiet and unassuming. Everyone liked him. Grettir was their second son. He was very overbearing as a child, taciturn and rough, and mischievous in both word and deed. His father Asmund showed him little affection, but his mother loved him dearly. Grettir Asmundarson was handsome, with a broad, short face, red-haired and fairly freckled, and as a child he was slow to develop. Asmund had a daughter called Thordis who later married Glum, the son of Ospak Kjallaksson from Skridinsenni. His second daughter, Rannveig, married Gamli, the son of Thorhall the Vinlander. They lived at Melar in Hrutafjord and had a son called Grim. Glum and Asmund's daughter Thordis had a son called Ospak, who quarrelled with Odd Ofeigsson, as is told in the *Saga of the Confederates*.

Grettir grew up at Bjarg to the age of ten. He began to develop then and Asmund told him he would have to do some work on the farm. Grettir answered that he was not suited for it, but asked all the same what he was supposed to do.

Asmund said, "You shall look after the geese I am rearing."

"A trifling job for weaklings," Grettir replied.

"Do the job well," said Asmund, "and we shall get on better."

Grettir took charge of the geese. There were fifty of them and many goslings as well. Before long he began to have trouble rounding them up, and thought the goslings were tedious, which infuriated him because he had a fairly short temper. A little while later some vagrants passing by found the goslings dead outside; the geese's wings were broken. This was in the autumn. Asmund was furious and asked Grettir if he had killed the birds.

Grettir grinned and answered:

8.

When winter comes around I wring
the goslings' necks for certain;
and if older ones are there as well
I can deal with them single-handed.

"You shan't deal with them any more," said Asmund.

"A true friend spares others from evil," Grettir replied.

"You will be given another job," said Asmund.

"The more you try, the more you learn," Grettir replied. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"I always have my back rubbed by the fireside, you shall do that," said Asmund.

"That will be warm for my hands," said Grettir, "but it's still a job for weaklings."

Grettir did this job for some time, but as autumn went on Asmund began to relax sitting inside in the warmth, and urged Grettir to scratch his back harder.

In those days it was the custom on farms to have big *fire-halls* where everyone sat beside the long fire in the evenings. Tables were set up there, and everyone slept alongside the fire in the evening. Women would comb wool there during the day.

One evening when Grettir had to scratch Asmund's back, the old man said to him: "You ought to shake off that laziness of yours for once, you layabout."

"It's a bad thing to goad the obstinate," said Grettir.

"You're good for nothing," Asmund replied.

Seeing the wool-combs lying on the bench, Grettir picked one up and ran it along Asmund's back. Asmund leapt to his feet in a rage and struck at Grettir with his stick, but he dodged the blow. Then Grettir's mother came in and asked what they were fighting about.

Grettir spoke a verse:

9.

He should ward off harm from me
but wants me to burn my hands;
I feel it sorely, bearer of gold;
we both suffer for this plan.
Goddess of cloth, I go to work
on the spreader of treasure
thoroughly with uncut nails:
I see beaks pecking at deep wounds.

bearer of gold: woman

goddess of cloth: woman

spreader of treasure: noble man

Grettir's mother disliked this trick that he had played and said he would not turn out to be a heedful sort of person. Relations between Asmund and Grettir did not improve after this incident.

Some time later, Asmund told Grettir to look after his horses. Grettir said he liked that idea more than rubbing his father's back by the fire.

"Now you shall do exactly as I tell you," said Asmund. "I have a fawn mare with a

dark stripe down her back; I call her Kengala (Back-stripe). She is so acute about the weather and the water-level in the rivers that a snowstorm never fails to materialise if she refuses to graze. In that case you should keep the horses in the stable, but take them north to the ridge when winter sets in. It seems to me that you need to make a better job of this task than the other two I gave you."

Grettir replied, "That's a cold and manly job. But I'm wary of trusting the mare, because I've never heard about anyone who has until now."

Then Grettir took over looking after the horses and Yule came and went. Then it turned very cold and snowed, making the ground hard for them to graze. Grettir had thin clothes on and was still fairly tender. He began to feel the cold, while Kengala always stood out in the most exposed places every time there was a storm. She never entered the meadow so early that she had returned to the stable before nightfall. Grettir thought he would play a trick on her to pay her back for staying out all the time.

Early one morning, Grettir went to the stable and opened it. Kengala was standing at the trough, because even when the other horses were given fodder she would eat it all herself. Grettir climbed on her back with a sharp knife in his hand, and slashed her across the shoulders with it and down her back on either side of her spine. The mare was fat and shied from humans, and she reacted violently, rearing up and hammering the walls with her hooves. Grettir fell off her back and when he got to his feet he tried to mount her again. After a sharp struggle, he ended by flaying all the hide off her back right down to the flanks, then drove the horses out to the pasture. The only thing Kengala bit at was her own back, and just after midday she started up and ran back to the stable.

Grettir closed up the stable and went home. Asmund asked him where the horses were, and Grettir said he had put them inside the stable as usual. Asmund said there must be a snowstorm in the offing, when the horses refused to stay outside in such weather.

"Wisdom falls short where it is most expected," said Grettir.

The night passed and the snowstorm did not materialise. Grettir drove out the horses and Kengala could not stand being out in the pasture. Asmund thought it was peculiar that the weather did not change.

On the third morning, Asmund went to see the horses.

He went up to Kengala and said, "I think the horses have had little benefit from such a good winter, but your back will be as firm as ever, Kengala."

"The foreseeable happens, and the unforeseeable too," said Grettir.

Asmund rubbed the mare's back, and its hide came off with his hand. He was puzzled by the state she was in, and said Grettir must be responsible. Grettir grinned and said nothing.

Asmund went home ranting.

He went into the fire-hall and heard his wife say, "Surely my son looked after the horses well."

Asmund spoke a verse:

10.

First of all, he has flayed
my trusty Kengala. Fair women
mostly go too far with their words:
Grettir tricked me.
That lad is certainly wise enough
to teach me not entrust him
with orders. May the goddess
of the ring take in my words.

goddess of the ring: woman (Asdis)

Asdis answered, "I do not know which I object to more: that you keep giving him jobs, or that he does them all the same way."

"This will be the end of that now," Asmund said. "But he'll be treated all the worse for it."

"Then neither of us should accuse the other," said Grettir, and the matter rested there for a while.

Asmund had Kengala put to death.

Grettir played many more pranks in his youth which are not recounted. He grew very big, but no one knew how strong he was, because he was not a wrestler. He often made verses and ditties that tended to be scornful. He did not lounge around in the fire-hall¹, and he was taciturn most of the time.

15 There were many young men growing up in Midfjord at this time. Torfa the Poetess, who lived at Torfustadir, had a son called Bersi, an accomplished young man and fine poet. The brothers Kormak and Thorgils lived at Mel, and a lad called Odd was brought up with them. He was a dependant living on their farm, so he was nicknamed Odd the Pauper-poet. There was a man called Audun who grew up at Audunarstadir in Vididal, a straightforward and kind person and the strongest lad for his age in that area. Kalf, Asgeir's son, lived at Asgeirsa with his brother Thorvald. Grettir's brother Atli had also grown very manly by this time and was an exceptionally peaceful character who was liked by everybody.

All these youths used to play *ball games* at Lake Midfjardarvatn. People would go there from Midfjord and Vididal, along with many others from Vesturhop and Vatnsnes and from Hrutafjord, too. Those who came from farthest away used to stay overnight there. Players of equal strength were matched against each other, and it was generally an enjoyable event every autumn.

When Grettir was fourteen he went to the games at the insistence of his brother Atli. Players were lined up to face each other, and Grettir was pitted against Audun, who was mentioned before. Audun was several years their elder. He hit the ball over Grettir's head so that he could not catch it, and it bounced far away over the ice. Grettir lost his temper at this, thinking that Audun had done it to make fun of him, but fetched the ball all the same, came back and, when he was within reach, hurled

¹ i.e. he was not a "coal-biter," an unpromising youth who turned into a hero.

it at Audun's forehead, making it bleed. Audun struck out at Grettir with the *bat* he was holding, but only glanced off him, because Grettir dodged the blow.

Then they grappled with each other and started wrestling, and everyone could tell Grettir was stronger than they had imagined, because Audun was very powerful. After they had fought for a long time, Grettir lost his balance in the end, and Audun jumped on him and kneed him in the groin. Atli, Bersi and many others ran over and broke up the fight.

Grettir said there was no need to hold him like a mad dog – “Only a *slave* takes vengeance at once, and a coward never.”

No one allowed the incident to develop into a quarrel, because the brothers Kalf and Thorvald wanted them to make up afterwards. Moreover, Grettir and Audun were distant relatives. The game went on as before and nothing else caused any friction.

16 Thorkel Scratcher was very old by now. He was the *godi* of the people from Vatnsdal and a great chieftain. As befits relatives by marriage, he and Asmund Grey-locks were close friends, and Thorkel made a habit of riding to Bjarg every spring to visit everyone there. In the spring after this incident he went to Bjarg as usual.

Asmund and Asdis welcomed him with open arms. He spent three nights there, and the two kinsmen talked together about many things. Thorkel asked Asmund how capable he imagined his sons would turn out to be. Asmund said he expected Atli to become a good farmer, prudent and wise.

“A useful man, just like you,” said Thorkel. “But what do you say about Grettir?”

“He will be a strong and unruly man,” said Asmund. “He has been obstinate and caused me trouble.”

“That does not bode well, kinsman,” Thorkel replied. “Anyway, what arrangements shall we make for riding to the Althing this summer?”

“I’m starting to have trouble moving about, and I’d prefer to stay at home,” said Asmund.

“Do you want Atli to go instead of you?” asked Thorkel.

“I don’t think I can spare him, because of all the work on the farm and all the provisions he has to get,” said Asmund. “Grettir refuses to do any work here, and he is clever enough to handle my affairs for me at the *Thing* under your guidance.”

“It’s up to you to decide, kinsman,” said Thorkel.

When he was ready to leave, Thorkel rode off home, and Asmund sent him on his way with fine gifts.

