

Havelok the Dane eBook

Havelok the Dane by Ian Serrailier

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Page 1

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*** Start of this project gutenber EBOOK Havelok the Dane ***

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Havelok the Dane: A Legend of Old Grimsby and Lincoln.

By Charles W. Whistler

Preface.

If any excuse is needed for recasting the ancient legend of Grim the fisher and his foster-son Havelok the Dane, it may be found in the fascination of the story itself, which made it one of the most popular legends in England from the time of the Norman conquest, at least, to that of Elizabeth. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries it seems to have been almost classic; and during that period two full metrical versions—one in Norman-French and the other in English—were written, besides many other short versions and abridgments, which still exist. These are given exhaustively by Professor Skeat in his edition of the English poem for the Early English Text Society, and it is needless to do more than refer to them here as the sources from which this story is gathered.

These versions differ most materially from one another in names and incidents, while yet preserving the main outlines of the whole history. It is evident that there has been a far more ancient, orally-preserved tradition, which has been the original of the freely-treated poems and concise prose statements of the legend which we have. And it seems possible, from among the many variations, and from under the disguise of the mediaeval forms in which it has been hidden, to piece together what this original may have been, at least with some probability.

We have one clue to the age of the legend of Havelok in the statement by the eleventh-century Norman poet that his tale comes from a British source, which at least gives a very early date for the happenings related; while another version tells us that the king of "Lindesie" was a Briton. Welsh names occur, accordingly, in several places; and it is more than likely that the old legend preserved a record of actual events in the early days of the Anglo-Saxon settlement in England, when there were yet marriages

between conquerors and conquered, and the origins of Angle and Jute and Saxon were not yet forgotten in the pedigrees of the many petty kings.

One of the most curious proofs of the actual British origin of the legend is in the statement that the death of Havelok's father occurred as the result of a British invasion of Denmark for King Arthur, by a force under a leader with the distinctly Norse name of Hodulf. The claim for conquest of the north by Arthur is very old, and is repeated by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and may well have originated in the remembrance of some successful raid on the Danish coasts by the Norse settlers in the Gower district of Pembrokeshire, in company with a contingent of their Welsh neighbours.



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This episode does not occur in the English version; but here an attack on Havelok on his return home to Denmark is made by men led by one Griffin, and this otherwise unexplainable survival of a Welsh name seems to connect the two accounts in some way that recalls the ancient legend at the back of both.

I have therefore treated the Welsh element in the story as deserving a more prominent place, at least in subsidiary incidents, than it has in the two old metrical versions. It has been possible to follow neither of these exactly, as in names and details they are widely apart; but to one who knows both, the sequence of events will, I think, be clear enough.

I have, for the same reason of the British origin of the legend, preferred the simple and apposite derivation of the name of "Curan," taken by the hero during his servitude, from the Welsh Cwran, "a wonder," to the Norman explanation of the name as meaning a "scullion," which seems to be rather a guess, based on the menial position of the prince, than a translation.

For the long existence of a Welsh servile population in the lowlands of Lincolnshire there is evidence enough in the story of Guthlac of Crowland, and the type may still be found there. There need be little excuse for claiming some remains of their old Christianity among them, and the "hermit" who reads the dream for the princess may well have been a half-forgotten Welsh priest. But the mediaeval poems have Christianized the ancient legend, until it would seem to stand in somewhat the same relationship to what it was as the German "Niebelungen Lied" does to the "Volsunga Saga."

With regard to the dreams which recur so constantly, I have in the case of the princess transferred the date of hers to the day previous to her marriage, the change only involving a difference of a day, but seeming to be needed, as explanatory of her sudden submission to her guardian. And instead of crediting Havelok with the supernatural light bodily, it has been transferred to the dream which seems to haunt those who have to do with him.

As to the names of the various characters, they are in the old versions hardly twice alike. I have, therefore, taken those which seem to have been modernized from their originals, or preserved by simple transliteration, and have set them back in what seems to have been their first form. Gunther, William, and Bertram, for instance, seem to be modernized from Gunnar, Withelm, and perhaps Berthun; while Sykar, Aunger, and Gryme are but alternative English spellings of the northern Sigurd, Arngeir, and Grim.

The device on Havelok's banner in chapter xxi. is exactly copied from the ancient seal of the Corporation of Grimsby,[1] which is of the date of Edward the First. The existence of this is perhaps the best proof that the story of Grim and Havelok is more than a romance. Certainly the Norse "Heimskringla" record claims an older northern origin for the town than that of the Danish invasion of Alfred's time; and the historic freedom of its

ships from toll in the port of Elsinore has always been held to date from the days of its founder.



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The strange and mysterious “blue stones” of Grimsby and Louth are yet in evidence, and those of the former town are connected by legend with Grim. Certainly they have some very ancient if long-forgotten associations, and it is more than likely that they have been brought as “palladia” with the earliest northern settlers. A similar stone exists in the centre of the little East Anglian town of Harleston, with a definite legend of settlement attached to it; and there may be others. The Coronation Stone of Westminster and the stone in Kingston-on-Thames are well-known proofs of the ancient sanctity that surrounded such objects for original reasons that are now lost.

The final battle at Tetford, with its details, are from the Norman poem. The later English account is rounded off with the disgrace and burning alive of the false guardian; but for many reasons the earlier seems to be the more correct account. Certainly the mounds of some great forgotten fight remain in the Tetford valley, and Havelok is said to have come to “Carleflure,” which, being near Saltfleet, and on the road to Tetford, may be Canton, where there is a strong camp of what is apparently Danish type.

Those who can read with any comfort the crabbed Norman-French and Early English poetic versions will see at once where I have added incidents that may bring the story into a connected whole, as nearly as possible on the old Saga lines; and those readers to whom the old romance is new will hardly wish that I should pull the story to pieces again, to no purpose so far as they are concerned. And, at least, for a fairly free treatment of the subject, I have the authority of those previous authors whom I have mentioned.

In the different versions, the founder of Grimsby is variously described as a steward of the Danish king’s castle, a merchant, a fisher, and in the English poem—probably because it was felt that none other would have undertaken the drowning of the prince—as a thrall. Another version gives no account of the sack episode, but says that Grim finds both queen and prince wandering on the shore. Grim the fisher is certainly a historic character in his own town, and it has not been hard to combine the various callings of the worthy foster-father of Havelok and the troubles of both mother and son. A third local variant tells that Havelok was found at Grimsby by the fisher adrift in an open boat; and I have given that boat also a place in the story, in a different way.

The names of the kings are too far lost to be set back in their place in history, but Professor Skeet gives the probable date of Havelok and Grim as at the end of the sixth century, with a possible identification of the former with the “governor of Lincoln” baptized by Paulinus. I have, therefore, assumed this period where required. But a legend of this kind is a romance of all time, and needs no confinement to date and place. Briton and Saxon, Norman and Englishman, and maybe Norseman and Dane, have loved the old story, and with its tale of right and love triumphant it still has its own power.



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Stockland, 1899

Chas. W. Whistler

CHAPTER I. GRIM THE FISHER AND HIS SONS.

This story is not about myself, though, because I tell of things that I have seen, my name must needs come into it now and then. The man whose deeds I would not have forgotten is my foster-brother, Havelok, of whom I suppose every one in England has heard. Havelok the Dane men call him here, and that is how he will always be known, as I think.

He being so well known, it is likely that some will write down his doings, and, not knowing them save by hearsay, will write them wrongly and in different ways, whereof will come confusion, and at last none will be believed. Wherefore, as he will not set them down himself, it is best that I do so. Not that I would have anyone think that the penmanship is mine. Well may I handle oar, and fairly well axe and sword, as is fitting for a seaman, but the pen made of goose feather is beyond my rough grip in its littleness, though I may make shift to use a sail-needle, for it is stiff and straightforward in its ways, and no scrawling goeth therewith.

Therefore my friend Wislac, the English priest, will be the penman, having skill thereto. I would have it known that I can well trust him to write even as I speak, though he has full leave to set aside all hard words and unseemly, such as a sailor is apt to use unawares; and where my Danish way of speaking goeth not altogether with the English, he may alter the wording as he will, so long as the sense is always the same. Then, also, will he read over to me what he has written, and therefore all may be sure that this is indeed my true story.

Now, as it is needful that one begins at the beginning, it happens that the first thing to be told is how I came to be Havelok's foster-brother, and that seems like beginning with myself after all. But all the story hangs on this, and so there is no help for it.

If it is asked when this beginning might be, I would say, for an Englishman who knows not the names of Danish kings, that it was before the first days of the greatness of Ethelbert of Kent, the overlord of all England, the Bretwalda, and therefore, as Father Wislac counts, about the year of grace 580. But King Ethelbert does not come into the story, nor does the overlord of all Denmark; for the kings of whom I must speak were

under-kings, though none the less kingly for all that. One must ever be the mightiest of many; and, as in England, there were at that time many kings in Denmark, some over wide lands and others over but small realms, with that one who was strong enough to make the rest pay tribute to him as overlord, and only keeping that place by the power of the strong hand, not for any greater worth.



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Our king on the west coast of Denmark, where the story of Havelok the Dane must needs begin, was Gunnar Kirkeban—so called because, being a heathen altogether, as were we all in Denmark at that time, he had been the bane of many churches in the western isles of Scotland, and in Wales and Ireland, and made a boast thereof. However, that cruelty of his was his own bane in the end, as will be seen. Otherwise he was a well-loved king and a great warrior, tall, and stronger than any man in Denmark, as was said. His wife, the queen, was a foreigner, but the fairest of women. Her name was Eleyrn, and from this it was thought that she came from the far south. Certainly Gunnar had brought her back from Gardariki,[2] whither he had gone on a trading journey one year. Gunnar and she had two daughters and but one son, and that son was Havelok, at this time seven years old.

Next to the king came our own lord, Jarl Sigurd, older than Gunnar, and his best counsellor, though in the matter of sparing harmless and helpless church folk his advice was never listened to. His hall was many miles from the king's place, southward down the coast.

Here, too, lived my father, Grim, with us in a good house which had been his father's before him. Well loved by Jarl Sigurd was Grim, who had ever been his faithful follower, and was the best seaman in all the town. He was also the most skilful fisher on our coasts, being by birth a well-to-do freeman enough, and having boats of his own since he could first sail one. At one time the jarl had made him steward of his house; but the sea drew him ever, and he waxed restless away from it. Therefore, after a time, he asked the jarl's leave to take to the sea again, and so prospered in the fishery that at last he bought a large trading buss from the Frisian coast, and took to the calling of the merchant.

So for some years my father, stout warrior as he proved himself in many a fight at his lord's side, traded peacefully—that is, so long as men would suffer him to do so; for it happened more than once that his ship was boarded by Vikings, who in the end went away, finding that they had made a mistake in thinking that they had found a prize in a harmless trader, for Grim was wont to man his ship with warriors, saying that what was worth trading was worth keeping. I mind me how once he came to England with a second cargo, won on the high seas from a Viking's plunder, which the Viking brought alongside our ship, thinking to add our goods thereto. Things went the other way, and we left him only an empty ship, which maybe was more than he would have spared to us. That was on my second voyage, when I was fifteen.

Mostly my father traded to England, for there are few of the Saxon kin who take ship for themselves, and the havens to which he went were Tetney and Saltfleet, on the Lindsey shore of Humber, where he soon had friends.

So Grim prospered and waxed rich fast, and in the spring of the year wherein the story begins was getting the ship ready for the first cruise of the season, meaning to be afloat

early; for then there was less trouble with the wild Norse Viking folk, for one cruise at least. Then happened that which set all things going otherwise than he had planned, and makes my story worth telling.



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We—that is my father Grim, Leva my mother, my two brothers and myself, and our two little sisters, Gunhild and Solva—sat quietly in our great room, busy at one little thing or another, each in his way, before the bright fire that burned on the hearth in the middle of the floor. There was no trouble at all for us to think of more than that the wind had held for several weeks in the southwest and northwest, and we wondered when it would shift to its wonted springtide easting, so that we could get the ship under way once more for the voyage she was prepared for. Pleasant talk it was, and none could have thought that it was to be the last of many such quiet evenings that had gone before.