Some time later, Thorkel made preparations to go to the Thing. He rode there taking sixty men with him, all the men who supported his authority as a *godi*. He arrived at Bjarg, and Grettir rode from there with him. They rode south over the moor called Tvidaegra (Two days’ journey). Since there were few places to rest the horses in the highland they rode fast into the settled district. When they reached Fljotstunga, they decided it was time to sleep, so they unbridled their horses and let

them loose with their saddles on. The men slept there until late, and when they woke up they looked around for their horses, which had strayed off in all directions and some had been rolling on the ground. Grettir was the last of them to find his horse.

In those days it was the custom for people to take their own provisions to the Thing with them and most people rode with a bag of food across their saddle. The saddle had moved under the belly of Grettir’s horse, but his bag was missing, so he went to look for it but could not find it anywhere. He noticed a man walking around at a brisk pace, and asked him who he was. The man said his name was Skeggi, and that he was a farmhand from As in Vatnsdal.

“I’m with Thorkel’s party,” he added, “and I’ve been careless and lost my bag of food.”

“What only happens to one is worst,” said Grettir. “I’ve lost the bag I had with me too. Let’s look for them together.”

Skeggi thought this was a good idea, and the two of them roamed the area for a while. All of a sudden Skeggi darted across the moorland and snatched up a bag there. Grettir saw him bend down and asked what he had picked up.

“My bag of food,” said Skeggi.

“Who else says it’s yours?” asked Grettir. “Let me have a look. One thing may look like something else.”

Skeggi said no one was going to take his own belongings from him. Grettir grabbed at the bag and they tugged at it, both insisting they were right.

“It’s strange of you to suppose,” said the farmhand, “that just because not all the people in Vatnsdal are as rich as you, they wouldn’t dare to keep hold of what’s theirs against you.”

Grettir said people should have what was theirs, whatever their status.

Skeggi said, “What a pity Audun’s too far away to throttle you like he did at the ball game.”

“Be that as it may,” said Grettir. “You certainly won’t throttle me, whatever happened then.”

Skeggi seized his axe and struck at Grettir. Seeing this, Grettir grabbed the shaft of the axe with his left hand, above where Skeggi was holding it, and wrenched it free in an instant. Grettir struck him with the same axe right through to his brain. The farmhand dropped down dead on the spot.

Grettir took the bag of food and threw it across his saddle, then rode off to join his companions. Thorkel was riding in front, unaware of what had happened. People had noticed that Skeggi had gone missing from the party, and when Grettir reached them they asked him what he knew of his whereabouts.

Grettir spoke a verse:

11.

I imagine a cleft-dwelling troll
made a wild rush for Skeggi,

cleft-dwelling troll: ogress living in the cliffs, also an axe

that battle-axe was thirsty
to taste blood just now.

battle-axe: hag, also axe

Not sparing her fangs, she stretched
her harsh mouth over his head,
split his forehead in two:
I was there when they fought.

Thorkel's men ran up then and said a *troll* would never have taken him in broad daylight.

Thorkel kept quiet, then said, "There's more to it than that; Grettir must have killed him. So how did it happen?"

Grettir told him all about their quarrel.

"Things have taken a bad turn," said Thorkel. "Skeggi was sent to accompany me. He was from a good family, and I shall accept responsibility by paying whatever compensation is decided, but I have no control over whether a sentence of outlawry is passed. You have two options, Grettir: either go to the Thing and take the chance of what is decided there, or turn back now."

Grettir opted to go to the Thing, so he went on with them. The case was brought by the slain man's heirs. Thorkel undertook to pay compensation, but Grettir was sentenced to *lesser outlawry* and was banished from Iceland for three years.

When they rode back from the Thing, the chieftains rested their horses at Sledaas before going their separate ways. Grettir lifted up a boulder lying in the grass there, which is now called Grettishaf (Grettir's Lift). Many people went up to look at it and were astonished that such a young man could lift such a huge rock.

Grettir rode home to Bjarg and told his father what had happened. Asmund showed little reaction to the news and said Grettir would turn out to be a troublemaker.

17 There was a man called Hafliði who lived at Reyðarfell in the Hvítarsíða district. He was a merchant and owned a trading ship which had been hauled up on the river Hvítá. One member of his crew was a man called Bard, who had a young and pretty wife.

Asmund sent a messenger to Hafliði asking him to take Grettir on and look after him. Hafliði said he had been told that Grettir was an unruly character, but for the sake of his friendship with Asmund he agreed to take him along, and made preparations to sail abroad. Asmund refused to give Grettir anything for the journey except provisions and a little *homespun cloth*. Grettir asked his father to give him a weapon.

"You've never done anything I've told you. And I don't know what useful thing you would do with weapons, so I shan't be giving you any."

"Then there's no need to reward a favour that isn't done," said Grettir.

The father and son parted with little love lost between them. Many people wished Grettir a safe journey, but few a safe return.

His mother accompanied him on his way.

"You haven't been sent on your way as well equipped as I would like to see some-

one of your standing, my son," she told him before they parted. "What I think you lack most is a useful weapon. Something tells me you will be needing one."

Then she took an inlaid sword from under her cloak, a fine piece of workmanship.

"This sword belonged to my grandfather Jokul and the most prominent people of the Vatnsdal clan, and it brought them many triumphs. I want to give you this sword. Make good use of it."

Grettir thanked her kindly for the gift, saying he thought it was better than anything else, even much more valuable gifts. Then he went on his way, and Asdis wished him many good things.

Grettir rode south over the moor, not stopping until he had crossed it and reached the ship. Hafliði welcomed him warmly and asked him what he was equipped with for the journey.

Grettir spoke a verse:

12.

Rider of the cloak that clothes the wind!
I think that rich man has given me
a poor start from home. I hoped
for gold from the dragon's lair.
For her gift of a wound-maker
a woman of calibre proved
the truth of the ancient saying:
The mother is best to the child.

cloak that clothes the wind: sail; its rider: seafarer

Hafliði said it was obvious that she cared the most for him.

They put to sea when they were ready to sail and the wind was favourable, and when they were clear of all the shallows they hoisted sail. Grettir made himself a place to sleep under the ship's boat and refused to leave it, neither to bail out the ship nor turn the sails, nor do any of the tasks on board he was supposed to share with the rest of the crew. Nor would he pay them to be relieved of his duties.

They sailed south around Reykjanes and then along the south of Iceland, and when they lost sight of land they ran into strong breaking waves. The ship tended to leak and could hardly stand up to the breakers, and the crew were drenched. Grettir kept making *lampoons* about them, which infuriated them.

One day when it was both windy and cold, the crew called out to Grettir and told him to pull his weight – "Our fingers are frozen to the bone."

Grettir looked up and said:

13.

What luck if every layabout's fingers
would shrivel up and drop off.

They could not get him to work, but disliked his behaviour all the more and said they would make him pay for all the lampoons and offences he had made.

"You'd much rather stroke Bard's wife's belly with your hands than do your duties on board," they said. "We won't stand for it."

The weather grew steadily worse and the crew had to bail the ship out day and night, and they started threatening Grettir.

When Hafliði heard this, he went over to where Grettir was lying and said to him, "I don't like the way you and the crew have been getting on together. You refuse to do your duties and you lampoon them into the bargain, and now they're threatening to throw you overboard. This is no way to behave."

"Why can't they get on with their own business?" Grettir asked him. "But I'd like to leave a couple of them lying around before I disappear overboard."

"This is impossible," said Hafliði. "Things won't turn out well for us if this is the way you and the crew are going to behave. I want to suggest a plan to you."

"What is it?" asked Grettir.

"They complain about you making lampoons about them," said Hafliði. "I suggest that you make a lampoon about me, and then maybe they'll put up with you better."

"The only verse I would ever make about you would be praise," said Grettir. "I would never compare you with those layabouts."

Then Hafliði said, "You could make a verse that sounds better if you look closely at it, but is none too pretty on first impression."

"I can manage that," said Grettir.

So Hafliði went up to the crew and said, "You're toiling away so hard, it's no surprise that you disapprove of Grettir."

"His lampoons annoy us more than anything else," they said.

Then Hafliði said in a loud voice, "He'll certainly pay for it in the end, too."

Hearing Hafliði criticising him, Grettir spoke a verse:

14.

Life has changed for loud-mouthed
Hafliði since he supped
on curds at Reyðarfell;
he felt at home then.
See the proud spearhead
of battle breakfast now
day and night on the elk
that rides the land-hugging seas.

*breakfast: or, read as break fast for a battle image
elk that rides the seas: ship*

The merchants disliked the verse intensely and said that Grettir would not get away with heaping abuse on Hafliði.

Then Hafliði said, "Grettir deserves to be humiliated by you, but I don't want to stake my honour against his spite and heedlessness. We shall not take revenge on him while we are in such peril, but you can remember it when you reach land if you wish."

"Why can't we put up with it like you?" said the merchants. "Why should lampoons hurt us more than you?"

Hafliði told them to try, and afterwards they took far less offence at his lampoons. They had a long, rough passage, and the ship began leaking in several places. The crew toiled so hard that they began to flag.

Bard's young wife made a habit of sewing Grettir's shirt-sleeves up for him, and the crew made fun of him for it.

Hafliði went over to where Grettir lay and spoke a verse:

15.

Stand up from where you're buried, Grettir,
the ship is furrowing the waves deep
while you chatter cheerfully
with that glad-hearted woman.
She has rolled up your sleeves, sewn them
tight around your arms, that woman,
she wants you to respect
your companions who are working below.

Grettir stood up at once and spoke a verse:

16.

I stand up, how much beneath me
the ship is heaving and pitching.
I know the woman will frown
on me for slouching on board.
That maid of fair spirit and face
is sure to disapprove
if I let others here
always do my work for me.

Then he ran to the men who were bailing water at the aft of the ship and asked what they wanted him to do. They said he would not do much good.

"Many hands make light work," said Grettir.

Hafliði told them not to refuse his assistance – "Maybe he thinks he can get all this business off his hands by offering to help."

In those days there were no bilge troughs on ships, but the bailing was done using buckets or tubs, which was a wet and tiring job. Two buckets were used, and one was carried down while the other went up. The bailers told Grettir to dip the buckets in the water, saying this would show them what he was capable of. He answered back that this would not take much effort to show them, and he went down and filled the buckets with water, while two men emptied them. Before long they were exhausted. Four others took over from them, and the same thing happened. Some claim there were eight men emptying the buckets for him by the end when the ship was completely bailed out. After this, the merchants spoke very dif-

ferently about Grettir, because they saw what he could accomplish on account of his great strength. He also turned out to be very energetic in helping them afterwards with whatever was needed.

They were carried eastwards across the ocean, and a heavy fog descended. The next thing they knew was that one night their ship sailed into a skerry, ripping a hole in the keel under the prow. The ship's boat was put out with all the women and goods on board. There was an islet nearby and they took as much of their belongings to it as they could manage that night.

When day broke they discussed where they had landed. Some of them who had sailed abroad before recognised that they had reached South More in Norway. There was an island called Haramsoy a short way off towards the mainland, where a lot of people lived, and the local landholder had his home.

18 The landholder who lived on the island was called Thorfinn. He was an important chieftain, the son of Kar the Old, who had lived there for a long time.

When it was fully light, people on the island could see the merchants in trouble. Thorfinn was told and reacted at once by sending out a large *warship* that he owned, with sixteen oars on either side. Almost thirty men were on board and they rowed with all their might and saved the merchants' belongings, but the ship sank, and many valuables were lost with it. Thorfinn had all the people from the ship taken to his house, where they stayed for a week, drying out their goods. Then the merchants left for the south, and have left the saga.

Grettir remained behind with Thorfinn and kept a low profile. Mostly, he said very little and Thorfinn had him fed but did not pay much attention to him. Grettir was unsociable towards him and refused to go outside with him during the day. Thorfinn disapproved, but could not bring himself to refuse him food. Thorfinn was a very houseproud and cheerful host, and liked everyone else to be happy too.

Grettir went visiting a lot and often went to the other farms on the island. There was a man called Audun who lived at a place called Vindheim. Grettir went there every day and struck up a friendship with him, and would sit there late into the day.

Late one evening, Grettir was about to walk back to Thorfinn's when he saw a great fire flare up on the headland down from Audun's farm. Grettir asked what strange thing was happening there. Audun said he had no need to find out.

"Where I come from," said Grettir, "people who saw that would say it was the glow of a treasure hoard."

"The keeper of that fire," answered the farmer, "is someone we are better off not trying to find out about."

"I'd like to find out," said Grettir.

"There's a mound on the headland," said Audun, "where Kar the Old, Thorfinn's father, was buried. At first they owned a single farm on the island, but since Kar died he has haunted the island and frightened away all the farmers who owned land here. Now Thorfinn owns the entire island and no one who is under his protection is harmed by Kar."

Grettir said he had done well to tell him this, and said, "I shall come back tomorrow. Have some tools ready for me to dig with."

"I advise you not to get involved in this," said Audun, "because I know Thorfinn will hate you for it."

Grettir said he was prepared to take that risk.

The night passed, and Grettir came back early in the morning. The tools were ready for him, and the farmer accompanied him to the mound.

Grettir broke open the mound and worked furiously, not stopping until he had reached the timber props, by which time it was very late in the day. Then he tore away the props. Audun discouraged him as best he could from entering the mound.

Grettir told him to watch over the rope, "because I want to find out what's inside there."

Then Grettir went inside the mound. It was dark and smelled unpleasant. He explored the mound to see how it was laid out. He found some horse bones, then he rubbed against the carved back of a chair and could tell there was a man sitting in it. A huge amount of gold and silver had been piled up there and the man's feet were resting on a chest full of silver. Grettir took all the treasure and carried it over to the rope. And when he was walking back inside the mound, something grabbed him tight. He dropped the treasure and fought back, and the two of them grappled violently, knocking everything over that was in their way. The mound-dweller went for him ferociously, and Grettir backed off for a long time, until he realised that he would need all his strength. They both fought with all their might, and struggled towards where the horse bones were. They grappled for a long while there and both of them were brought to their knees at different times, until in the end the mound-dweller toppled over backwards with a mighty crash. Audun ran away from the rope, thinking that Grettir must have been killed. Then Grettir drew his sword, Jokul's Gift, swung at the mound-dweller's neck and chopped off his head. He placed the head up against the mound-dweller's buttocks and took all the treasure over to the rope. Audun was nowhere around, so he had to clamber up the rope himself and then pull up the treasure, which he had tied to the end of it.

Grettir was feeling very stiff after his fight with Kar and went back to Thorfinn's farm with the treasure. Everyone there was seated at the table. Thorfinn glared at Grettir when he entered the *hall* and asked him what he needed to do that was so important he couldn't keep the same hours as other people.

"Many little things happen at night," Grettir said.

Then he spread out on the table all the treasure he had taken from the mound. Grettir had his eye on one piece of the treasure in particular, a fine short-sword. He said he had never seen such a good weapon before, and handed it over last of all. Thorfinn's eyebrows lifted when he saw the treasure and the short-sword, because it was an heirloom that had never left his family.

"Where did you get this treasure from?" Thorfinn asked.

Grettir spoke a verse:

17.

Spreader of gold that glitters on waves, *spreader of gold: generous man*
 my hopes of winning treasure *hopes...are dashed: i.e. he perhaps realises Thorfinn will*
 from the mound are clearly dashed: *take the treasure himself*
 men will soon hear of this.
 Yet I see too that few makers *makers of sword-blizzards: warriors*
 of sword-blizzards will earn
 much joy when they seek
 the dragon's mire of gold there. *dragon's mire: treasure where dragons lie*

Thorfinn answered, "You are not a man of faint heart. No one until now has ever been keen to break into that mound. I know that it is a waste of treasure to bury it in the ground or a mound, so I cannot say you have done wrong, because after all you brought it to me. And where did you find that fine short-sword?"

Grettir answered with a verse:

18.

Spreader of gold that burns on waves, *spreader of gold: generous man*
 in a murky mound I gained hold
 of the sword that stretches wounds:
 a ghost was felled then.
 Were it mine, that scourge of men,
 that precious flash of flame *flash of flame: i.e. sword*
 clashing down on helmets,
 would never leave my hand.

"You state your case well," said Thorfinn, "but you must prove your prowess before I give you the sword, because my father never gave it to me while he was alive."

"There's no telling whom it will serve the best in the end," Grettir answered.

Thorfinn took the treasure and kept the sword by his bedside. The winter passed and Yule came around, and nothing else eventful happened.

19 Earl Eirik, Hakon's son, had left for England the previous summer to see his brother-in-law, King Canute the Great. He had appointed his son, Earl Hakon, as ruler of Norway, but had entrusted his brother Earl Svein with governing the realm and taking care of Hakon, who was still only a boy.

Before leaving Norway, Earl Eirik had summoned the landholders and powerful farmers to him. They discussed many aspects of the law and government of the country, because Eirik was a firm ruler. People there thought it was a disgraceful practice to allow robbers and berserks to challenge men of high standing to duels for their money or wives, without compensation being paid for the one who was slain. Many had suffered disgrace and lost their money, and some had even lost their lives, so Earl Eirik banned all duels in Norway. He also outlawed all robbers and berserks who caused any trouble. Thorfinn Karsson from Haramsoy was involved in planning this measure, because he was a wise man and a close friend of the earl.

The worst troublemakers were said to be two brothers called Thorir Paunch and

Ogmund the Evil. They came from Halogaland and were bigger and stronger than anybody else. They would go berserk and spare nothing when they flew into a rage. They used to take away men's wives and daughters and keep them for a week or two, then return them. Wherever they went, they used to plunder and cause other trouble. Earl Eirik outlawed them throughout Norway. Thorfinn was the most avid campaigner to have them banished, and they felt that he deserved to be paid back with all the hatred they could show. Then the earl went abroad, as described in his saga,¹ and Earl Svein ruled and governed Norway.

Thorfinn went home to his farm and stayed there most of the time until Yule, as mentioned above. Towards Yule he made preparations to go to another of his farms, in a place called Slysford on the mainland. He had invited many of his friends there, but his wife was unable to go with him, because their grown-up daughter was ill, so the two women stayed behind at home. Thorfinn took thirty freed slaves with him to the Yule feast, which was a joyful and merry occasion.

On Yule Eve the weather was bright and calm. Grettir spent most of his time outdoors during the day, and saw ships sailing north and south along the shore, because everybody was on the way to feasts. The farmer's daughter had recovered by then and could walk about with her mother. The day passed.

Then Grettir saw a boat being rowed up to the island. It was not large, but had overlapping shields arranged from stem to stern, and was painted above the waterline. The men on board were rowing vigorously, heading for Thorfinn's boat-shed. When the boat touched ground the crew leapt ashore; Grettir counted them, and there were twelve in all. They did not seem to have come in peace. After they had hauled their boat ashore onto dry land, they ran over to Thorfinn's boat-shed. Inside was Thorfinn's huge warship which had always needed thirty men to launch, but the twelve of them tugged it straight out onto the gravelly beach, lifted up their own boat, and put it in the boat-shed.

Grettir could tell they were not going to wait for an invitation, so he went up to them and greeted them warmly, asking who they were and the name of their leader.

The one he had asked answered back at once that he was called Thorir and nicknamed Thorir Paunch. Then he mentioned his brother Ogmund's name and those of the rest of their companions.

"I expect your master Thorfinn has heard about us," he said. "Would he happen to be at home?"

"You're in luck," said Grettir, "because you've arrived at a very good time, if you are the men I think you are. The master of the house is away and all the free-born men in the household have gone with him, and they aren't planning to return until after Yule. His wife and daughter are at home. If I had any score to settle, this is exactly the time I would have wanted to arrive, because everything you need is to be had here, ale and other pleasures."

Thorir kept quiet while Grettir talked away, then he said to Ogmund, "Things

¹ Unknown apart from this passing reference and one other.

have not gone the way I predicted, and I have a mind to repay Thorfinn for having us outlawed. This man tells us just what we wanted to hear, and we don't need to force the words out of him."

"Every man is the master of his own words," said Grettir. "I shall look after you in every way I can. Come home with me."

They thanked him and said they would accept his offer. When they reached the farmhouse, Grettir took Thorir by the arm and led him into the *main room*. Grettir was very talkative then. Thorfinn's wife was in the main room hanging up tapestries and making it ready for Yule. Hearing Grettir talking to someone, she stopped where she was on the floor and asked who it was that he was welcoming so openly.