Yet it seemed that my father was uneasy, and we had been laughing at him for his silence, until he said, looking into the fire, “I will tell you what is on my mind, and then maybe you will laugh at me the more for thinking aught of the matter. Were I in any but a peaceful land, I should say that a great battle had been fought not so far from us, and to the northward.”

Then my mother looked up at him, knowing that he had seen many fights, and was wise in the signs that men look for before them; but she asked nothing, and so I said, “What makes you think this, father?”

He answered me with another question.

“How many kites will you see overhead at any time, sons?”

I wondered at this, but it was easy to answer—to Raven, at least.

“Always one, and sometimes another within sight of the first,” Raven said.

“And if there is food, what then?”

“The first swoops down on it, and the next follows, and the one that watches the second follows that, and so on until there are many kites gathered.”

“What if one comes late?”

“He swings overhead and screams, and goes back to his place; then no more come.”

“Ay,” he said; “you will make a sailor yet, son Raven, for you watch things. Now I will tell you what I saw today. There was the one kite sailing over my head as I was at the ship garth, and presently it screamed so that I looked up. Then it left its wide circles over the town, and flew northward, straight as an arrow. Then from the southward came another, following it, and after that another, and yet others, all going north. And far off I could see where others flew, and they too went north. And presently flapped over me the ravens in the wake of the kites, and the great sea eagles came in screaming and went the same way, and so for all the time that I was at the ship, and until I came home.”



“There is a sacrifice to the Asir somewhere,” I said, “for the birds of Odin and Thor have always their share.”

My father shook his head.

“The birds cry to one another, as I think, and say when the feast is but enough for those that have gathered. They have cried now that there is room for all at some great feasting. Once have I seen the like before, and that was when I was with the ship guard when the jarl fought his great battle in the Orkneys; we knew that he had fought by the same token.”

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But my mother said that I was surely right. There was no fear of battle here, and indeed with Gunnar and Sigurd to guard the land we had had peace for many a long year on our own coasts, if other lands had had to fear them. My father laughed a little, saying that perhaps it was so, and then my mother took the two little ones and went with them into the sleeping room to put them to rest, while I and my two brothers went out to the cattle garth to see that all was well for the night.

Then, when our eyes were used to the moonlight, which was not very bright, away to the northward we saw a red glow that was not that of the sunset or of the northern lights, dying down now and then, and then again flaring up as will a far-off fire; and even as we looked we heard the croak of an unseen raven flying thitherward overhead.

“Call father,” I said to Withelm, who was the youngest of us three. The boy ran in, and presently my father came out and looked long at the glow in the sky.

“Even as I thought,” he said. “The king’s town is burning, and I must go to tell the jarl. Strange that we have had no message. Surely the king’s men must be hard pressed if this is a foe’s work.”

So he went at once, leaving us full of wonder and excited, as boys will be at anything that is new and has a touch of fear in it. But he had hardly gone beyond the outbuildings when one came running and calling him. The jarl had sent for him, for there was strange news from the king. Then he and this messenger hastened off together.

In half an hour the war horns were blowing fiercely, and all the quiet town was awake, for my father’s forebodings were true, and the foe was on us. In our house my mother was preparing the food that her husband should carry with him, and I was putting a last polish on the arms that should keep him, while the tramp of men who went to the gathering rang down the street, one by one at first, and then in twos and threes. My mother neither wept nor trembled, but worked with a set face that would not show fear.

Then came in my father, and I armed him, begging at the same time that I might go also, for I could use *my* weapons well enough; but he told me that some must needs bide at home as a guard, and that I was as much wanted there as at the king’s place, wherewith I had to be content. It was by no means unlikely that we also might be attacked, if it was true that the king’s men were outnumbered, as was said.

Now when my father went to say farewell to us, nowhere could be found my brother Withelm.

“The boy has gone to watch the muster,” my father said. “I shall see him there presently.”



Then, because he saw that my mother was troubled more than her wont, he added, "Have no fear for me. This will be no more than a raid of Norsemen, and they will plunder and be away with the tide before we get to the place."

So he laughed and went out, having done his best to cheer us all, and I went with him to where the men were gathered in their arms in the wide space in the midst of the houses. There I sought for little Wilhelm, but could not find him among the women and children who looked on; and before we had been there more than a few minutes the jarl gave the word, and the march was begun. There were about fifteen miles to be covered between our town and the king's.



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I watched them out of sight, and then went home, having learned that I was to be called out only in case of need. And as I drew near the homestead I saw a light in the little ash grove that was behind the garth.[3] In the midst of the trees, where this light seemed to be, was our wooden image of Thor the Hammer Bearer, older than any of us could tell; and in front of this was what we used as his altar —four roughly-squared stones set together. These stones were blue-black in colour, and whence they came I do not know, unless it was true that my forefathers brought them here when first Odin led his folk to the northern lands. Always they had been the altar for my people, and my father held that we should have no luck away from them.

So it was strange to see a light in that place, where none would willingly go after dark, and half was I feared to go and see what it might mean. But then it came into my mind that the enemy might be creeping on the house through the grove, and that therefore I must needs find out all about it. So I went softly to the nearest trees, and crept from one to another, ever getting closer to the light; and I will say that I feared more that I might see some strange thing that was more than mortal than that I should see the leading foeman stealing towards me. But presently it was plain that the light did not move as if men carried it, but it flickered as a little fire; and at last I saw that it burned on the altar stones, and that frightened me so that I almost fled.

Maybe I should have done so, but that I heard a voice that I knew; and so, looking once more, I saw a figure standing before the fire, and knew it. It was little Withelm, and why a ten-year-old boy should be here I could not think. But I called him softly, and he started somewhat, turning and trying to look through the darkness towards me, though he did not seem afraid. There was a little fire of dry sticks burning on the stones, and the gaunt old statue seemed to look more terrible than ever in its red blaze. One might have thought that the worn face writhed itself as the light played over it.

“It is I, Withelm,” I said softly, for the fear of the place was on me. “We have sought you everywhere, and father would have wished you farewell. What are you doing here?”

I came forward then, for it was plain that the child feared nothing, so that I was put to shame. And as I came I asked once more what he was doing in this place.

“The jarl has surely forgotten the sacrifice to the Asir before the warriors went to fight, and they will be angry,” he answered very calmly. “It is right that one should remember, and I feared for father, and therefore—”

He pointed to the altar, and I saw that he had laid his own untasted supper on the fire that he had lighted, and I had naught to say. The thing was over-strange to me, who thought nothing of these things. It was true that the host always sacrificed before sailing on the Viking path, but tonight had been urgent haste.



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“Thor will not listen to any but a warrior,” I said. “Come home, brother, for mother waits us.”

“If not Thor, who is maybe busy at the battle they talk of, then do I think that All Father will listen,” he said stoutly. “But this was all that I had to make sacrifice withal, and it may not be enough.”

“The jarl will make amends when he comes back,” I said, wishing to get home and away from this place, and yet unwilling to chide the child. “Now let us go, for mother will grow anxious.”

With that he put his hand in mine, and we both saluted Thor, as was fitting, and then went homeward. It seemed to me that the glare in the north was fiercer now than when I had first seen it.

Now, after my mother had put Withelm to bed, I told her how I had found him; and thereat she wept a little, as I could see in the firelight.

After a long silence she said, “Strange things and good come into the mind of a child, and one may learn what his fate shall be in the days to come. I am sure from this that Withelm will be a priest.”

Now as one may buy the place of a godar, with the right to have a temple of the Asir for a district and the authority that goes therewith, if so be that one falls vacant or is to be given up by the holder, this did not seem unlikely, seeing how rich we were fast growing. And indeed my mother’s saying came to pass hereafter, though not at all in the way of which we both thought.

There was no alarm that night. The old warriors watched round the town and along the northern tracks, but saw nothing, and in the morning the black smoke hung over the place of the burning, drifting slowly seaward. The wind had changed, and they said that it would doubtless have taken the foe away with it, as my father had hoped. So I went down to the ship with Raven, and worked at the few things that were still left to be done to her as she lay in her long shed on the slips, ready to take the water at any tide. She was only waiting for cargo and stores to be put on board her with the shift of wind that had come at last, and I thought that my father would see to these things as soon as he came back.

Now in the evening we had news from the Jarl, and strange enough it was. My father came back two days afterwards and told us all, and so I may as well make a short story of it. The ways of Gunnar Kirkeban had been his end, for a certain Viking chief, a Norseman, had wintered in Wales during the past winter, and there he had heard from the Welsh of the wrongs that they had suffered at his hands. Also he had heard of the great booty of Welsh gold that Gunnar had taken thence in the last summer; and so,



when these Welsh asked that he would bide with them and help fight the next Danes who came, he had offered to do more than that —he would lead them to Gunnar's place if they would find men to man three ships that he had taken, and would be content to share the booty with them.



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The Welsh king was of the line of Arthur, and one who yet hoped to win back the land of his fathers from the Saxons and English; and so he listened to this Hodulf, thinking to gain a powerful ally in him for attack on the eastern coast of England after this. So, favoured by the wind that had kept us from the sea, Hodulf, with twenty ships in all, had fallen on Gunnar unawares, and had had an easy victory, besetting the town in such wise that only in the confusion while the wild Welsh were burning and plundering on every side had the messenger to the jarl been able to slip away.

But when the jarl and our men reached the town there was naught to be done but to make terms with Hodulf as best he might, that the whole country might not be overrun. For Gunnar had been slain in his own hall, with his two young daughters and with the queen also, as was supposed. Havelok the prince was in his hands, and for his sake therefore Sigurd had been the more ready to come to terms.

Then Hodulf sent messengers to the overlord of all Denmark, saying that he would hold this kingdom as for him, and backed up that promise with a great present from Gunnar's treasure, so that he was listened to. Therefore our jarl was helpless; and there being no other king strong enough to aid him if he rose, in the end he had to take Hodulf for lord altogether, though it went sorely against the grain.

I have heard it said by the Welsh folk that Hodulf held the kingdom for their lord; and it is likely that he humoured them by saying that he would do so, which was a safe promise to make, as even King Arthur himself could never have reached him to make him pay scatt.

CHAPTER II. KING HODULF'S SECRET.

My father came home heavy and anxious enough, for he did not know how things would go under this new king, though he had promised peace to all men who would own him. We in our place saw nothing of him or his men for the next few weeks, but he was well spoken of by those who had aught to do with him elsewhere. So my father went on trying to gather a cargo for England; but it was a slow business, as the burnt and plundered folk of the great town had naught for us, and others sold to them. But he would never be idle, and every day when weather served we went fishing, for he loved his old calling well, as a man will love that which he can do best. Our two boats and their gear were always in the best of order, and our kinsman, Arngeir, used and tended them when we were away in the ship in summertime.

Now, one evening, as we came up from the shore after beaching the boat on the hard below the town, and half a mile from the nearest houses, and being, as one may suppose, not altogether in holiday trim, so that Grim and his boys with their loads of fish and nets looked as though a fisher's hovel were all the home that they might own, we saw a horseman, followed at a little distance by two more, riding towards us. The dusk

was gathering, and at first we thought that this was Jarl Sigurd, who would ask us maybe to send fish to his hall, and so we set our loads down and waited for him.



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But it was not our lord, and I had never seen this man before. From his arms, which were of a new pattern to me, he might be one of the host of Hodulf, as I thought.

“Ho, fisher!” he cried, when he was yet some way from us; “leave your lads, and come hither. I have a word for you.”

He reined up and waited, and now I was sure that he was a Norseman, for his speech was rougher than ours. He was a tall, handsome man enough; but I liked neither his voice nor face, nor did I care to hear Grim, my father, summoned in such wise, not remembering that just now a stranger could not tell that he was aught but a fisher thrall of the jarl’s.

But my father did as he was asked, setting down the nets that he was carrying, and only taking with him the long boathook on which he had slung them as he went forward. I suppose he remembered the old saying, that a man should not stir a step on land without his weapons, as one never knows when there may be need of them; and so, having no other, he took this.

I heard the first questions that the man asked, for he spoke loudly.

“Whose man are you?”

“Sigurd’s,” answered my father shortly.

“Whose are the boats?”

“Mine, seeing that I built them.”

“Why, then, there is somewhat that you can do for me,” the horseman said. “Is your time your own, however?”