"It is the right thing to do, to give guests a kind welcome, my good lady," said Grettir. "Master Thorir Paunch has arrived with eleven companions and they intend to stay here for Yule. That's a fine thing, because we were rather short of company before."

"I don't rank them with masters or fine men," she replied, "because they are the worst robbers and evil-doers around. I would gladly have given almost anything I own for them not to have come here at this time. And you're repaying Thorfinn badly for rescuing you from a shipwreck without a penny to your name and keeping you all winter as a free man."

"You would do better to help the guests out of their wet clothes than to criticise me. You'll have plenty of chance to do that later."

Then Thorir said, "Don't be surly, my good lady. You won't lack anything though your husband is away from home, for you'll have a man in his place, and so will your daughter and all the women of the household."

"That's spoken like a true man," said Grettir. "They won't be able to complain about being neglected."

All the women rushed out of the room and were seized with fear and fits of weeping.

"Hand over anything you want me to look after," Grettir told the berserks, "your weapons and wet clothes, because the women will be easier to handle when they are not scared."

Thorir said he did not care how much the women bickered, "but you deserve to be treated completely differently from the rest of the people here. I think we can make a true friend of you."

"That is up to you," said Grettir. "I for one don't treat all men alike."

Then they put down most of their weapons.

Afterwards, Grettir said, "I think you had better go over to the table and have something to drink, because all that rowing must have made you thirsty."

They said they were quite ready to do that, but did not know where the cellar was, so when Grettir asked whether they would leave everything to him, the berserks readily agreed. Grettir went off, fetched the ale and served it up. They were very tired and gulped it down in great draughts. He kept plying them with the strongest ale there was for a long time, and told them many amusing tales. It was a very noisy gathering and the people of the household had no wish to join them.

Then Thorir said, "I have never met a stranger who has treated us as well as this man. How would you like us to reward you for your service?"

"I don't want any reward for the time being, but if we're still as good friends when you leave as we seem to be now, then I shall join your band. Even though I may be a lesser man than some of you, I shan't get in the way of your doing great deeds."

They were delighted at his words and wanted to make a firm pledge of companionship at once.

Grettir declined, saying, "There's truth in the old saying that 'Ale makes another man.' Let's not rush into doing any more than I have said already. We are all rather impetuous characters."

They said they would not take the promise back. As the evening wore on and it grew very dark, Grettir noticed that they were becoming worn out by all the drinking.

"Don't you think it's time for bed now?" he said.

Thorir said it was, "and I'll keep my promise to the lady of the house."

Grettir left the room and called out in a loud voice, "Get into bed, ladies. Master Thorir wants you there."

They shouted curses back at him, howling and screaming, just as the berserks left the room.

"Let us go outside," Grettir said to them. "I'll show you where Thorfinn keeps his clothes."

They agreed and they went out to a huge, solidly-built outhouse with a big lock on the door. Beside it, joined by a single boarded wall, stood a big, solid privy. They were quite tall buildings, with some steps leading up to them. The berserks became rather unruly and started pushing Grettir about, and he dodged out of their way, then when they least expected it he dashed out of the building, grabbed the latch, slammed the door and locked it. Thinking at first that the door must have swung shut by itself, Thorir and his companions did not pay any attention to it. They had a light with them, because Grettir had been showing them many of Thorfinn's belongings, and they went on looking around inside for a while. Grettir rushed back to the farmhouse and, reaching the doorway, he called out in a loud voice to ask where the farmer's wife was. She was too scared to reply.

"There's a fine catch here for the taking," he said. "Are there any suitable weapons around?"

"There are plenty of weapons, but I don't know what use they'll be to you," she replied.

"We'll talk about that later," he said. "Now it's everyone for himself. It's now or never."

"It would surely be a godsend if anything could improve our lot now," said the farmer's wife. "Old Kar's barbed spear is hanging above Thorfinn's bed. A helmet, coat of mail and that fine sword are there too, weapons that will not fail you as long as your courage holds up."

Grettir snatched up the helmet and spear and girded on the sword, and went straight out again. The woman called out to the farmhands, telling them to go with this good, brave man. Four of them ran for their weapons, but four others did not dare to approach.

To return to the berserks, they felt Grettir was taking a long time about coming back and began to suspect a trick. They ran for the door and discovered it was locked, then pushed against the timber wall so hard that every board in it creaked. Eventually they managed to break down the boarding into the privy, and from there they headed down the steps. They went berserk and began howling like dogs.

Just at that moment, Grettir turned up. Using both hands, he thrust the spear at Thorir's stomach just as he was on his way down the steps, and it went straight through him. The spear was fitted with a long, thin blade; Ogmund the Evil was behind Thorir and bumped against him so that the spear pierced him right up to the barbs, out between his shoulderblades and into Ogmund's chest. Both of them tumbled down dead from the spear.

All the men who had come out ran down the steps. Grettir attacked each one in turn, slashing at them with his sword or lunging with his spear, while they fought back with logs that were lying out on the field or anything else they could find. They were deadly characters to deal with even when they had no weapons because of their mighty strength. Grettir killed two of the Halogalanders in the *hayfield*. The four farmhands came out then; they had been bickering over who should have which weapon. They advanced when the berserks were on the retreat anyway, but when the berserks fought back they scampered off to the buildings again.

Six vikings fell there, and Grettir was the slayer of them all. The other six fled; they made their way down to the boat-shed and went inside. They defended themselves with oars, and dealt Grettir such fierce blows that he almost sustained serious injuries.

The farmhands went back, boasting of their prowess. The farmer's wife ordered them to go and find out what had happened to Grettir, but they would not.

Grettir killed two men in the boat-shed, but four escaped from him. They ran off in pairs in different directions and Grettir chased the two who were closer to him. It was pitch dark by now. They ran into a barn on the farm called Vindheim that was mentioned earlier, and after a long struggle Grettir killed both of them. He was feeling very stiff and exhausted by then and the night was almost over. When the weather turned cold with drifting snow he did not feel like looking for the two remaining vikings, so he went back home to the farm.

The farmer's wife lit a light at the windows of the top rooms to guide him on his way, and by following the light he eventually made his way home.

When he reached the door, the farmer's wife went up to him and welcomed him in.

"You have won great renown for this," she said, "and delivered me and my household from a shameful fate which we would never have recovered from, if you had not rescued us."

"I think I'm much the same person you were heaping abuse on earlier this evening," said Grettir.

"We didn't know you were the mighty warrior that you have proved yourself to be," she said. "Feel free to take anything you want in this house that is fitting for us to give and an honour for you to accept. And I have a feeling Thorfinn will reward you even more handsomely when he comes home."

"There is little need for rewards for the time being but I shall accept your offer until your husband comes home. And I trust you will be able to sleep in peace from berserks."

Grettir had not had much to drink that evening and lay down with his weapons beside him during the night. At daylight the next morning people were summoned from around the island and they set out to find the berserks who had escaped the night before. They were discovered towards the end of the day, lying up against a rock, dead from the cold and their wounds. Their bodies were carried off to the shoreline and buried there in a shallow grave. After that the islanders went home, certain that peace had been brought to them.

When he went back to the farmer's wife, Grettir spoke this verse:

19.

Twelve wielders of battle-flame
I sent to a sea-lapped grave,
alone and undaunted I brought
swift death upon them all.
Woman, high-born tree of gold,
what deed that one man does
will ever be worthy of praise
if this one counts for little?

battle-flame: sword

tree of gold: woman

"There are certainly few men like you around these days," said the farmer's wife.

She made him sit in the *high seat* and treated him well in every respect. Time passed until Thorfinn was due home.

20 After Yule, Thorfinn made preparations to go back home, and gave many of the people he had invited to the feast fine gifts when they parted. Then he set off with his band of men until he drew close to his boat-shed. They noticed a ship lying on the sand, and soon recognised that it was his big warship. Thorfinn had not yet heard anything about the vikings.

He ordered them to hurry for land, "for I suspect that this is not the work of any friends of mine," he said.

Thorfinn led his men ashore and went straight over to the boat-shed. He saw a boat inside it which he recognised as belonging to the berserks.

Then he said to his men, "I suspect that such events have happened here that I would have given the island and everything on it to have been able to avert."

They asked him why.

Then he said, "The vikings have been here, the worst men I know about in the

whole of Norway: Thorir Paunch and Ogmund the Evil. They won't have done us any favours here, and I don't trust that Iclander very much."

He spoke at length to his companions about this.

Grettir was at home and delayed the people on the farm from going down to the beach, saying that he did not care if the man of the house was nervous about what might have happened. Then the wife asked his permission to leave, and he said she was free to go where she pleased, but he showed no signs of going himself.

She rushed off to see Thorfinn and welcomed him warmly.

He was happy to see her and said, "Praise God that I see you and my daughter safe and happy. So what has happened to you since I left?"

"Things have turned out well in the end," she said, "but we came very close to suffering a shameful fate that we would never have recovered from if your winter guest had not helped us."

"Let's sit down now, and you tell me all that happened," said Thorfinn.

She told him in detail about everything that had happened, praising Grettir's courage and action.

Thorfinn remained silent until she had finished the story, then said, "The old saying is true, that it takes time to know people. So where is Grettir now?"

"He's in the main room of the farm," she replied.

Then they went back to the farmhouse. Thorfinn went up to Grettir, embraced him and thanked him eloquently for the integrity he had displayed.

"Now I shall say something to you that few men say to their friends," Thorfinn said. "I hope you need help some time, and then you would really see whether I could prove useful to you or not. I shall never really be able to repay your good deeds unless you end up in trouble. But my hospitality is open to you for as long as you need to accept it, and I will treat you the best of all my men."

Grettir thanked him kindly and said, "I would have accepted your offer earlier too."

Grettir spent the winter there on the best of terms with Thorfinn. He became renowned for this deed all over Norway, especially in places where berserks had been causing the most trouble.

In the spring, Thorfinn asked Grettir what he was planning to do, and Grettir replied that he wanted to go north to the market in Vagan. Thorfinn told him that as much money as he wanted was there for the taking, but Grettir said all he needed was a little cash. Thorfinn said this was only a matter of course, and he accompanied him to his ship. Then he gave Grettir the fine short-sword which Grettir carried for the rest of his life and was a precious piece of work. Thorfinn also invited him back whenever he needed any help.

Grettir went north to Vagan where a large crowd had assembled. Many people whom he had never met before welcomed him warmly on account of the great deed he had done in killing the vikings. Many leading men invited him to stay with them, but he preferred to go back to his friend Thorfinn. He took a passage on a trading ship owned by a man called Thorkel, who lived at Salten in Halogaland and

was from an important family there. Thorkel welcomed Grettir warmly when he arrived at his farm and made an eloquent invitation to him to stay for the winter. Grettir accepted the offer, stayed with Thorkel that winter and was very well looked after.

21 There was a man called Bjorn who was staying with Thorkel, a distant relative of his and from a good family, but rather short-tempered. He was not popular with the ordinary people, because he spread stories about the men who stayed with Thorkel and drove many of them away. He and Grettir hardly got on at all together. Bjorn looked down on him, while Grettir was stubborn, and friction developed between them. Since Bjorn was a boisterous and swaggering character, many young men used to seek his company and loiter with him in the evenings.

Early in the winter, it happened that a savage bear left its den and was so ferocious that it spared neither men nor animals. Everyone assumed it must have been woken from hibernation by the noise that Bjorn and his companions were always making. The animal grew so troublesome that it would prey on the farmers' livestock, and since Thorkel was the wealthiest farmer in the district, he suffered the greatest losses.

One day Thorkel summoned his men to join him and find out where the bear's den was. They discovered it in the cliffs overlooking the sea: there was a single cliff with a cave in it and a narrow track leading up to it. There was a sheer drop below the cave down to boulders on the shore, which would have spelled certain death. The bear lay in its den by day, but usually came outside at night. No pens could protect the sheep from the bear, and dogs shied from it. Everyone thought it was a terrible situation to deal with.

Thorkel's kinsman Bjorn said that the most difficult task was over once the den had been found.

"I shall now put to the test," he said, "who will come off the better in this game, my namesake¹ or me."

Grettir acted as though he did not know about Bjorn's boasts.

Bjorn started going out every night when everyone else went to bed. One night he went to the den and heard the bear inside roaring ferociously. Bjorn lay down on the path with his shield over him, planning to wait until it came outside as usual. The bear got wind of him and stayed inside. Bjorn grew very sleepy lying there and could not keep awake. Suddenly the animal came out of its den, saw him lying there, clawed at him with its paw and pulled the shield off him, then tossed it over the edge of the cliff. Bjorn woke up with a start, took to his heels and ran home. The bear came close to catching him. His companions knew this, for they had been spying on him; they found the shield the following morning and made great fun of him for it.

At Yuletide, Thorkel went to the den for himself, with seven other men – Bjorn

¹ The name Björn means "bear."

and Grettir, and other followers of his. Grettir was wearing a fur cloak which he took off while they moved in on the bear. It was difficult to attack, because they could only prod it with spears which it warded off with its mouth. Bjorn eagerly urged them to attack it, but never went so close himself that he was in any danger. When no one was watching he took Grettir's cloak and threw it into the bear's den. They were unable to make any progress and turned back home towards the end of the day. When Grettir was making ready to go home he noticed his cloak was missing, and could see that the bear was lying down on it.

"Which of you lads has played a trick on me and thrown my cloak into the den?" he asked.

"Someone did it who dares to admit it," said Bjorn.

"I shan't make a big fuss about that," said Grettir.

Then they turned back home. After they had gone some way, the thong on Grettir's leggings broke. Thorkel told the others to wait for him, but Grettir said there was no need.

"Don't imagine Grettir will run off and leave his cloak behind," said Bjorn. "He wants to win fame by killing the bear single-handed after the eight of us have given up on it. Then he would live up to his reputation, but he has put up a poor show today."

"I don't know how this will turn out for you," said Thorkel, "but you are no match for him, so leave him alone."

Bjorn said neither of them had the right to put words into his mouth.

A ridge was blocking their view of each other, and Grettir turned back to the path. This time there was no disagreement about making the attack. He drew the sword Jokul's Gift, and had a strap on the hilt of his short-sword which he slipped around his wrist, because he felt he had more scope to act with his hand free.

He went straight along the path, and when the bear saw him, it ran at him ferociously and lashed at him with the paw that was farther away from the cliff. Grettir struck with his sword, hit the paw above the claws and chopped it off. Then the bear tried to strike him with its good paw, and shifted its weight to the stump; because that paw was shorter than it had expected, the bear toppled into Grettir's arms. Grettir grabbed the bear by the ears and held it at arm's length to prevent it from biting him. He said later that holding off that bear was his greatest feat of strength. Because the bear thrashed about and the path was so narrow, they both toppled over the edge of the cliff. The bear was heavier than Grettir, so it hit the boulders first, with him on top of it, and was badly injured by the fall. Grettir grabbed his short-sword, drove it through the bear's heart and killed it. Then he went home, taking his cloak with him, which was ripped to shreds. He also took the piece of the paw that he had cut off.

Thorkel was sitting drinking in the main room when Grettir walked in. Everyone laughed at Grettir in his tattered cloak. He produced the piece he had cut off the bear's paw and put it on the table.

"Where is my kinsman Bjorn now?" said Thorkel. "I have never seen your weapons

bite so sharp. I want you to make redress to Grettir for the dishonour you have done him."

Bjorn said that he would take his time about doing that, "and I don't care whether he likes it or not."

Then Grettir spoke a verse:

20.

That murderous weasel often returned
dripping sweat of fear, not blood,
in the twilight after he visited
his winter-clad foe.

murderous weasel: i.e. Bjorn

No one saw me sitting
by the bear's den late at night,
yet I brought that furry beast
out from the cave's mouth.

winter-clad foe: i.e. the bear

"You have certainly done well," said Bjorn, "and you tell a different story about me, too. I realise that you think your barbs have struck home."

"Grettir, I do not want you to take vengeance on Bjorn," said Thorkel. "I shall pay you the full compensation due for a man's life, if you two are reconciled."

Bjorn said he had better things to spend his money on than paying compensation for that – "I think you should leave each man to himself when Grettir and I clash."

Grettir said he liked the idea.

"For my sake at least, Grettir," Thorkel said, "you must not impose on Bjorn while the two of you are staying with me."

"So be it," said Grettir.

Bjorn said he would not go around in fear of Grettir, wherever they met. Grettir grinned and refused to accept any compensation on Bjorn's behalf, and they remained there for the rest of the winter.

22 In the spring Grettir went back north to Vagan with the merchants. He and Thorkel parted in friendship, while Bjorn set off for England at the helm of a ship that Thorkel sent there. Bjorn spent the summer there and bought all the goods Thorkel had told him to. Then he sailed back to Norway as the autumn drew on.

Grettir stayed in Vagan until the fleet put out and sailed north with some merchants as far as the port called Gartar, which is on the estuary where Trondheim stands, and they put the awnings up. When they had finished, they saw a ship approaching from the south. They recognised at once that this was one of the ships that sailed to England, and when it landed just down the coast from them, the crew went ashore.

Grettir and his companions went over to them.

When they met he saw that Bjorn was one of the crew and said to him, "It's a good thing that we should meet here, because we still have an old score to settle. I want to put our strength to the test now."

Bjorn said the argument was a thing of the past to him, "but if any wrong was done, let me pay you any compensation for it that you would feel honoured to accept."

Then Grettir spoke a verse:

21.

I beat the spiky-fanged bear,
word of that deed spread far;
that harsh-hearted beast ripped
the warrior's long pelt.
The devious guardian of rings
whose work that was shall pay.
I do not think I am one
to outbid others in boasts.

guardian of rings: man, i.e. Bjorn

Bjorn said money had been paid to settle greater wrongs than this.

Grettir replied that there were not many people around who had played malicious tricks on him, and that he had never accepted compensation, and would not this time either – "We shall not both walk away from here in one piece if I have any say in the matter. I declare you a coward if you do not dare to fight."

Bjorn could see that he had no hope of talking his way out of this situation, so he took his weapons and went ashore. Then they rushed at each other and fought, and before long Bjorn was wounded and fell down dead to the ground. Seeing this, Bjorn's companions went to their ship, sailed north to call on Thorkel and told him about the incident. He said this had not happened any sooner than was to be expected.

Shortly afterwards Thorkel went to Trondheim, where he went to see Earl Svein.

After he had killed Bjorn, Grettir went south to More to see his friend Thorfinn, and told him what had happened.

Thorfinn welcomed him warmly.

"And it's a good thing that you need a friend," he said. "Stay with me until this business is over."

Grettir thanked him for his offer and said he would accept it this time.

Earl Svein was staying at Steinkjer in Trondheim when he heard news of Bjorn's killing. One of the earl's men was Bjorn's brother, whose name was Hjarrandi. He was furious when he heard about Bjorn being killed and asked the earl for his support in this matter. The earl promised it, then sent a messenger to summon both Thorfinn and Grettir to appear before him. They prepared to leave as soon as they heard the earl's order, and went to Trondheim. The earl arranged a meeting with them to discuss the matter and asked Hjarrandi to attend it as well.

Hjarrandi announced he would never carry his brother's life around in his purse.¹

"I shall either meet the same fate as he did, or take vengeance for him," he said.

When the case was examined, the earl felt that Bjorn had done Grettir much wrong. Thorfinn offered to pay such an amount of compensation that the earl con-

¹ i.e. accept money instead of his killing his brother's killer.

sidered would honour his heirs, and gave a long speech about the freedom that Grettir had brought to people in the north when he killed the berserks, as described earlier.

"That is quite true, Thorfinn," said the earl. "He purged the country of a great scourge. I am honoured to accept compensation on your recommendation. In addition, Grettir is renowned for his strength and courage."

Hjarrandi did not want to accept this settlement, so they all left the meeting. Thorfinn appointed one of his kinsmen, Arnbjorn, to be with Grettir every day, because he knew Hjarrandi was waiting for a chance to kill him.

23 One day when Grettir and Arnbjorn were walking around the streets of the town to keep themselves amused, they went past a gate and a man suddenly rushed out brandishing an axe with both hands, and aimed a blow at Grettir. Not expecting the attack, Grettir was slow to react. Arnbjorn saw the assailant, grabbed hold of Grettir and pushed him so hard that he fell to his knees. The axe struck him on the shoulderblade, ran down it and out under his armpit, causing a deep wound. Grettir swung round, drawing his short-sword, and recognised Hjarrandi. The axe had stuck in the ground, Hjarrandi was slow in pulling it back out, and Grettir struck at him, slicing off his arm at the shoulder. Then Hjarrandi's companions ran up, five of them in all, and a fight ensued. Grettir and Arnbjorn made short work of it; they killed Hjarrandi's five men, while one escaped¹ and went straight to see the earl and tell him the news.