“If the jarl needs me not.”

“Tonight, then?”

“I have naught to do after I have carried the nets home.”

“That is well,” said the stranger; and after that he dropped his voice so that I heard no more, but he and my father talked long together.

We waited, and at last the talk ended, and my father came back to us, while the stranger rode away northward along the sands. Then I asked who the man was, and what he wanted.



“He is some chief of these Norsemen, and one who asks more questions of a thrall, as he thinks me, than he would dare ask Sigurd the jarl, or Grim the merchant either, for that matter.”

Seeing that my father did not wish to say more at this time, we asked nothing else, but went homeward in silence. It seemed as if he was ill at ease, and he went more quickly than was his wont, so that presently Raven and little Withelm lagged behind us with their burdens, for our catch had been a good one.

Then he stopped outside the garth when we reached home, and told me not to go in yet. And when the others came up he said to them, “Do you two take in the things and the fish, and tell mother that Radbard and I have to go down to the ship. There is cargo to be seen to, and it is likely that we shall be late, so bid her not wait up for us.”

Then he told me to come, and we left the two boys at once and turned away towards the haven. There was nothing strange in this, for cargo often came at odd times, and we were wont to work late in stowing it. I did wonder that we had not stayed to snatch a bit of supper, but it crossed my mind that the Norseman had told my father of some goods that had maybe been waiting for the whole day while we were at sea. And then that did not seem likely, for he had taken us for thralls. So I was puzzled, but held my peace until it should seem good to my father to tell me what we were about.



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When we reached a place where there was no house very near and no man about, he said to me at last, "What is on hand I do not rightly know, but yon man was Hodulf, the new king, as I suppose we must call him. He would not tell me his name, but I saw him when he and the jarl made terms the other day. Now he has bidden me meet him on the road a mile from the town as soon as it is dark, and alone. He has somewhat secret for me to do."

"It is a risk to go alone and unarmed," I answered; "let me go home and get your weapons, for the errand does not seem honest."

"That is what I think also," said my father, "and that is why I am going to meet him. It is a bad sign when a king has a secret to share with a thrall, and I have a mind to find out what it is. There may be some plot against our jarl."

He was silent for a few minutes, as if thinking, and then he went on.

"I cannot take arms, or he would suspect me, and would tell me nothing; but if there is any plotting to be done whereof I must tell the jarl, it will be as well that you should hear it."

Then he said that he thought it possible for me to creep very close to the place where he was to meet Hodulf, so that I could hear all or most of what went on, and that I might as well be armed in case of foul play, for he did not suppose that the Norseman would think twice about cutting down a thrall who did not please him.

It was almost dark by this time, and therefore he must be going. I was not to go home for arms, but to borrow from Arngeir as we passed his house. And this I did, saying that I had an errand beyond the town and feared prowling men of the Norse host. Which danger being a very reasonable one, Arngeir offered to go with me; and I had some difficulty in preventing him from doing so, for he was like an elder brother to all of us. However, I said that I had no great distance to go, and feigned to be ashamed of myself for my fears; and he laughed at me, and let me go my way with sword and spear and seax[4] also, which last my father would take under his fisher's jerkin.

I caught up my father quickly, and we went along the sands northwards until we came to the place where we must separate. The road was but a quarter of a mile inland from this spot, for it ran near the shore, and it was not much more than that to the place where Hodulf would be waiting.

"Creep as near as you can," my father said; "but come to help only if I call. I do not think that I am likely to do so."

Then we went our ways, he making straight for the road, and I turning to my left a little. It was dark, for there was no moon now, but save that I was soundly scratched by the



brambles of the fringe of brushwood that grew all along the low hills of the coast, there was nothing to prevent my going on quickly, for I knew the ground well enough, by reason of yearly bird nesting. When I reached the roadway the meeting place was yet to my left, and I could hear my father's footsteps coming steadily in the distance. So I skirted the road for a little way, and then came to an open bit of heath and rising land, beyond which I thought I should find Hodulf. Up this I ran quickly, dropping into the heather at the top; and sure enough, in a hollow just off the road I could dimly make out the figure of a mounted man waiting.



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Then my father came along the road past me, and I crawled among the tall heather clumps until I was not more than twenty paces from the hollow, which was a little below me.

Hodulf's horse winded me, as I think, and threw up its head snorting, and I heard its bit rattle. But my father was close at hand, and that was lucky.

"Ho, fisher, is that you?" he called softly.

"I am here," was the answer, and at once my father came into the hollow from the road.

"Are any folk about?" Hodulf said.

"I have met none. Now, what is all this business?" answered my father.

"Business that will make a free man of you for the rest of your days, and rich, moreover, master thrall," said Hodulf. "That is, if you do as I bid you."

"A thrall can do naught else than what he is bidden."

"Nay, but he can do that in a way that will earn great reward, now and then; and your reward for obedience and silence thereafter in this matter shall be aught that you like to ask."

"This sounds as if I were to peril my life," my father said. "I know naught else that can be worth so much as that might be."

"There is no peril," said Hodulf scornfully; "your skin shall not be so much as scratched—ay, and if this is well done it will know a master's dog whip no more."

I heard my father chuckle with a thrall's cunning laugh at this, and then he said eagerly, "Well, master, what is it?"

"I will tell you. But first will you swear as on the holy ring that of what you shall do for me no man shall know hereafter?"

"What I do at your bidding none shall know, and that I swear," answered my father slowly, as if trying to repeat the king's words.

"See here, then," said Hodulf, and I heard his armour clatter as he dismounted.

Then the footsteps of both men shuffled together for a little while, and once I thought I heard a strange sound as of a muffled cry, at which Hodulf muttered under his breath. I could see that they took something large from the saddle bow, and set it on the ground, and then they spoke again.



“Have you a heavy anchor?” asked the king.

“A great one.”

“Well, then, tie it to this sack and sink it tonight where tide will never shift it. Then you may come to me and claim what reward you will.”

“Freedom, and gold enough to buy a new boat—two new boats!” said my father eagerly.

Hodulf laughed at that, and got on his horse again. I saw his tall form lift itself against the dim sky as he did so.

“What is in the sack?” asked my father.

“That is not your concern,” Hodulf answered sharply. “If you know not, then you can tell no man, even in your sleep. Put off at once and sink it.”

“It is in my mind,” said my father, “that I had better not look in the sack. Where shall I find you, lord, when the thing is in the sea? For as yet I have not heard your name.”



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I think that Hodulf had forgotten that he would have to answer this question, or else he thought that everyone knew him, for he did not reply all at once.

“You may ask the king for your reward,” he said, after a little thought, “for this is his business. Now you know that it will be best for you to be secret and sure. Not much worth will your chance of escape from torture be if this becomes known. But you know also that the reward is certain.”

“The king!” cried my father, with a sort of gasp of surprise.

I could almost think that I saw him staring with mouth agape as would a silly thrall; for so well had he taken the thrall’s part that had I not known who was speaking all the time, I had certainly had no doubt that one was there.

“Come to Hodulf, the king, and pray for freedom and your gold as a boon of his goodness, saying naught else, or making what tale you will of a hard master, or justice, so that you speak naught of what you have done, and that—and maybe more—shall be granted.”

“You yourself will speak for me?”

“I am the king—and think not that the darkness will prevent my knowing your face again,” Hodulf replied.

There was a threat in the words, and with them he turned his horse and rode away quickly northwards. I heard the hoofs of his men’s horses rattle on the road as they joined him, before he had gone far.

When the sounds died away altogether, and there was no fear of his coming back suddenly on us, my father whistled and I joined him. He almost started to find how near I was.

“You have heard all, then?” he said.

“Every word,” I answered, “and I like it not. Where is this sack he spoke of?”

It lay at his feet. A large sack it was, and full of somewhat heavy and warm that seemed to move a little when I put my hand on it. Still less did I like the business as I felt that.

“More also!” quoth my father, as if thinking of the king’s last words. “If that does not mean a halter for my neck, I am mistaken. What have we here, son, do you think?”

“Somewhat that should not be here, certainly,” I answered. “There would not be so much talk about drowning a dog, as one might think this to be.”

“Unless it were his wife’s,” answered my father, with a laugh.

Then he stooped, and I helped him to get the sack on his shoulders. It was heavy, but not very—not so heavy as a young calf in a sack would be; and he carried it easily, taking my spear to help him.

“The thrall is even going to take this to the house of Grim the merchant, whom the king will not know again, though he may see in the dark,” said he; “then we shall know how we stand.”

We met no one on our way back, for the town had gone to sleep, until the watchman passed the time of night with us, thinking no doubt that we had fish or goods in the burden. And when we came home a sleepy thrall opened to us, for all were at rest save him. And he too went his way to the shed where his place was when he had stirred the fire to a blaze and lit a torch that we might see to eat the supper that was left for us.



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Then we were alone, and while I set Arngeir's weapons in a corner, my father put down the sack, and stood looking at it. It seemed to sway a little, and to toss as it settled down. And now that there was light it was plain that the shape of what was inside it was strangely like that of a child, doubled up with knees to chin, as it showed through the sacking.

"Hodulf or no Hodulf," said my father, "I am going to see more of this."

With that he took a knife from the table and cut the cord that fastened the mouth, turning back the sack quickly.

And lo! gagged and bound hand and foot in such wise that he could not move, in the sack was a wondrously handsome boy of about the size of Withelm; and for all his terrible journey across the king's saddle, and in spite of our rough handling, his eyes were bright and fearless as he looked up at us.

"Radbard," said my father, "what if Hodulf had met with a thrall who had done his bidding in truth?"

I would not think thereof, for surely by this time there had been no light in the eyes that seemed to me to be grateful to us.

Now my father knelt down by the boy's side, and began to take the lashings from him, telling him at the same time to be silent when the gag was gone.

And hard work enough the poor child had to keep himself from screaming when his limbs were loosed, so cramped was he, for he had been bound almost into a ball. And even as we rubbed and chafed the cold hands and feet he swooned with the pain of the blood running freely once more.

"This is a business for mother," said my father, on that; "get your supper, and take it to bed with you, and say naught to the boys in the morning. This is a thing that may not be talked of."

Now I should have liked to stay, but my father meant what he said, and I could be of no more use; so I took my food, and went up to the loft where we three slept, and knew no more of what trouble that night might have for others.

CHAPTER III. HAVELOK, SON OF GUNNAR.

Now after I had gone, Grim, my father, tried to bring the child round, but he could not do so; and therefore, leaving him near the fire, he went softly to call Leva, my mother, to help him; and all the while he was wondering who the child might be, though indeed a



fear that he knew only too well was growing in his heart, for there would surely he only one whom Hodulf could wish out of his way.

As he opened the door that led to the sleeping room beyond the high seat, the light shone on Leva, and showed her sitting up in bed with wide eyes that seemed to gaze on somewhat that was terrible, and at first he thought her awake. But she yet slept, and so he called her gently, and she started and woke.

“Husband, is that you?” she said. “I had a strange dream even now which surely portends somewhat.”

Now, as all men know, our folk in the north are most careful in the matter of attending to dreams, specially those that come in troubled times, holding that often warning or good counsel comes from them. I cannot say that I have ever had any profit in that way myself, being no dreamer at all; but it is certain that others have, as may be seen hereafter. Wherefore my father asked Leva what this dream might be.



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“In my dream,” she answered, “it seemed that you came into the house bearing a sack, which you gave into my charge, saying that therein lay wealth and good fortune for us. And I would not believe this, for you said presently that to gain this the sack and all that was therein was to be thrown into the sea, which seemed foolishness. Whereon I cast it into a corner in anger, and thereout came pitiful cries and wailings. Then said I that it were ill to drown aught that had a voice as of a child, and so you bade me leave it. Then I seemed to sleep here; but presently in my dream I rose and looked on the sack again, and lo! round about it shone a great light, so that all the place was bright, and I was afraid. Then you came and opened the sack, and therein was a wondrous child, from whose mouth came a flame, as it were the shaft of a sunbeam, that stretched over all Denmark, and across the sea to England, whereby I knew that this child was one who should hereafter be king of both these lands. And on this I stared even as you woke me.”

Now Grim was silent, for this was passing strange, and moreover it fitted with his thought of who this child might be, since Hodulf would make away with him thus secretly.

“What make you of the dream?” asked Leva, seeing that he pondered on it.

“It is in my mind that your dream will come true altogether, for already it has begun to do so,” he answered. “Rise and come into the hall, and I will show you somewhat.”

On that Leva made haste and dressed and came out, and there, lying as if in sleep before the fire, was the wondrous child of her dream, and the sack was under his head as he lay; and she was wont to say to those few who knew the story, that the kingliness of that child was plain to be seen, as had been the flame of which she had dreamed, so that all might know it, though the clothes that he wore were such as a churl might be ashamed of.

Then she cried out a little, but not loudly, and knelt by the child to see him the better; and whether he had come to himself before and had dropped asleep for very weariness, or out of his swoon had passed into sleep, I cannot say, but at her touch he stirred a little.

“What child is this? and how came he here?” she asked, wondering.

“Already your dream has told you truly how he came,” Grim answered, “but who he is I do not rightly know yet. Take him up and bathe him, wife; and if he is the one I think him, there will be a mark whereby we may know him.”

“How should he be marked? And why look you to find any sign thus?”



But Grim had turned down the rough shirt and bared the child's neck and right shoulder, whereon were bruises that made Leva well-nigh weep as she saw them, for it was plain that he had been evilly treated for many days before this. But there on the white skin was the mark of the king's line—the red four-armed cross with bent ends which Gunnar and all his forebears had borne.



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Seeing that, Leva looked up wondering in her husband's face, and he answered the question that he saw written in her eyes.

"He is as I thought—he is Havelok, the son of Gunnar, our king. Hodulf gave him to me that I might drown him."

Then he told her all that had happened, and how from the first time that he had lifted the sack and felt what was within it he had feared that this was what was being done. Hodulf would have no rival growing up beside him, and as he dared not slay him openly, he would have it thought that he had been stolen away by his father's friends, and then folk would maybe wait quietly in hopes that he would come again when time went on.

Now Leva bathed Havelok in the great tub, and with the warmth and comfort of the hot water he waked and was well content, so that straightway, when he was dressed in Withelm's holiday clothes, which fitted him, though he was but seven years old at this time, and Withelm was a well-grown boy enough for his ten winters, he asked for food, and they gave him what was yet on the board; and we lived well in Denmark.

"There is no doubt that he hath a kingly hunger," quoth Grim as he watched him.

"Friend," said Havelok, hearing this, though it was not meant for his ears, "it is likely, seeing that this is the third day since I have had food given me. And I thank you, good people, though I would have you know that it is the custom to serve the king's son kneeling."

"How should we know that you are the king's son indeed?" asked Grim.

"I am Havelok, son of Gunnar," the boy said gravely. "Yon traitor, Hodulf, has slain my father, and my two sisters, and driven out my mother, whither I cannot tell, and now he would drown me."

Then the boy could hardly keep a brave front any longer, and he added, "Yet I do not think that you will do to me as I heard him bid you."

Then came over Grim a great pity and sorrow that it should seem needful thus to sue to him, and there grew a lump in his throat, so that for a while he might not answer, and the boy thought him in doubt, so that in his eyes there was a great fear. But Leva wept outright, and threw herself on her knees beside him, putting her arms round him as he sat, speaking words of comfort.

Then Grim knelt also, and said, "Thralls of yours are we, Havelok, son of Gunnar, and for you shall our lives be given before Hodulf shall harm you. Nor shall he know that you live until the day comes when you can go to him sword in hand and helm on head, with half the men of this realm at your back, and speak to him of what he did and what he planned, and the vengeance that shall be therefor."



So Grim took on himself to be Havelok's foster-father, and, as he ended, the boy said with glowing eyes, "I would that I were grown up. How long shall this be before it comes to pass?"

And then of a sudden he said, as a tired child will, "Friends, I am sorely weary. Let me sleep."



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So Leva took him in her arms and laid him in their own bed; and at once he slept, so that she left him and came back to Grim by the fireside, for there was much to be said.

First of all it was clear that Havelok must be hidden, and it was not to be supposed that Hodulf would be satisfied until he had seen the thrall to whom he had trusted such a secret come back for his reward. If he came not he would be sought; and then he would find out to whom he had spoken, and there would be trouble enough.

But it seemed easy to hide Havelok on board the ship, and sail with him to England as soon as possible. A few days might well pass before a thrall could get to Hodulf, so that he would suspect nothing just at first. There were merchants in England who would care for the boy well, and the two boats might be sunk, so that the king should not ask whose they were. So when Grim came home again the fisher would be thought of as drowned on his errand, and Hodulf would be content.

But then, after a little talk of this, it was plain that all the town could not be told to say that the fisher was drowned on such a night, and Hodulf would leave naught undone to find the truth of the matter. So the puzzle became greater, and the one thing that was clear was that Grim was in sore danger, and Havelok also.

Then suddenly outside the dogs barked, and a voice which they obeyed quieted them. Grim sprang for his axe, which hung on the wall, and went to the door, whereon someone was knocking gently.

“Open, uncle; it is I, Arngeir.”

“What does the boy want at this time?” said Grim, taking down the great bar that kept the door, axe in hand, for one must be cautious in such times as these.

Arngeir came in—a tall young man of twenty, handsome, and like Grim in ways, for he was his brother’s son.

“Lucky am I in finding you astir,” he said. “I thought I should have had to wake you all. Are you just home from sea, or just going out?”

“Not long home,” answered Leva; “but what has brought you?”

“I have a guest for you, if I may bring one here at this hour.”

“A friend of yours never comes at the wrong time,” Grim said. “Why not bring him in?”

“If it were a friend of mine and a man he would do well enough at my house for the night,” said Arngeir, smiling; “but the one for whom I have come is a lady, and, I think, one in sore trouble.”



“Who is she?” asked my mother, wondering much.

“From the king’s town, certainly,” answered Arngeir, “but I do not know her name. Truth to tell, I forgot to ask it, for she is sorely spent; and so I made haste to come to you.”

Then Leva would know how a lady came at this time to Arngeir’s house, for he was alone, save for his four men, being an orphan without other kin beside us, and his house was close to our shipyard and the sea.



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“She came not to me, but I found her,” he replied. “My horse is sick, and I must get up an hour ago and see to it for the second time tonight. Then as I came from the stable I saw someone go towards the shipyard, and, as I thought, into the open warehouse. It was dark, and I could not tell then if this was man or woman; but I knew that no one had business there, and there are a few things that a thief might pick up. So I took an axe and one of the dogs, and went to see what was on hand, but at first there was naught to be found of anyone. If it had not been for the dog, I think that I should have gone away, but he went into the corner where the bales of wool are set, and there he whined strangely, and when I looked, there was this lady on the bales, and she was weeping and sore afraid. So I asked her what was amiss, and it was not easy to get an answer at first. But at last she told me that she had escaped from the burning of the king’s town, and would fain be taken across the sea into some place of peace. So I cheered her by saying that you would surely help her; and then I took her to my house and came to you. Worn and rent are her garments, but one may see that they have been rich, and I deem her some great lady.”

“Go and bring her here, husband,” said my mother, on hearing that.

But he was already going, and at once he and Arngeir went out and down the street. There were many other ladies and their children who had taken refuge here with the townfolk after the burning, and the coming of this one was but another count in the long tale of trouble that began on the Welsh shore with the ways of Gunnar, the church’s bane.

My father was long gone, and the day was breaking when he came back. My mother slept in the great chair before the fire, for waiting had wearied her, but she woke as she heard Grim’s footstep, and unbarred the door to him, ready to welcome the guest that she looked for. But he was alone, and on his face was the mark of some new trouble, and that a great one.

He came in and barred the door after him, and then sat down wearily and ate for the first time since we had had our meal at sea; and while he did so Leva asked him nothing, wondering what was wrong, but knowing that she would hear in good time. And when he had eaten well he spoke.

“The lady is Eley the queen. She has been wandering for these many days from place to place, sometimes in the woods, and sometimes in hiding in the cottages of the poor folk, always with a fear of staying in one place, lest Hodulf should find her, for it is known that he is seeking her. Then at last one told her of my ship, and she is here to seek me.”

Now one may know what the wonder and pity of my mother was, and she would fain have gone to her. But Grim had left her at Arngeir’s house, for folk were stirring in the town, and there were many who would know the queen if they saw her.

“It will soon be known that Arngeir has a guest,” my mother said, “whereas none would have wondered had she been here.”



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“By this time tomorrow it will not matter if Hodulf knows,” answered Grim, “for she will be safe.”

“Where will you hide her then and what of Havelok?”

“For those two there is no safety but across the sea, and they are the most precious cargo that I shall ever have carried. Already Arngeir and the men are at work on the ship, getting the rollers under her keel, that she may take the water with the next tide. I shall sail with the tide that comes with the darkness again, saying that I shall find cargo elsewhere in other ports, as I have done once before.”

“I had not looked to say farewell to you quite so soon,” my mother said; “but this is right. Now I will have all things ready, that the queen shall be in what comfort she may on the voyage. But it will be well that none shall know, even of your seamen, who the passengers are, else will word go to Hodulf in some way hereafter that Havelok has escaped.”

“I have thought of that,” answered Grim. “It will be best that none, not even Radbard, shall know who this is whom we have in the house. A chance word goes far sometimes.”

“The boy will tell his name.”

“There are many who are named after him, and that is no matter. Do you speak to him, for it is plain that he has sense enough, and bid him say naught but that he and his mother have escaped from the town, and, if you will, that he escaped in the sack. I will speak to Radbard, and there will be no trouble. Only Arngeir must know the truth, and that not until we are on the high seas perhaps.”

So there seemed to be no more fear, and in an hour the house was astir, and there was work enough for all in preparing for the voyage. As for me, I went down to the ship with my father, and worked there.

Now, I will say that not for many a long year did I know who this foster-brother of mine was. It was enough for me to be told that he was the son of some great man or other with whom Hodulf had a private feud. Nor did I ever speak of that night’s work to any, for my father bade me not to do so. Presently I knew, of course, that the lady was Havelok’s mother; but that told me nothing, for I never heard her name.

We worked at the ship for three hours or so, stowing the bales of wool and the other little cargo we had; and then my father sent me to the fishing-boats for a pair of oars belonging to the ship’s boat that were there, and, as it fell out, it was a good thing that I and not one of the men went. When I came to the place where they were drawn up on the beach, as we had left them last night, there was a stranger talking to some of the



fisher folk, who were working at their nets not far off; and though another might have paid no heed to this, I, with the remembrance of last night fresh in my mind, wondered if he was by any chance there on an errand from Hodulf. I thought that, were I he, I should surely send someone to know, at least, if the fisher went out last night



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after I had spoken with him. So I loitered about until the man went away, which he did slowly, passing close to me, and looking at the boats carefully, as if he would remember them. Then I went and asked the men to whom he had been speaking what he wanted. They said that they wondered that he had not spoken to me, for he had been asking about my father and of his ship, and if he took any passenger with him this voyage. It would seem that he wanted to sail with us, from all he said.

Certainly he had begun by asking whose boats these were, and wondered that a merchant should go fishing at all, when there was no need for him to do so. Also he had asked if Grim had been out last night, and they had of course told him that he had not, for neither boat had been shifted from the berth she had been given when we came in at dusk.

“Ah,” he had said, “well did I wot that your merchant would do no night work,” and so made a jest of the matter, saying that in his country it were below the state of a merchant to have aught to do with a thrall’s work. He was certainly a Norseman, and they thought that I should find him with my father. Now I thought otherwise, and also I saw that all was known. This man was a spy of Hodulf’s, and would go straight back to his master. My father must hear of this at once; and I hurried back to the ship, and took him aside and told him. And as I did so his face grew grey under the tan that sea and wind had given it, and I knew not altogether why.

“Tell Arngeir to come to me,” he said; “I am going to the jarl. Tell no one, but go home and say to mother that I shall be with her in an hour. Then come back and work here.”

Then he and Arngeir went to Sigurd, and told him all from the beginning. And when the jarl heard, he was glad for the safety of the queen and of Havelok, but he said that there was no doubt that Denmark was no place for Grim any longer.

“That is my thought also,” said my father; “but now am I Havelok’s foster-father, and for him I can make a home across the sea, where I will train him up for the time that shall surely come, when he shall return and take his father’s kingdom.”