The earl was furious when he heard this and called an assembly for the following day. Thorfinn attended it.

The earl charged Grettir with the killings and he admitted them, saying they had been in self-defence.

"I have a wound to prove it," said Grettir. "I would have been killed if Arnbjorn had not saved me."

The earl replied that it was a shame he had not been killed – "You will be the death of many men if you remain alive."

Grettir's friend and companion Bersi, the son of Torfa the Poetess, was with the earl at that time. He and Thorfinn went before the earl and asked for Grettir to be spared, and suggested that the earl himself judge the case so long as Grettir were granted his life and the right to stay in Norway. The earl was reluctant to make any settlement, but eventually he gave in to their entreaties; and a truce was made allowing Grettir to remain in peace until the spring, although the earl refused to make a binding settlement until Gunnar, the brother of Bjorn and Hjarrandi, was present. Gunnar had a house in the town of Tunsberg.

In the spring, the earl summoned Grettir and Thorfinn to Tunsberg, where he planned to stay himself when most of the ships were calling there. Grettir and Thorfinn went there and the earl was already in town when they arrived.

¹ This inconsistency is in the original.

Grettir met his brother Thorstein Dromund there. He welcomed Grettir warmly and invited him to stay, since he had a house in the town. Grettir told him about the case he had become involved in, and Thorstein was sympathetic, but warned him to be on his guard against Gunnar. Spring drew on.

24 Gunnar was in town, waiting for the chance to attack Grettir. One day Grettir happened to be drinking in a tavern to avoid running into Gunnar, when the door was rammed so hard that it broke into pieces. Four men ran in, fully armed: Gunnar and his men had come and they attacked Grettir. He grabbed his weapons, which were hanging above him, and retreated into the corner where he put up his defence. He held his shield in front of him and wielded his short-sword, and they made little headway against him. He struck a blow at one of Gunnar's men – and that was all it took. Then Grettir cleared a space for himself on the floor, and his assailants backed off to the far side of the tavern. Another of Gunnar's men was killed then. Gunnar tried to escape with his remaining companion, who reached the door but tripped on the threshold, fell to the ground and was slow to get back to his feet. Guarding himself with his shield, Gunnar backed away from Grettir, who attacked him vigorously and jumped up onto the side-bench nearest the door. Gunnar's hands, holding the shield, were still inside the door, so Grettir hacked down between his body and the shield, chopping off both his hands at the wrist; Gunnar tumbled over backwards through the door. Grettir dealt him a death blow. Gunnar's companion made it back to his feet at that moment and ran straight off to the earl to tell him the news.

Earl Svein was furious when he heard this account, and summoned an assembly in the town immediately. When Thorfinn and Thorstein Dromund found out they mustered all their kinsmen and friends and turned up for the assembly in a very large band. The earl was very surly and would hardly listen to anyone.

Thorfinn went up to the earl first and said, "I have come here to offer you a settlement with honour for the killings that Grettir has committed. You alone shall shape and set the terms, if his life is spared."

"You never seem to tire of asking for Grettir's life to be spared," the earl answered angrily. "But I don't think that you have a good case. He has killed three brothers now, one after the other, all of them so brave that none of them would carry another in his purse. There is no point in pleading for Grettir's life, Thorfinn, because I will not perpetrate injustice in this country by accepting compensation for such atrocities."

Then Bersi, Torfa the Poetess' son, stepped forward and asked the earl to accept a settlement.

"I implore you with the offer of all I own, because Grettir is a man of great family and a good friend of mine, my lord. You must see that it is better to spare one man's life and win the gratitude of many men, and decide for yourself the amount of compensation to be paid, than to reject an honourable gesture and risk not being able to capture the man anyway."

The earl replied, "That is an honourable attitude, Bersi; you always show what a noble man you are. Nonetheless I have no intention of breaking the laws of this land by sparing the lives of men who deserve to die."

Then Thorstein Dromund stepped forward, greeted the earl and made an offer on Grettir's behalf with an eloquent speech. The earl asked him what his motivation was in making an offer on behalf of such a man. Thorstein told him they were brothers.

The earl said he had not been aware of that – "It is noble of you to want to help him. But since I have ruled that no compensation shall be paid in this case, I shall treat you all in the same way. I shall have Grettir's life, whatever the cost, as soon as I can arrange it."

Then the earl leapt to his feet and refused to consider their offers of a settlement any longer. Thorstein and the others went back to his house and prepared to defend themselves. When the earl realised this, he had all his men arm themselves and marched there in procession. Before they arrived, Thorstein and the others mounted a guard at the gate. Thorfinn, Thorstein, Grettir and Bersi stood at the front, and each of them had a large band of men with him.

The earl told them to hand over Grettir and not push themselves to the brink. They all repeated their earlier offers, but the earl refused to listen to them.

Thorfinn and Thorstein said the earl had more work on his hands than simply taking Grettir's life, "for we shall all meet the same fate, and it will be said that you have gone to great lengths to take one man's life when we are all slain with him."

The earl replied that he would spare none of them. Battle seemed to be on the point of breaking out. Then many fair-minded men approached the earl and pleaded with him not to be the cause of such a disaster, saying that he would suffer heavy losses before his opponents were killed. The earl realised the wisdom of this advice; he calmed down somewhat. A settlement was drawn up, which Thorfinn and Thorstein were eager to accept provided Grettir's life was spared.

"You shall understand," said the earl, "that although I am making a great compromise over these killings, I do not call this a settlement of any kind. I do not care to fight my own men, even though this whole matter has shown how little you respect me."

Then Thorfinn said, "This is a much greater honour for you, because you alone shall set the amount of compensation to be paid."

The earl said that he would allow Grettir to leave in peace for Iceland as soon as ships began sailing there, if they wished, and they said they would accept that offer. Then they paid the earl the compensation he wanted, and there was no love lost between them when they parted. Grettir went off with Thorfinn, and he parted with his brother Thorstein in great friendship. Thorfinn won renown for the support he had given to Grettir in the face of overwhelming odds. None of Grettir's supporters enjoyed the earl's friendship after that, with the single exception of Bersi.

Grettir made this verse:

22.

Thorfinn, partner
of the thunderer's elite
was destined
to give me help
when the woman
who reigns entombed
in the realm of the dead
laid claim to my life.

thunderer's elite: chosen warriors in Valhalla

woman who reigns in the realm of the dead: Hel, goddess of the dead

23.

Of all men most,
the cliff-giants' killer
and dwarf's abode,
mighty ship
of the distant seas,
kept evil Loki's
deathly daughter
at bay from me.

cliff-giants' killer: the god Thor

dwarf's abode: stone (Icel. *steinn*); Thor + stone = the name *Thorstein*

mighty ship: dromond (Icel. *dromundr*), a medieval galleon

Loki's daughter: the goddess Hel

24.

None of the men
of the thing-leader
had any heart
to tackle us
when the leopard
wished to smite
their forts of thought
with his shield-fire.

thing-leader: king (i.e. Earl Svein)

leopard: i.e. Bersi (Icel. = "bear")

forts of thought: heads or breasts
shield-fire: sword

Grettir went back north with Thorfinn and stayed with him until he arranged a passage for him with some merchants who were sailing to Iceland. Thorfinn gave him many fine garments and a painted saddle and a bridle. They parted in friendship, and Thorfinn told him to visit him if he ever returned to Norway.

25 Asmund Grey-locks lived at Bjarg while Grettir was abroad, and was considered one of the leading men in Midfjord. Thorkel Scratcher died at the time when Grettir was not in Iceland. Thorvald Asgeirsson lived at As in Vatnsdal then and became a great chieftain. He was the father of Dalla; she was married to Isleif, who later became bishop of Skalholt. Asmund enjoyed much support from Thorvald in presenting law cases and many other matters.

There was a man named Thorgils who was brought up at Asmund's farm. He was known as Thorgils Masson, and was a close relative of Asmund's. Thorgils was a strong man and earned much wealth with guidance from Asmund, who bought him land at Laekjamot, where he went to live. Thorgils kept his household well provided for and went to Strandir every year. There he took whales and other provisions. He was an intrepid character, venturing as far as the outer Almenningar.

In those days the *sworn brothers* Thorgeir Havarsson and Thormod Kolbrun's Poet were in their prime. They owned a ferry, raided where they pleased and were very overbearing.

One summer, Thorgils Masson chanced upon a beached whale at Almenningar and started flensing it with his companions at once. When the sworn brothers heard of this, they went there and everyone seemed to be on good terms at first. Thorgils offered them half of the uncut part of the whale, but they insisted on being given all that had not yet been cut, unless they divided all the meat, cut and uncut, equally between them. Thorgils firmly refused to hand over any of the meat he had already cut. Tempers flared, both sides took their weapons, and a battle ensued. Thorgeir and Thorgils duelled fiercely for a long time without any of the others intervening. In the end, after a long, hard fight, Thorgils was killed by Thorgeir. Thormod fought the rest of Thorgils' men somewhere else, and he emerged as victor, killing three of them.

After Thorgils' death, his companions returned to Midfjord, taking his body with them. He was greatly mourned. The sworn brothers kept the entire whale for themselves. Thormod refers to this encounter in the *drapa* he made in memory of Thorgeir.

Asmund Grey-locks learned of the killing of his kinsman Thorgils. He was responsible for pursuing the case for it. He examined the body, named witnesses to the wounds and brought the case before the Althing, which was considered the correct procedure for a killing that took place in another *quarter*. And time passed.

26 There was a man called Thorstein Kuggason, the son of Thorkel the Squat and grandson of Thord Bellow. Thord was the son of Olaf Feilan, whose father Thorstein Red was the son of Aud the Deep-minded. Thorstein Kuggason's mother, Thurid, was the daughter of Asgeir Scatter-brain, who was Asmund Grey-locks' uncle on his father's side.

Thorstein Kuggason took charge of the case for the killing of Thorgils Masson, together with Asmund Grey-locks. Asmund sent a message to Thorstein to call on him. Thorstein was a good fighter and very aggressive. He set off to see Asmund at once, and they discussed the case. Thorstein was vehement and insisted that no compensation would be accepted, saying that they had enough support from kinsmen to punish the killings either with outlawry or revenge. Asmund replied that he would follow any course he wanted to take. They rode north to see their kinsman Thorvald to ask him for his support, and he agreed at once. Then they prepared the case against Thorgeir and Thormod. Thorstein rode back to his farm at Ljarskogar in the district of Hvamm.

There was a man called Skeggi who lived at the nearby farm of Hvamm, and he sided with Thorgils in the case. Skeggi was the son of Thorarin Foal's-brow, whose father was Thord Bellow. Skeggi's mother, Fridgerd, was the daughter of Thord from Hofdi.

They mustered a large band to ride to the Althing and pursued the case vigor-

ously. Asmund and Thorvald rode down from the north with sixty men and spent several nights at Ljarskogar.

27 There was a man called Thorgils who lived at Reykjaholar at that time, the son of Ari Masson. His grandfather, Atli the Red, was the son of Ulf the Squinter, who took land in Reykjanes. Thorgils Arason's mother, Thorgerd, was the daughter of Alf from Dalir. Alf had another daughter called Thorelf, who was the mother of Thorgeir Havarsson. Because of their kinship, Thorgeir could count on the support of Thorgils, who was the leading man in the West Fjords Quarter. Thorgils was so charitable that he would give food to all free-born men for as long as they cared to accept it, so there was always a large number of people with him at Reykjaholar. Thorgils enjoyed great honour for his generosity, and was a kind and wise man. Thorgeir used to stay with him for the winter, and go to Strandir in summer.

After Thorgils Masson had been killed, Thorgeir went to Reykjaholar to tell Thorgils Arason the news.

Thorgils offered him a place to stay there.

"But I imagine they will be difficult about the case," he said, "and I am reluctant to make matters any worse. I shall send someone to Thorstein to offer him compensation for the killing of Thorgils. If he refuses a settlement, I shall not make a firm stand in your defence."

Thorgeir said he would abide by what Thorgils saw as best.

In the autumn, Thorgils Arason sent a messenger to Thorstein Kuggason to approach him about a settlement. Thorstein was absolutely against accepting any compensation for the killing of Thorgils Masson, but said he would settle the other killings as wise men suggested. When Thorgils heard this, he called Thorgeir over and asked what he thought would be the most useful support to provide. Thorgeir said he would prefer to leave the country if he were outlawed, and Thorgils replied that he would try to arrange that.

A ship had been laid up in the river Nordura in Borgarfjord, and Thorgils secretly paid for a passage on it for the two sworn brothers. The winter passed by.

Thorgils heard that Thorstein had gathered a large band of men to go to the Althing and that they were all staying at Ljarskogar then, so he put off his departure, wanting them to be on their way south before he set off, and that is what happened. When Thorgils rode south, the sworn brothers went with him, and on the way Thorgeir killed Bundle-Torfi at Maskelda and Skuf and Bjarni in Hundadal.

In his *drapa* about Thorgeir, Thormod said:

25.

Fate favoured the warrior
when the swords rained down:
Mar's son paid for his pride,
ravens tore at raw flesh.

Then the rider of the waves,
the skilled battle-worker,
gladly lent his hand
to kill Skuf and Bjarni.

rider of the waves: seafarer, i.e. Thorgeir

Thorgils made an immediate settlement for the killings of Skuf and Bjarni in the valley, which kept him there for longer than he had planned. Thorgeir headed for the ship, but Thorgils went to the Thing and did not arrive before the court had convened.

Then Asmund Grey-locks invited a defence for the killing of Thorgils Masson. Thorgils Arason approached the court and offered to pay compensation provided that Thorgeir would be acquitted. He sought a defence in the question whether the common land was not free for anyone to harvest. The lawspeaker was asked if these were legal grounds for a defence. Skafti, who was the lawspeaker at that time and supported Asmund because of their kinship, answered that this law only applied to people of equal standing, and that farmers enjoyed preference over single men. Asmund said that Thorgils Masson had offered the sworn brothers an equal share of the uncut part of the whale when they arrived, and this refuted the defence. Thorstein and his kinsmen pursued the case vigorously, and refused to approve of anything less than a sentence of outlawry on Thorgeir. Thorgils realised he had to choose between mustering his men for an attack, without being sure how that would turn out, or letting them have their way. Since Thorgeir was already on board the ship, Thorgils let the case take its course. Thorgeir was outlawed, while compensation was paid for the people Thormod had killed, and he was free.

Asmund and Thorstein gained much stature from this case. Everyone went home from the Thing afterwards. Some claimed Thorgils had not put much effort into pursuing the case, but he paid little attention and let people say what they pleased.

But when Thorgeir heard he had been outlawed, he said, "I want everyone who has had me declared an outlaw to pay the full price for it in the end, if I have any say in the matter."

There was a man known as Gaut Sleituson, the son of Sleitu-Helgi (Helgi the Cheat) and a kinsman of Thorgils Masson. He was one of the crew on board the same ship that Thorgeir was sailing on. He made snarling remarks to Thorgeir and threatened him, and seeing this, the merchants thought it was obvious they should not travel on the same ship. Although Thorgeir said he did not care how much Gaut scowled at him, they opted to make Gaut leave the ship, and he went back up north to the countryside. Thorgeir and Gaut did not clash for the time being, but the incident led to a quarrel between them, as would emerge later.

28 Grettir Asmundarson went back to Iceland that summer and landed in Skagafjord. By then he was so renowned for his strength and vigour that no young man was considered his equal. He rode home to Bjarg at once and Asmund gave him a warm welcome. Atli was running the farm then, and the two brothers got on well together. At this stage, Grettir had grown so overbearing that he felt nothing was beyond him.

Most of the boys whom Grettir had played games with on Midfjardarvatn before he went abroad were grown men by this time. One of them was Audun, who lived at Audunarstadir in Vididal, the son of Asgeir and grandson of Audun. His great-grandfather was Asgeir Scatter-brain. Audun from Audunarstadir was a good farmer and a worthy man. He was stronger than anyone else in the north of Iceland, but was considered a very peaceful man in his district.

Grettir remembered the humiliation he felt he had suffered from Audun at the ball game described earlier, and he wanted to put to the test which of them had grown stronger since then. So he set off for Audunarstadir in the beginning of *hay-time*. Grettir dressed extravagantly and rode off in the finely wrought painted saddle that Thorfinn had given him. He had a good horse and took his finest weapons with him.

Grettir arrived at Audunarstadir early in the morning and knocked on the door. Few people were at home. Grettir asked whether Audun was in. He was told that he had gone to the *shieling* to fetch food. Grettir unbridled his horse, and because the hayfields had not been mown, it headed for the grassiest part. Then Grettir went into the hall, sat down on the bench and fell asleep.

A little later Audun returned home and noticed a horse with a painted saddle in the hayfields. He had two horses to carry the food, and one of them was carrying curds in skins with the necks tied up, called curd pouches. Audun unloaded the horses and carried the curds indoors in his arms. His eyes had not adjusted to the darkness, and Grettir stuck out his foot from the edge of the bench, tripping him over. He landed on the curd pouch and the band it was tied with came undone. Audun leapt to his feet and asked what trickster was there. Grettir said his name.

Audun said, "That was a stupid thing to do. What are you here for?"

"I want to fight you," Grettir replied.

"I have to see to the food first," said Audun.

"As you please," said Grettir, "if you don't have anyone else to have it done for you."

Audun bent down to pick up the curd pouch, slung it into Grettir's arms and told him to take what he was given. Grettir was covered with curds, which he considered a greater insult than if Audun had given him a bloody wound. Then they went for each other and grappled fiercely. Grettir attacked him furiously, and Audun yielded his ground, realising that Grettir had grown stronger than him. Everything in their way was knocked over and they tumbled all over the hall. Both of them exerted themselves to the full, but Grettir got the upper hand and eventually he brought Audun to the ground, after he had torn off all Grettir's weapons. They were struggling hard and crashing about when the ground began shaking too. Grettir heard someone ride up to the farm, dismount and hurry indoors. He saw a smartly-dressed man enter, wearing a red cloak with a helmet on his head. The man had come over to the longhouse because he could hear the noise of their brawling. He asked what was going on in there.

Grettir said his name.

"And who's asking?" he added.

"My name is Bardi," said the newcomer.

"Are you Bardi Gudmundarson from Asbjarnarnes?"

"The very same," said Bardi. "And what are you up to here?"

"Audun and I are playing a little game," replied Grettir.

"I'm not sure how much of a game it is," said Bardi. "And you don't make a good pair either. You are an unjust and overbearing man, Grettir, while Audun is gentle and kind. Let him get up at once."

"Never reach around a door for the handle," Grettir answered back. "I think you'd do better to avenge your brother Hall than to interfere in what Audun and I get up to."

"I'm always being told that," said Bardi, "but I'm not sure whether he ever will be avenged. All the same, I want you to leave Audun alone, because he's a gentle man."

Grettir did as Bardi suggested, although he was not happy about it. Bardi asked what they were quarrelling about.

Then Grettir spoke a verse:

26.

Odin here, for all I know,
might reward you for your pains,
pay back your strivings
with a swollen neck.

Odin: i.e. Audun (one of Odin's aliases)

That's how the gold-watcher's god
choked my words long ago,
before the snake that coils
around mountains left home.

gold-watcher's god: Odin (i.e. Audun)

snake: i.e. Grettir (also a name given to snakes, lit. "frowner," "face-puller")

Bardi said it was not surprising if he sought revenge.

"Now I shall make a settlement between you," he said. "I want you to leave the matter as it stands and put an end to it."

They let the agreement stand because they were kinsmen, but Grettir did not like Bardi and his brothers much. Then they rode off together.

On the way, Grettir said to Bardi, "I have heard that you plan to ride to Borgarfjord this summer. I propose that I should join you when you go there, which I think is a better offer than you deserve."

Bardi was pleased with the proposal, thanked him and accepted it at once. Then they parted.

Then Bardi turned round and called back to Grettir.

"I want to make a condition," he said. "You can't come along without my foster-father Thorarin's consent, because he is in charge of the expedition."