“That is well,” the jarl said, “but you have little time. What Hodulf will do one cannot say, but he may come here with his men behind him to force me to give you up, and the town will be searched for Havelok, and both he and the queen will be lost.”

“If that is so,” my father answered, “we have time enough. Two hours for the spy to reach his master; one hour for Hodulf to hear him, and to bethink himself; an hour for gathering his men; and four hours, at the least, in which to get here. Eight hours, at the least, have we, and the tide serves in six. I had thought of waiting till dark, but that is of



no use now. We may as well go, for there are true men here, who will wait to welcome him who flies when he comes again.”

“This is a sore wrench for you and yours, good friend and faithful,” Sigurd said, “but it must be. Nevertheless I can make your loss as little as it may be. You shall sell all that is yours to me at your own price, that you may have the means to make a new home well, wherever you may choose.”



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At first my father would not have that, saying that there would be much trouble on his account presently.

But Sigurd said that, first, the trouble was not of his making at all; and next, that if Hodulf plundered the place, it was as well to send away as much as possible beforehand; and lastly—and this was what touched my father most—that he must think of his charge.

“Why, old friend, you are giving up all for Havelok, as would I. And am I to have no share in the training of him for the days to come?”

Therewith he waited for no more words, but went to his great chest, and took thereout chain after chain of linked gold rings, and put them in a canvas bag, without weighing or counting them, and gave them to Grim.

“Lord, here is enough to buy half the town!” my father said.

“What of that? The town is Havelok’s by right, and maybe you can buy him a village across seas with it. But give me a full quittance for my purchase of your goods and cattle and house, that I may have right to them.”

That Grim did at once, before witnesses who were called in, none wondering that he chose thus to secure his property while he was away, because Hodulf might make demands on it. They did not know that any money changed hands, and thought it formal only, and a wise thing to be done.

After that Grim and Arngeir took leave of the jarl, thanking him, and they went to our house.

There waited my mother anxiously enough, for she knew from my message that there was somewhat new to be told, or my father had not left the ship. Nor do I think that what was to be done was altogether a surprise to her, for she had thought much, and knew the dangers that might crop up. So, being very brave, she strove to make light of the trouble that leaving her home cost her, and set about gathering the few things that she could take.

Now on the hearth sat Withelm, tending the fire, and he heard presently that we were all to go to sea; and that pleased him well, for he had ever longed to sail with his father. As for Havelok, he had waked once, and had well eaten, and now was sleeping again.

Then said Withelm, “When will the sacrifice to Aegir and Ran [5] for luck on the swan’s path be?”

“Scant time have we for that,” my father said, “for tide will not wait.”



“Then,” said the boy, “it were well to take the stone altar with us, and make sacrifice on board. I have heard that Aegir is wrathful and strong.”

Then my father said to Leva, “The boy is right in one thing, and that is, that if we are to make a new home beyond the sea, the blue stones that have belonged to our family since time untold should go with us, else will there be no luck in this flitting.”

“What matter?”

“West they came with us in the days of Odin, and west they shall go with us once more,” my father said.

And there was an end of question on the matter, for presently Arngeir came up with the team of oxen and a sled, and my father hastily cried to Thor as in time of sudden war, and then on the sled they loaded the stones easily. I helped, and it is certain that they were no trouble to uproot or lift, though they were bedded in the ground and heavy. Wherefrom we all thought that the flitting was by the will of the Norns, and likely to turn out well.



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But in no way could we lift Thor himself. It was as if he were rooted, and maybe he was so. Therefore we left him, but sadly.

One may suppose that, had any noticed that Grim was taking these sacred things with him, there would have been a talk; but as we sailed light, none thought them aught but needed ballast; and we brought other stones to the ship with them and afterwards.

Of course folk did wonder at this sudden sailing of ours, but my father made no secret of his wish to get out of the way of Hodulf, who had taken the ships of one or two other men elsewhere, so that all thought he feared that his would be the next to be seized, and deemed him prudent in going. As for our own crew, they were told that it was certain that the ship would be taken unless we went on this tide, and so they worked well.

Very early in the morning, and unseen, Arngeir had brought Eleyrn, the queen, on board, and she was in the cabin under the raised after deck all the while that the bustle of making ready was going on. Only my father went in there at any time, unless he gave the key to one of us, for there he kept his valuables and the arms.

Presently, when all the men were forward and busy, I got Havelok on board unnoticed. We had kept Withelm running to and fro from ship to house with little burdens all the morning, mightily busy; and then, when the chance came, Havelok in Withelm's clothes, and with a bundle on his head, came running to me. I waited by the after cabin, and I opened the door quickly and let him in. Then he saw his mother; and how those two met, who had thought each other lost beyond finding, I will not try to say.

I closed the door softly and left them, locking it again, and found Withelm close to me, and Arngeir watching to see that all went well.

Soon after that there came a Norseman, dressed as a merchant, who talked with my father of goods, and lading, and whither he was bound, and the like. When he went away, he thought that he had found out that we were for the Texel, but I do not know that he was from Hodulf. There had been time for him to send a spy in haste, however, if he wished to watch us; but at any rate this man heard naught of our charges.

Then, at the last moment, my mother and the children came on board, and at once we hauled out of the harbour. I mind that an old woman ran along the wharf when she found that all were going, and cried that Dame Leva had not paid for certain fowls bought of her; and my father laughed in lightness of heart, and threw her a silver penny, so that she let us go with a blessing. And after that it did not matter what the people thought of this going of ours, for in an hour we were far at sea with a fair wind on the quarter, heading south at first, that the Norseman might see us, but when the land was dim astern, and there was no more fear, bearing away south and west for the Humber in far-off England.



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Now that was the last I saw of Denmark for many a long year, and I knew it must be so. But, as I have told, none but my father and mother, and now Arngeir, knew all that we were carrying with us.

CHAPTER IV. ACROSS THE SWAN'S PATH.

All that night, and during the morning of the next day, we sailed steadily with a fresh northwest breeze that bade fair to strengthen by-and-by. If it held, we should see the cliffs of Northumbria on our bow tomorrow morning, and then would run down the coast to the Humber, where my father meant to put in first. He thought to leave the queen and Havelok with merchants whom he knew in Lindsey, and with them would stay my mother and the little ones while he made a trading voyage elsewhere. There would be time enough to find out the best place in which to make a home when the autumn came, and after he had been to an English port or two that he did not know yet.

When half the morning was past, the sun shone out warmly, and all came on deck from the after cabin, where the ladies and children were. Our men knew by this time that we had passengers, flying like ourselves from Hodulf, and therefore they were not at all surprised to see Havelok and his mother with their mistress. None of them had ever seen either of them before, as it happened, though I do not think that any could have recognized the queen as she was then, wan and worn with the terror of her long hiding. Very silent was she as she sat on deck gazing ever at the long white wake of the ship that seemed to stretch for a little way towards Denmark, only to fade away as a track over which one may never go back. And silent, too, was my mother; but the children, who had no care, were pleased with all things, and Raven and I were full of the ways of old seamen.

So everything went quietly until after we had our midday meal. We were all amidships on the wide deck, except my father and Arngeir, who sat side by side on the steersman's bench on the high poop. There was no spray coming on board, for we were running, and the ship was very steady. Raven and I were forward with the men, busy with the many little things yet to be done to the rigging and such like that had been left in the haste at last, and there was no thought but that this quiet, save for some shift of wind maybe, would last until we saw the English shore.

Now I do not know if my father had seen aught from the after deck, but presently he came forward, and passed up the steps to the forecabin, and there sat down on the weather rail, looking out to leeward for some time quietly. I thought that maybe he had sighted some of the high land on the Scots coast, for it was clear enough to see very far, and so I went to see also. But there was nothing, and we talked of this and that for ten minutes, when he said, "Look and see if you can catch sight of aught on the skyline just aft of the fore stay as you sit."



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I looked long, and presently caught sight of something white that showed for a moment as we heaved up on a wave, and then was gone.

“Somewhat I saw,” I said, “but it has gone. It might have been the top of a sail.”

Then I caught a glimpse of it again, and my father saw it also, and, as we watched, it hove up slowly until it was plain to be seen. The vessel it belonged to was sailing in such a way as to cross our course in the end, though she was only a few points nearer the wind than we were. It seemed that she was swifter than ourselves, too, from the way she kept her place on our bow. Now a merchant must needs look on every sail with more or less distrust, as there is always a chance of meeting with ship-plundering Vikings, though the best of them will do naught but take toll from a trader on the high seas. So before long all our men were watching the stranger, and soon it was plain that she was a longship, fresh from her winter quarters. We thought, therefore, that she was not likely to trouble about us, having no need of stores as yet, and we being plainly in ballast only. Nor did she alter her course in any way, but mile after mile she sailed with us, always edging up nearer as she went, until at last we could see the men on her bows and the helmsman at his place.

I thought that one could hardly see a more handsome ship than she was, fresh with new paint, and with her dragon head shining golden in the sun. But I had seen her before, and that in no pleasant way. She was the ship of which I have already spoken—that which we beat off two years ago, taking their cargo of plunder by way of amends for being attacked.

There was this difference, however, at that time, that then we had all our men on board, and the Viking was short-handed after a fighting raid, whereas now we had but fifteen men instead of five-and-twenty, because in the hurry we had not had time to summon any who lived beyond the town, and it was plain that the Viking had a full crew, maybe of sixty men.

“It is in my mind,” my father said to Arngeir, “that our old foe will think twice before he attacks us again; but seeing whom we have to deal with, it is as well to be ready. We might keep him off with arrows, if he does not find out how few we are, should he make an attempt on us; but if he boards, we must submit, and make the best bargain we can.”

So he passed word that the men were to lie down on deck, leaving only a few to be seen, that the Viking might think us as he had known us before; and then the arms-chests were opened, and the bows and throwing weapons were set to hand by us boys while the men armed themselves.

Then my father spoke to them, saying, “I do not know if this Viking will pass us by as too hard a nut to crack, seeing that he knows of us already; but if he does not, it will be of no use our trying to fight him, as you can see. I would not waste your lives for naught.

But it may be that a show of force will keep him off, so we will wait under arms until we are sure what he will do.”



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Then the men broke out, saying that they had beaten this man before with him as leader, and they were in no mind to give up without a fight.

“Well, then,” my father answered, “it is plain that you will back me, and so I will call on you if there is need or chance. But we have the women folk to think of now, and we must not risk aught.”

Now the longship held on her course steadily, never shifting her helm for so much as a point. In half an hour or so we must be alongside one another, at this rate, and that Arngeir did not altogether like the look of, for it would seem as if she meant to find out all about us at least. There was some little sea running, and it might be thought easier to board us on the lee side, therefore. We could not get away from her in any way, for even now, while she was closer hauled than we, she kept pace with us, and had she paid off to the same course as ourselves, she would have left us astern in a very short time.

Presently a man swarmed up her rigging in order to look down on our decks, and as he went up, my father bade our men crawl over to windward, so that he should see all one gunwale lined with men, and so think that both were, and deem that we were setting a trap for them in order to entice them alongside by pretending to be hardly manned. At the same time, he sent the ladies and children into the cabin, so that they might not be seen.

That did not please Havelok at all, for he seemed to scent a fight in the air, and wanted weapons, that he might stand beside the other men, asking for an axe for choice. It was all that I could do to quiet him by saying that if there was any need of him I would call him, but that just now we thought the Vikings would go away if they saw many warriors on deck. Which indeed was all that we hoped, but he thought that would spoil sport, and so hastened into the shelter.

After that there fell a silence on us, for at any moment now we might be hailed by the other ship. And when we were but a bow shot apart the hail came. The two vessels were then broadside on to each other, we a little ahead, if anything. My father was steering now, fully armed, and Arngeir was beside him with myself. I had the big shield wherewith one guards the helmsman if arrows are flying.

The Viking bade us strike sail, and let him come alongside, but my father made no answer. Still we held on, and the Viking paid off a little, as though he were not so sure if it were wise to fall on us, as we showed no fear of him.

Then my father spoke to Arngeir in a stern voice that I had heard only when we met this same ship before.



“This will not last long. If there is one chance for us, it is to run him down and it may be done. Our ship will stand the blow, for these longships are but eggshells beside her. Pass the word for the men to shoot the steersman when I give the word. Then they must run forward, lest the Vikings climb over the bows as we strike her.”



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Arngeir's eyes flashed at that, and at once he went to the men, and there was a click and rattle as the arrows went to string, and they gathered themselves together in readiness to leap up when the word came. There seemed every chance that we should be upon the longship before they knew what we were about, for we had the weather gauge.

Now the Viking hailed again, and again bore up for us a little, whereat my father smiled grimly, for it helped his plan. And this time, as there was no answer, his men sent an arrow or two on board, which did no harm.

"It is plain that we are to be taken," my father said on that, "so we will wait no longer. Stand by, men, and one lucky shot will do all. Shoot!"

The helm went up as he spoke, and the men leaped to their feet, raining arrows round the two men who were at the helm, and down on the Viking we swept with a great cheer.

But in a moment there were four men on her after deck, and whether the first helmsman was shot I cannot say; but I think not, for quickly as we had borne down on her she was ready, rushing away from us, instead of luffing helplessly, as we had expected. It would almost have seemed that our move had been looked for.

Ten more minutes passed while we exchanged arrow flights, and then the longship had so gained on us that she struck sail and waited for us with her long oars run out and ready.

"That is all we can do," said my father, with a sort of groan. "Put up your weapons, men, for it is no good fighting now."

They did so, growling; and as we neared the longship, her oars took the water, and she flew alongside of us, and a grappling hook flung deftly from her bows caught our after gunwale, and at once she dropped astern, and swung to its chain as to a tow line. We were not so much as bidden to strike sail now, and the Vikings began to crowd forward in order to board us by the stern, as the grappling chain was hove short by their windlass.

"Hold on," my father cried to them "we give up. Where is your chief?"

Now the men were making way for him when a strange thing happened. Out of the after cabin ran Havelok when he heard that word, crying that it was not the part of good warriors to give up while they could wield sword—words that surely he had learned from Gunnar, his father. And after him came his mother, silent, and terrified lest he should be harmed.



Havelok ran up the steps to my father, and the queen followed. I have said that there was a little sea running, and this made the ships jerk and strain at the chain that held them together fiercely, now that it was so short. And even as the queen came to the top step, where there was no rail, for the steps were not amidships, but alongside the gunwale, one of these jerks came; and in a moment she was in the sea, and in a moment also Arngeir was after her, for he was a fine swimmer.

The Vikings cried out as they saw this, but the poor queen said no word, nor did she ever rise again after the first time. It is likely that she was drawn under the longship at once.



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So for a little while there was no talk of terms or fighting, but all held their breath as they watched to see if the queen floated alongside anywhere; but there was only Arngeir, who swam under the lee of the Viking, and called to her men for guidance. They threw him a rope's end as he came to the stern, and he clung to it for a little while, hoping to see the flash of a white hood that the queen wore, over the white wave crests: but at last he gave up, and the Vikings hauled him on board, praising him for his swimming, as he had on his mail.

Then the chief turned to my father, and spoke to him across the few fathoms of water that were between the ships.

"We meet again, Grim, as time comes round; and now I have a mind to let you go, though I have that old grudge against you, for I think that your wife is loss enough."

"Not my wife, Arnvid, but a passenger—one whom I would not have lost for all that you can take from me."

"Well, I am glad it is no worse. But it seems that you are in ballast. How comes it that you have no cargo for me, for you owe me one?"

Then my father told him shortly that he had fled from Hodulf; and all those doings were news to the Viking, so that they talked in friendly wise, while the men listened, and the ships crept on together down the wind.

But when all was told, save of the matter of Havelok, and who the lost lady was, the Viking laughed shortly, and said, "Pleasant gossip, Grim, but not business. What will you give us to go away in peace? I do not forget that you all but ran us down just now, and that one or two of us have arrows sticking in us which came from your ship. But that first was a good bit of seamanship, and there is not much harm from the last."

"Well," said my father, "it seems to me that you owe me a ship, for it is certain that I once had that one, and gave her back to you."

The Viking laughed.

"True enough, and therefore I give you back your ship now, and we are quits. But I am coming on board to see what property I can lift."

My father shrugged his shoulders, and turned away, and at once the Vikings hauled on the chain until their dragon head was against our quarter, when the chief and some twenty of his men came on board. The way in which they took off the hatches without staying to question where they should begin told a tale of many a like plundering.

Then, I do not know how it was rightly, for I was aft with my father, there began a quarrel between the Vikings and our men; and though both Grim and the chief tried to stop it,



five of our few were slain outright, and three more badly hurt before it was ended. The rest of our crew took refuge on the fore deck, and there bided after that. The whole fray was over in a few minutes, and it seemed that the Vikings half expected somewhat of the sort.

Then they took all the linen and woollen goods, and our spare sails, and all the arms and armour from the men and from the chests to their own ship. Only they left my father and Arngeir their war gear, saying that it were a shame to disarm two brave men.



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Then the chief said, "Little cargo have you, friend Grim, and therefore I am the more sure that you have store of money with you. Even flight from Hodulf would not prevent you from taking that wherewith to trade. So I must have it; and it rests with you whether we tear your ship to splinters in hunting for your hiding place or not."

"I suppose there is no help for it, but I will say that the most of what I have is not mine," said my father.

"Why, what matter? When one gives gold into the hands of a seafarer, one has to reckon with such chances as this. You must needs hand it over."

So, as there was naught else to do, Grim brought out the jarl's heavy bag, and gave it to the chief, who whistled to himself as he hefted it.

"Grim," he said, "for half this I would have let you go without sending a man on board. What is this foolishness? You must have known that."

"The gold is not mine," my father answered; "it was my hope that you would have been content with the cargo."

"Well, I have met with an honest man for once," the Viking said; and he called his men, and they cast off and left us.

But we were in no happy plight when he had gone away to the eastward on his old course. Half our men were gone, for the wounded were of no use, and the loss of the queen weighed heavily on us. And before long it began to blow hard from the north, and we had to shorten sail before there was real need, lest it should be too much for us few presently, as it certainly would have been by the time that darkness fell, for the gale strengthened.

Then, added to all this, there was trouble in the cabin under the after deck, for since his mother was lost, Havelok had spoken no word. I had brought him down to my mother from the deck, and had left him with her, hoping that he did not know what had happened; but now he was in a high fever, and sorely ill. Perhaps he would have been so in any case, after the long days of Hodulf's cruelty, but he had borne them well. A child is apt, however, to give up, as it were, suddenly.

So, burdened with trouble, we drove before the gale, and the only pleasant thing was to see how the good ship behaved in it, while at least we were on our course all the time. Therefore, one could not say that there was any danger; and but for these other things, none would have thought much of wind or sea, which were no worse than we had weathered many a time before. We had sea room, and no lee shore to fear, and the ship was stanch, and no sailor can ask for more than that.

CHAPTER V. STORM AND SHIPWRECK.



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The gale held without much change through the night, and then with morning shifted a few points to the westward, which was nothing to complain of. The sea rose, and a few rain squalls came up and passed; but they had no weight in them, and did not keep the waves down as a steady fall will. And all day long it was the same, and the ship fled ever before it. There was no thought now of reaching any port we might wish, but least of all did we think of making the Lindsey shore, which lies open to the north and east. When the gale broke, we must find harbour where we could; and indeed; to my father at this time all ports were alike, as refuge from Hodulf. When darkness came again one of the wounded men died, and Havelok was yet ill in the after cabin, so that my mother was most anxious for him. The plunging ship was no place for a sick child.

Now it was not possible for us to tell how far we had run since we had parted from the Viking, and all we knew was that we had no shore to fear with the wind as it was, and therefore nothing but patience was needed. But in the night came a sudden lull in the gale that told of a change at hand, and in half an hour it was blowing harder than ever from the northeast, and setting us down to the English coast fast, for we could do naught but run before such a wind. It thickened up also, and was very dark even until full sunrise, so that one could hardly tell when the sun was above the sea's rim.

I crept from the fore cabin about this time, after trying in vain to sleep, and found the men sheltering under the break of the deck and looking always to leeward. Two of them were at the steering oar with my father, for Arngeir was worn out, and I had left him in the cabin, sleeping heavily in spite of the noise of waves and straining planking. Maybe he would have waked in a moment had that turmoil ceased.

It was of no use trying to speak to the men without shouting in their ears, and getting to windward to do that, moreover, and so I looked round to see if there was any change coming. But all was grey overhead, and a grey wall of rain and flying drift from the wave tops was all round us, blotting out all things that were half a mile from us, if there were anything to be blotted out. It always seems as if there must be somewhat beyond a thickness of any sort at sea. But there was one thing that I did notice, and that was that the sea was no longer grey, as it had been yesterday, but was browner against the cold sky, while the foam of the following wave crests was surely not so white as it had been, and at this I wondered.

Then I crawled aft and went to my father and asked him what he thought of the wind and the chance of its dropping. He had had the lead going for long now.

"We are right off the Humber mouth, to judge by the colour of the water," he told me, "or else off the Wash, which is more to the south. I cannot tell which rightly, for we have run far, and maybe faster than I know. If only one could see—"



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There he stopped, and I knew enough to understand that we were in some peril unless a shift of wind came very soon, since the shore was under our lee now, if by good luck we were not carried straight into the great river itself. So for an hour or more I watched, and all the time it seemed that hope grew less, for the sea grew shorter, as if against tide, and ever its colour was browner with the mud of the Trent and her sisters.

Presently, as I clung to the rail, there seemed to grow a new sound over and amid all those to which I had become used—as it were a low roaring that swelled up in the lulls, and sank and rose again. And I knew what it was, and held up my hand to my father, listening, and he heard also. It was the thunder of breakers on a sandy coast to leeward.

He put his whistle to his lips and called shrilly, and the men saw him if they could not hear, and sprang up, clawing aft through the water that flooded the waist along the rail.

“Breakers to leeward, men,” he cried “we must wear ship, and then shall clear them. We shall be standing right into Humber after that, as I think.”

Arngeir heard the men trampling, if not the whistle, and he was with us directly, and heard what was to be done.

“It is a chance if the yard stands it,” he said, looking aloft.

“Ay, but we cannot chance going about in this sea, and we are too short of men to lower and hoist again. Listen!”

Arngeir did so, and heard for the first time the growing anger of the surf on the shore, and had no more doubt. We were then running with the wind on the port quarter, and it was useless to haul closer to the wind on that tack, whereas if we could wear safely we should be leaving the shore at once by a little closer sailing.

“Ran is spreading her nets,” said Arngeir, “but if all holds, she will have no luck with her fishing.” [6]

Then we manned the main sheet and the guys from the great yards, but we were all too few for the task, which needed every man of the fifteen that we had sailed with. There was the back stay to be set up afresh on the weather quarter for the new tack also, and three men must see to that.

We watched my father’s hand for the word, and steadily sheeted home until all seemed to be going well. But the next moment there was a crash and a cry, and we were a mastless wreck, drifting helplessly. Maybe some flaw of wind took us as the head of the great sail went over, but its power was too much for the men at guys and back stay, and they had the tackle torn through their hands. The mast snapped six feet above the deck, smashing the gunwales as it fell forward and overboard, but hurting none of us.



Then a following sea or two broke over the stern, and I was washed from the poop, for I had been at the sheet, down to the deck, and there saved myself among the fallen rigging, half drowned. One of the men was washed overboard at the same time, but a bight of the rigging that was over the side caught him under the chin, and his mates hauled him on board again by the head, as it were. He was wont to make a jest of it afterward, saying that he was not likely to be hanged twice, but he had a wry neck from that day forward.



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No more seas came over us, for the wreck over the bows brought us head to wind, though we shipped a lot of water across the decks as she rolled in the sea. Then we rode to the drag of the fallen sail for a time, and it seemed quiet now that there was no noise of wind screaming in rigging above us. But all the while the thunder of the breakers grew nearer and plainer.

I bided where I was, for the breath was knocked out of me for the moment. I saw my father lash the helm, and then he and the rest got the two axes that hung by the cabin door, and came forward with them. The mast was pounding our side in a way that would start the planking before long, and it must be cut adrift, and by that time I could join him.