"You ought to be capable of making your own plans," Grettir replied. "I don't leave other people to decide where I go. But I shall be annoyed if you leave me out of the band."

Then they went their separate ways and Bardi said he would send word to Grettir, "if Thorarin wants you to go." Otherwise he was to stay at home.

Grettir rode home to Bjarg, and Bardi to his farm.

29 That summer a big *horse-fight* was held at Langafit down from Reykir, which was well attended. Atli from Bjarg had a fine stallion from the same stock as Kengala, grey with a black mane and a stripe down its back, and he and his father prized it highly. The brothers Kormak and Thorgils from Mel had a brown stallion, which was reliable for fighting and was pitted against Atli's. Many other good horses were there.

Odd the Pauper-poet, Kormak's kinsman, was supposed to lead their horse to the fight later in the day. Odd had grown into a strong, swaggering man, overbearing and reckless. Grettir asked Atli who was supposed to lead his horse to the fight.

"I'm not exactly sure," Atli replied.

"Do you want me to be your second?" Grettir asked him.

"Only if you restrain yourself," said Atli. "There are some very pushy characters here."

"Let them pay the price for their impetuosity if they can't control themselves," said Grettir.

Then the stallions were brought out; the horses were kept tied together at the edge of the riverbank, just above a deep pool. The horses fought well and it was a good show. Odd goaded his horse on vigorously, while Grettir kept his horse back, holding its tail with one hand and the stick he used to goad it on with the other. Odd was standing close to the front of his horse and it was difficult to be sure that he was not prodding Atli's horse with his stick to drive it back. Grettir showed no sign that he noticed this. As the horses moved towards the river, Odd jabbed at Grettir with his stick and hit him on the shoulderblade, as Grettir had his back turned to him. It was a hard enough blow to cause a swelling, although it did not bleed. At that moment the horses reared, Grettir ducked under the haunches of his stallion and jabbed Odd so hard in the side with his stick that it broke three of his ribs and sent him flying into the pool, taking his horse with him and the other horses which were tethered together. People dived in and dragged him back out of the river.

A great clamour followed. Kormak and his men went for their weapons, and so did the people from Bjarg. When the people from Hrútafjörð and Vatnsnes saw this, they intervened and separated them. They all went home after that, amidst threats from either side, but everything remained quiet for a while. Atli did not say much about the incident, but Grettir was more brash about it and said they would meet again later if he had any say in the matter.

30 There was a man called Thorbjörn who lived at Thoroddsstaðir in Hrútafjörð. He was the son of Arnor Hairy-nose, whose father Thorodd had taken land on that side of Hrútafjörð all the way to Bakki. Thorbjörn was an exceptionally strong man, and was nicknamed the Ox. He had a brother called Thorodd

who was called Half-poem. Their mother was Gerd, the daughter of Bodvar from Bodvarsholar.

Thorbjörn was a brave fighter and always had plenty of men with him. He was noted for having more trouble in obtaining farmhands than other farmers did, and he paid hardly any of them for their work. He was not thought easy to deal with.

One of his kinsmen was named Thorbjörn, too, and called Traveller. He was a merchant and shared everything with his namesake. Most of the time he stayed at Thoroddsstaðir and was not thought to bring out the best in Thorbjörn Ox. He was a disdainful character and liked to mock people.

There was a man called Thorir, the son of Thorkel from Borðeyri. His daughter Helga married Sleitu-Helgi. Thorir lived at Melar in Hrútafjörð at first, but after the killings at Fagrabrekka he sold the land to Thorhall the Vinlander, the son of Gamli, and moved south to live at Skard in Haukadal. His son was Gamli, who married Rannveig, Asmund Grey-locks' daughter. At this time they were living at Melar and lived together well.

Thorir from Skard had two sons, called Gunnar and Thorgeir. They were promising men who had taken over their father's farm, but spent most of their time with Thorbjörn Ox and became excessively overbearing.

In the summer in which all this took place, Kormak and Thorgils rode south with their kinsman Narfi to Nordurardal on some business. Odd the Pauper-poet was with them and had recovered from the bruising he received at the horse-fight. While they were south of the moor, Grettir left Bjarg with two of Atli's farmhands. They rode over to Burfell and continued over the ridge into Hrútafjörð, until they reached Melar in the evening. They spent three nights there. Rannveig and Gamli welcomed Grettir warmly and invited him to stay longer with them, but he wanted to ride back home. Grettir then heard that Kormak and his men had returned from the south and had spent the night at Tunga.

Grettir prepared to make an early start from Melar. Gamli told him to be on his guard and offered to let him have some men to accompany him. Grim, who was Gamli's brother and an outstandingly vigorous man, went with him together with another man, and the five of them rode off until they reached Hrútafjörð ridge, west of Burfell. There is a big boulder there called Grettishaf (Grettir's Lift). Grettir spent much of the day trying to lift it, and stayed there so long that Kormak's men arrived. He went up to them and they all dismounted. Grettir said it was more in the spirit of free-born men to strike the mightiest blows they could, instead of fighting with sticks like vagrants. Kormak told his men to take up the challenge like men and fight for all they were worth.

Then the two bands of men ran for each other and fought. Grettir led his men forward and told them to make sure no one attacked him from behind. They fought for some time and people from both parties were wounded.

The same day, Thorbjörn Ox had ridden over the ridge to Burfell, and saw the encounter when he and his men were riding back. Thorbjörn Traveller was with him, together with Thorir's sons Gunnar and Thorgeir and Thorodd Half-poem.

When they reached the fight, Thorbjorn told his men to try to break it up, but the fighting was so fierce by then that they could do nothing to stop it. Grettir stormed around, and when he confronted Thorir's two sons he knocked them both off their feet. They flew into a rage and Gunnar dealt Atli's farmhand a mortal blow. When Thorbjorn saw this he told them to separate; he promised his support to the side that obeyed his command. Two of Kormak's farmhands had been killed by then. Grettir, realising that he could not prevail if Thorbjorn's men joined the other side, called an end to the fight. Everyone who had taken part in the fight was wounded, and Grettir was annoyed that they had been separated. Afterwards they all went home, and never reached a settlement over the incident.

Thorbjorn Traveller made many jibes about it, and relations between the people from Bjarg and Thorbjorn Ox deteriorated into total hostility, as emerged later. Atli was not offered any compensation for his farmhand, but he gave the impression that he was unaware of this. Grettir stayed at Bjarg until hay-time. There is no account or mention that he and Kormak ever encountered each other again.

31 After Bardi Gudmundarson and his brothers parted with Grettir, they rode home to Asbjarnarnes. They were the sons of Gudmund, the son of Solmund. Solmund's mother, Thorlaug, was the daughter of Saemund the Hebridean, who was the foster-brother of Ingimund the Old. Bardi was a very distinguished man. He soon set off to see his foster-father, Thorarin the Wise, who welcomed him warmly and asked him what he had achieved in mustering forces for the expedition they had planned. Bardi replied that he had enlisted a man whose assistance was worth twice that of anyone else.

Thorarin paused for a while, then said, "That must be Grettir Asmundarson."

"A wise man can guess the future," said Bardi. "That's the very man, foster-father."

Thorarin replied, "It is true that Grettir is the greatest of all men now living in our country, and for as long as he keeps his health, it will be a long time before he is beaten with weapons. But he is a man of unbridled temper, and I doubt how much good fortune he will enjoy. You will need to make sure that not everyone on your expedition is a man of ill-fortune; there will be plenty of those even if he does not go along. He shall not be going anywhere, if I have any say in the matter."

"I never expected you to grudge me the bravest man, whatever happens, foster-father," said Bardi. "No one in my straits can provide for everything."

"You will succeed, even if I provide for things," replied Thorarin.

The matter was settled as Thorarin wished and no message was sent to Grettir. Bardi went south to Borgarfjord and the Slayings on the Heath took place.

Grettir was at Bjarg when he heard that Bardi had ridden south. He grew angry about not having been told, and said that this was not the end of the matter. He received word when they were expected from the south and rode down to the farm at Thoreyjargnup, planning to ambush Bardi and his men when they rode back. He set off from the farm for the hillside and waited there.

The same day, Bardi and his men rode back from the south over Tvidaegra, after the Slayings on the Heath. There were six of them and they were all severely wounded.

When they came up alongside the farm Bardi said, "There's a big man up on the hillside, fully armed. Do you recognise him?"

They said they did not know who it was.

Bardi said, "I believe Grettir Asmundarson is there, and if that is so, he will be looking for us. I imagine he took offence at not being with us, and I don't think we are at all prepared if he makes any trouble. I shall send for help from Thoreyjargnup, since I don't want to stake everything against someone as overbearing as he is."

His men agreed that this was a wise course of action, and did as he said. Bardi and the others rode on their way, and when Grettir saw them he came down in front of them. They exchanged greetings and Grettir asked if there was any news. Bardi told him everything that had happened, without flinching. Grettir asked who the men with him were, and Bardi told him they were his brothers and his brother-in-law Eyjolf.

"You have cleared your name at last," said Grettir, "so the next thing to do is to find out which of us is the stronger."

"I have other fish to fry than having a pointless fight with you," said Bardi. "I think I have done enough to be free of that."

"You must be losing your nerve then, Bardi," said Grettir, "if you don't dare to fight with me."

"Call it what you want," Bardi replied. "If you want to push people around you should pick on someone other than me. And you quite probably will, because your overbearing knows no bounds now."

Disturbed by Bardi's prediction, Grettir began to wonder whether to attack one of them, but thought this would be a rash idea, since they were six and he was by himself. At that moment, a party arrived from Thoreyjargnup to join Bardi. Grettir backed off and went over to his horse, while Bardi and his men went on their way. They did not bother to wish each other farewell. There is no mention of any further encounters between Bardi and Grettir.

Grettir himself has said that he felt confident about fighting any three men at once, nor would he flee from four without putting it to the test, but would only fight more men than that if his life was at stake, as this verse says:

27.

Versed in valkyries' arts, I trust

valkyries' arts: warfare

myself to tackle three men

wherever the war-goddesses' storm

war-goddesses' storm: battle

demands memorable deeds.

But if the choice is mine

I will not meet more

than four ship-stormers

ship-stormers: vikings

when killers roar for blood.