When that was done, and it did not take long, we cleared the anchor and cable and let go, for it was time. The sound of the surf was drowning all else. But the anchor held, and the danger was over for the while, and as one might think altogether; but the tide was running against the gale, and what might happen when it turned was another matter.

Now we got the sail on deck again, and unlaced it from the yard, setting that in place with some sort of rigging, ready to be stepped as a mast if the wind shifted to any point that might help us off shore.

It may be thought how we watched that one cable that held us from the waves and the place where they broke, for therein lay our only chance, and we longed for the clear light that comes after rain, that we might see the worst, at least, if we were to feel it. But the anchor held, and presently we lost the feeling of a coming terror that had been over us, the utmost peril being past. My father went to the after cabin now, and though the poor children were bruised with the heavy rolling of the ship as she came into the wind, they were all well save Havelok, and he had fallen asleep in my mother's arms at last.

With the turn of the tide, which came about three hours after midday, the clouds broke, and slowly the land grew out of the mists until we could see it plainly, though it was hardly higher than the sea that broke over it in whirling masses of spindrift. By-and-by we could see far-off hills beyond wide-stretching marshlands that looked green and rich across yellow sandhills that fringed the shore. And from them we were not a mile, and at their feet were such breakers as no ship might win through, though, if we might wait until they were at rest, the level sand was good for beaching at the neap tides. For we were well into Humber mouth, and to the northward of us, across the yellow water, was the long point of Spurn, and the ancient port of Ravenspur, with its Roman jetties falling into decay under the careless hand of the Saxon, under its shelter. There was no port on this southern side of the Humber, though farther south was Tetney Haven and again Saltfleet, to which my father had been, but neither in nor out of them might a vessel get in a northeast gale.



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I have said that this clearness came with the turn of the tide, and now that began to flow strongly, setting in with the wind with more than its wonted force, for the northwest shift of the gale had kept it from falling, as it always will on this coast. That, of course, I learned later, but it makes plain what happened next. Our anchor began to drag with the weight of both tide and wind, and that was the uttermost of our dread.

Slowly it tore through its holding, and as it were step by step at first, and once we thought it stopped when we had paid out all the cable. But wind and sea were too strong, and presently again we saw the shore marks shifting, and we knew that there was no hope. The ship must touch the ground sooner or later, and then the end would come with one last struggle in the surf, and on shore was no man whose hand might be stretched to drag a spent man to the land, if he won through. It would have seemed less lonely had one watched us, but I did not know then that no pity for the wrecked need be looked for from the marshmen of the Lindsey shore. There was not so much as a fisher's boat of wicker and skins in sight on the sandhills, where one might have looked to see some drawn up.

Now my father went to the cabin and told my mother that things were at their worst, and she was very brave.

"If you are to die at this time, husband," she said, "it is good that I shall die with you. Better it is, as I think, than a sickness that comes to one and leaves the other. But after that you will go to the place of Odin, to Valhalla; but I whither?"

Then spoke little Withelm, ever thoughtful, and now not at all afraid.

"If Freya wants not a sailor's wife who is willing to fight the waves with Grim, my father, it will be strange."

My mother was wont to say that this saying of the child's did much to cheer her at that time, but there is little place for a woman in the old faiths. So she smiled at him, and that made him bold to speak of what he had surely been thinking since the storm began.

"I suppose that Aegir is wroth because we made no sacrifice to him before we set sail. I think that I would cast the altar stones to him, that he may know that we meant to do so."

This sounds a child's thought only, and so it was; but it set my father thinking, and in the end helped us out of trouble.

"I have heard," my father said, "that men in our case have thrown overboard the high-seat pillars, and have followed them to shore safely. We have none, but the stones are more sacred yet. Overboard they shall go, and as the boat with them goes through the surf we may learn somewhat."



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With that he hastened on deck, and told the men what he would do; and they thought it a good plan, as maybe they would have deemed anything that seemed to call for help from the strong ones of the sea. So they got the boat ready to launch over the quarter, and the four stones, being uncovered since the Vikings took our cargo, were easily got on deck, and they were placed in the bottom of the boat, and steadied there with coils of fallen rigging, so that they could not shift. They were just a fair load for the boat. Then my father cried for help to the Asir, bidding Aegir take the altar as full sacrifice; and when we had done so we waited for a chance as a long wave foamed past us, and launched the boat fairly on its back, so that she seemed to fly from our hands, and was far astern in a moment.

Now we looked to see her make straight for the breakers, lift on the first of them, and then capsize. That first line was not a quarter of a mile from us now.

But she never reached them. She plunged away at first, heading right for the surf, and then went steadily westward, and up the shore line outside it, until she was lost to sight among the wild waves, for she was very low in the water.

“Cheer up, men,” my father said, as he saw that; “we are not ashore yet, nor will be so long as the tide takes that current along shore. We shall stop dragging directly.”

And so it was, for when the ship slowly came to the place where the boat had changed her course, the anchor held once more for a while until the gathering strength of the tide forced it to drag again. Now, however, it was not toward the shore that we drifted, but up the Humber, as the boat had gone; and as we went the sea became less heavy, for we were getting into the lee of the Spurn headland.

Soon the clouds began to break, flying wildly overhead with patches of blue sky and passing sunshine in between them that gladdened us. The wind worked round to the eastward at the same time, and we knew that the end of the gale had come. But, blowing as it did right into the mouth of the river, the sea became more angry, and it would be worse yet when the tide set again outwards. Already we had shipped more water than was good, and we might not stand much more. It seemed best, therefore, to my father that we should try to run as far up the Humber as we might while we had the chance, for the current that held us safe might change as tide altered in force and depth.

So we buoyed the cable, not being able to get the anchor in this sea, and then stepped the yard in the mast's place, and hoisted the peak of the sail corner-wise as best we might; and that was enough to heel us almost gunwale under as the cable was slipped and the ship headed about up the river mouth. We shipped one or two more heavy seas as she paid off before the wind, but we were on the watch for them, and no harm was done.



After that the worst was past, for every mile we flew over brought us into safer waters; and now we began to wonder where the boat with its strange cargo had gone, and we looked out for her along the shore as we sailed, and at last saw her, though it was a wonder that we did so.



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The tide had set her into a little creek that opened out suddenly, and there Arngeir saw her first, aground on a sandbank, with the lift of each wave that crept into the haven she had found sending her higher on it. And my father cried to us that we had best follow her; and he put the helm over, while we sheeted home and stood by for the shock of grounding.

Then in a few minutes we were in a smother of foam across a little sand bar, and after that in quiet water, and the sorely-trying ship was safe. She took the ground gently enough in the little creek, not ten score paces from where the boat was lying, and we were but an arrow flight from the shore. As the tide rose the ship drifted inward toward it, so that we had to wait only for the ebb that we might go dry shod to the land.

Before that time came there was rest for us all, and we needed it sorely. It was a wonder that none of the children had been hurt in the wild tossing of the ship, but children come safely through things that would be hard on a man. Bruised they were and very hungry, but somehow my mother had managed to steady them on the cabin floor, and they were none the worse, only Havelok slept even yet with a sleep that was too heavy to be broken by the worst of the tossing as he lay in my mother's lap. She could not tell if this heavy sleep was good or not.

Then we saw to the wounded men, and thereafter slept in the sun or in the fore cabin as each chose, leaving Arngeir only on watch. It was possible that the shore folk would be down to the strand soon, seeking for what the waves might have sent them, and the tide must be watched also.

Just before its turn he woke us, for it was needful that we should get a line ashore to prevent the ship from going out with the ebb, and with one I swam ashore. There was not so much as a stump to which to make fast, and so one of the men followed me, and we went to the boat, set the altar stones carefully ashore, then fetched the spare anchor, and moored her with that in a place where the water seemed deep to the bank.

It was a bad place. For when the tide fell, which it did very fast, we found that we had put her on a ledge. Presently therefore, and while we were trying to bail out the water that was in her, the ship took the ground aft, and we could not move her before the worst happened. Swiftly the tide left her, and her long keel bent and twisted, and her planks gaped with the strain of her own weight, all the greater for the water yet in her that flowed to the hanging bows. The good ship might sail no more. Her back was broken.

That was the only time that I have ever seen my father weep. But as the stout timbers cracked and groaned under the strain it seemed to him as if the ship that he loved was calling piteously to him for help that he could not give, and it was too much for him. The gale that was yet raging overhead and the sea that was still terrible in the wide waters of the river had been things that had not moved him, for that the ship should break up in a



last struggle with them was, as it were, a fitting end for her. But that by his fault here in the hardly-won haven she should meet her end was not to be borne, and he turned away from us and wept.



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Then came my mother and set her hand on his shoulder and spoke softly to him with wise words.

“Husband, but a little while ago it would have been wonderful if there were one of us left alive, or one plank of the ship on another. And now we are all safe and unhurt, and the loss of the ship is the least of ills that might have been.”

“Nay, wife,” he said; “you cannot understand.”

“Then it is woe for the—for the one who is with us. But how had it been if you had seen Hodulf and his men round our house, and all the children slain that one might not escape, while on the roof crowed the red cock, and naught was left to us? We have lost less than if we had stayed for that, and we have gained what we sought, even safety. See, to the shore have come the ancient holy things of our house, and that not by your guidance. Surely here shall be the place for us that is best.”

“Ay, wife; you are right in all these things, but it is not for them.”

Then she laughed a little, forcing herself to do so, as it seemed.

“Why, then, it is for the ship that I was ever jealous of, for she took you away from me. Now I think that I should be glad that she can do so no more. But I am not, for well I know what the trouble must be, and I would have you think no more of it. The good ship has saved us all, and so her work is done, and well done. Never, if she sailed many a long sea mile with you, would anything be worth telling of her besides this. And the burden of common things would surely be all unmeet for her after what she has borne hither.”

“It is well said, Leva, my wife,” my father answered.

From that time he was cheerful, and told us how it was certain that we had been brought here for good, seeing that the Norns[7] must have led the stones to the haven, so that this must be the place that we sought.

CHAPTER VI. THE BEGINNING OF GRIMSBY TOWN.

Easily we went ashore when the tide fell, across the spits of sand that ran between the mud banks, and we climbed the low sandhill range that hid the land from us, and saw the place where we should bide. And it might have been worse; for all the level country between us and the hills was fat, green meadow and marsh, on which were many cattle and sheep feeding. Here and there were groves of great trees, hemmed in with the quickset fences that are as good as stockades for defence round the farmsteads of the English folk, and on other patches of rising ground were the huts of thralls or herdsmen, and across the wide meadows glittered and flashed streams and meres, above which



the wildfowl that the storm had driven inland wheeled in clouds. All the lower hills seemed to be wooded thickly, and the alder copses that would shelter boar and deer and maybe wolves stretched in some places thence across the marsh. Pleasant and homely seemed all this after long looking at the restless sea.



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Then said my father, "Now am I no longer Grim the merchant, and that pride of mine is at an end. But here is a place where Grim the fisher may do well enough, if I am any judge of shore and sea. Here have we haven for the boats, and yonder swim the fish, and inland are the towns that need them. Nor have we seen a sign of a fisher so far as we have come."

Now we had been seen as soon as we stood on the sandhills; and before long the herdsman and thralls began to gather to us, keeping aloof somewhat at first, as if fearing my father's arms. But when we spoke with them we could learn nothing, for they were Welsh marshmen who knew but little of the tongue of their English masters. Serfs they were now in these old fastnesses of theirs to the English folk of the Lindiswaras, who had won their land and called it after their own name, Lindsey.

But before long there rode from one of the farmsteads an Englishman of some rank, who had been sent for, as it would seem, and he came with half a dozen armed housecarls behind him to see what was going on. Him we could understand well enough, for there is not so much difference between our tongue and that of the English; and when he learned our plight he was very kindly. His name was Witlaf Stalling, and he was the great man of these parts, being lord over many a mile of the marsh and upland, and dwelling at his own place, Stallingborough, some five miles to the north and inland hence.

Now it had been in this man's power to seize us and all we had as his own, seeing that we were cast on his shore; but he treated us as guests rather, bidding us shelter in one of his near farmsteads as long as we would, and telling my father to come and speak with him when we had saved what we could from the wreck. He bade the thralls help at that also, so that we had fallen in with a friend, and our troubles were less for his kindness.

We saved what cargo we had left during the next few days, while we dwelt at the farm. Then at the height of the spring tides the ship broke up, for a second gale came before the sea that the last had raised was gone. And then I went with my father to speak with Witlaf the thane at Stallingborough, that we might ask his leave to make our home on the little haven, and there become fishers once more.

That he granted readily, asking many questions about our troubles, for he wondered that one who had owned so good a ship seemed so content to become a mere fisher in a strange land, without thought of making his way home. But all that my father told him was that he had had to fly from the new king of our land, and that he had been a fisher before, so that there was no hardship in the change.

"Friend Grim," said Witlaf when he had heard this, "you are a brave man, as it seems to me, and well may you prosper here, as once before. I will not stand in your way. Now, if you will hold it from me on condition of service in any time of war, to be rendered by



yourself and your sons and any men you may hire, I will grant you what land you will along the coast, so that none may question you in anything. Not that the land is worth aught to any but a fisher who needs a place for boats and nets; but if you prosper, others will come to the place, and you shall be master.”



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One could hardly have sought so much as that, and heartily did we thank the kindly thane, gladly taking the fore shore as he wished. But he said that he thought the gain was on his side, seeing what men he had won.

“Now we must call the place by a name, for it has none,” he said, laughing. “Grim’s Stead, maybe?”

“Call the place a town at once,” answered my father, laughing also. “Grimsby has a good sound to a homeless man.”

So Grimsby the place has been from that day forward, and, as I suppose, will be now to the end of time. But for a while there was only the one house that we built of the timbers and planks of our ship by the side of the haven—a good house enough for a fisher and his family, but not what one would look for from the name.

By the time that was built Havelok was himself again, though he had been near to his death. Soon he waxed strong and rosy in the sea winds, and out-went Withelm both in stature and strength. But it seemed that of all that had happened he remembered naught, either of the storm, or of his mother’s death, or of the time of Hodulf. My mother thought that the sickness had taken away his memory, and that it might come back in time. But from the day we came to the house on the shore he was content to call Grim and Leva father and mother, and ourselves were his brothers, even as he will hold us even now. Yet my father would never take him with us to the fishing, as was right, seeing who he was and what might lie before him. Nor did he ever ask to go, as we had asked since we were able to climb into the boat as she lay on the shore; and we who knew not who he was, and almost forgot how he came to us, ceased to wonder at this after a while; and it seemed right that he should be the home-stayer, as if there must needs be one in every household.

Nevertheless he was always the foremost in all our sports, loving the weapon play best of all, so that it was no softness that kept him from the sea. I hold that the old saw that says, “What is bred in the bone cometh out in the flesh,” is true, and never truer than in the ways of Havelok.

For it is not to be thought that because my father went back perforce to the fisher’s calling he forgot that the son of Gunnar Kirkeban should be brought up always in such wise that when the time came he should be ready to go to the slayer of his father, sword in hand, and knowing how to use it. Therefore both Havelok and we were trained always in the craft of the warrior.

Witlaf the thane was right when he said that men would draw to the place if we prospered, and it was not so long before the name that had been a jest at first was so no longer. Truly we had hard times at first, for our one ship’s boat was all unfitted for the fishing; but the Humber teemed with fish, and there were stake nets to be set that



need no boat. None seemed to care for taking the fish but ourselves, for the English folk had no knowledge of the riches to be won from the sea, and the eels of the river were the best that they ever saw. So they were very ready to buy, and soon the name of Grim the fisher was known far and wide in Lindsey, for my father made great baskets of the willows of the marsh, and carried his burden of fish through the land, alone at first, until we were able to help him, while Arngeir and we minded the nets.



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Only two of our men stayed here with us, being fishers and old comrades of my father. The rest he bade find their way home to Denmark to their wives and children, from the Northumbrian coast, or else take service with the king, Ethelwald, who ruled in East Anglia, beyond the Wash, who, being a Dane by descent from the Jutes who took part with Angles and Saxons in winning this new land, was glad to have Danish men for his housecarls. Some went to him, and were well received there, as we knew long afterwards.

The man who had been washed overboard and hauled back at risk of his neck was one of these. His name was Mord, and he would have stayed with us; but my father thought it hard that he should not have some better chance than we could give him here, for it was not easy to live at first. Somewhat of the same kind he said to Arngeir, for he had heard of this king when he had been in the king's new haven in the Wash some time ago. But Arngeir would by no means leave the uncle who had been as a father to him.

Now when we marked out the land that Witlaf gave us, there was a good omen. My father set the four blue altar stones at each corner of the land as the boundaries, saying that thus they would hallow all the place, rather than make an altar again of them here where there was no grove to shelter them, or, indeed, any other spot that was not open, where a holy place might be. And when we measured the distances between them a second time they were greater than at first, which betokens the best of luck to him whose house is to be there. I suppose that they will bide in these places now while Grimsby is a town, for, as every one knows, it is unlucky to move a boundary stone.

Soon my father found a man who had some skill in the shipwright's craft, and brought him to our place from Saltfleet. Then we built as good a boat as one could wish, and, not long after that, another. But my father was careful that none of the Lindsey folk whom he had known should think that this fisher was the Grim whom they had once traded with, lest word should go to Hodulf in any way.

Now we soon hired men to help us, and the fishing throve apace. We carried the fish even to the great city of Lincoln, where Alsi the Lindsey king had his court, though it was thirty miles away. For we had men in the villages on the road who took the great baskets on from one to another, and always Grim and one of us were there on the market day, and men said that never had the town and court seen such fish as Grim's before. Soon, therefore, he was rich, for a fisher; and that was heard of by other fishers from far off, and they drew to Grimsby, so that the town spread, and Witlaf the good thane said that it was a lucky day which drove us to his shore, for he waxed rich with dues that they were willing to pay. We built boats and let them out to these men, so that one might truly say that all the fishery was Grim's.



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Then a trading ship put in, hearing of the new haven, and that was a great day for us. But her coming made my father anxious, since Hodulf was likely to seek for news of Grim the merchant from any who had been to England; and hearing at last of him, he would perhaps be down on us, Vikingwise, with fire and sword. But after that traders came and went, and we heard naught of him except we asked for news; for he left us in peace, if he knew that his enemy lived yet. Men said that he was not much loved in Denmark.

So the town grew, and well did we prosper, so that there is naught to be said of any more trouble, which is what my story seems to be made up of so far. Yet we had come well through all at last; and that, I suppose, is what makes the tale of any man worth hearing.

Twelve years went all well thus, and in those years Havelok came to manhood, though not yet to his full strength. What that would be in a few more summers none could tell, for he was already almost a giant in build and power, so that he could lift and carry at once the four great fish baskets, which we bore one at a time when full of fish, easily, and it was he who could get a stranded boat afloat when we could hardly move her between us, though all three of us were strong as we grew up.

Very handsome was Havelok also, and, like many very strong men, very quiet. And all loved him, from the children who played along the water's edge to the oldest dame in the town; for he had a good word for all, and there was not one in the place whom he had not helped at one time or another. More than one there was who owed him life—either his own, or that of a child saved from the water.

Most of all Havelok loved my father; and once, when he was about eighteen, he took it into his head that he was burdensome to him by reason of his great growth. So nothing would satisfy him but that he must go with us to the fishing, though it was against Grim's will somewhat. But he could make no hand at it, seeing that he could pull any two of us round if he took an oar, and being as likely as not to break that moreover. Nor could he bear the quiet of the long waiting at the drift nets, when hour after hour of the night goes by in silence before the herring shoal comes in a river of blue and silver and the buoys sink with its weight; rather would he be at the weapon play with the sons of Witlaf, our friend, who loved him.

But though the fishing was not for him, after a while he would not be idle, saying, when my father tried to persuade him to trouble not at all about our work, that it was no shame for a man to work, but, rather, that he should not do so. So one day he went to the old Welsh basket maker who served us, and bade him make a great basket after his own pattern, the like of which the old man had never so much as thought of.

“Indeed, master,” he said, when it was done, “you will never be able to carry so great a load of fish as that will hold.”



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“Let us see,” quoth Havelok, laughing; and with that he put him gently into it, and lifted him into the air, and on to his mighty shoulder, carrying him easily, and setting him down in safety.

The basket maker was cross at first, but none was able to be angry with Havelok long, and he too began to smile.

“It is ‘curan’ that you are, master,” he said; “not even Arthur himself could have done that.”

“Many times have I heard your folk call me that. I would learn what it means,” said Havelok.

But the old man could hardly find the English word for the name, which means “a wonder,” and nothing more. Nevertheless the marsh folk were wont to call their friend “Hablok Curan” in their talk, for a wonder he was to all who knew him.

So he came home with his great basket, and said, “Here sit I by the fire, eating more than my share, and helping to win it not at all. Now will I make amends, for I will go the fisher’s rounds through the marshlands with my basket, and I think that I shall do well.”

Now my father tried to prevent him doing this, because, as I know now, it was not work for a king’s son. But Havelok would not be denied.

“Fat and idle am I, and my muscles need hardening,” he said. “Let me go, father, for I was restless at home.”

So from that time he went out into the marshland far and wide, and the people grew to know and love him well. Always he came back with his fish sold, and gave money and full account to my father, and mostly the account would end thus:

“Four fish also there were more, but the burden was heavy, and so I even gave them to a certain old dame.”

And my mother would say, “It is likely that the burden was lighter for her blessing.”

And, truly, if the love of poor folk did help, Havelok’s burden weighed naught, great though it was.

Yet we thought little of the blessings of the Welsh folk of the marsh in those days, for they blessed not in the names of the Asir, being sons of the British Christians of long ago, and many, as I think, Christians yet. Witlaf and all the English folk were Odin’s men, as we were, having a temple at the place called Thor’s Way, among the hills. But we had naught to do with the faith of the thralls, which was not our business. Only Withelm was curious in the matter, and was wont to ask them thereof at times, though at



first they feared to tell him anything, seeing how the Saxons and English had treated the Christian folk at their first coming. But that was forgotten now, by the English at least, and times were quiet for these poor folk. There was a wise man, too, of their faith, who lived in the wild hills not far from the city, and they were wont to go to him for advice if they needed it. They said also that the king of Lindsey had once been a Christian, for he was Welsh by birth on his mother's side, and had been so brought up. It is certain that his sister Orwenna, who married Ethelwald of East Anglia, was one, but I have seen Alsi the king at the feasts of the Asir at Thor's Way when Yuletide was kept, so it is not so certain about him. He had many Welsh nobles about him at the court, kinsmen of his mother mostly, so that it did not seem strange, though there is not much love lost between the English and the folk whom they conquered, as one might suppose.



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Now, as I have said, none but Withelm thought twice about these things; but in the end the love of the marsh folk was a thing that was needed, and that Withelm had learned somewhat of their faith was the greatest help that could be, as will be seen.

CHAPTER VII. BROTHERHOOD.

True are the words of the Havamal, the song of the wisdom of Odin, which say, "One may know and no other, but all men know if three know."

Therefore for all these years my father told none of us the secret of Havelok's birth; and when Arngeir married my sister Solva he made him take oath that he would not tell what he knew to her, while she, being but a child at the time of the flight, had forgotten how this well-loved brother of hers came to us. But it happened once that Grim was sick, and it seemed likely that he would die, so that this secret weighed on him, and he did not rightly know what to do for the best, Havelok at the time being but seventeen, and the time that he should think of his own place not being yet come. At that time he told Arngeir all that he foresaw, and set things in order, that we three should not be backward when need was.

He called us to him, Havelok not being present, and spoke to us.

"Sons," he said, "well have you all obeyed me all these years, and I think that you will listen to me now, for I must speak to you of Havelok, who came to us as you know. Out of his saving from his foes came our flight here; and I will not find fault with any of the things that happened, for they have turned out well, save that it seems that I may never see the land of my birth again, and at times I weary for it. For me Denmark seems to lie within the four square of the ancient stones; but if you will do my bidding, you and Havelok shall see her again, though how I cannot tell."

Then I could hardly speak for trouble, but Withelm said softly, "As we have been wont to do, father, so it shall be."

"Well shall my word be kept, therefore," Grim said, smiling on us. "Listen, therefore. In the days to come, when time is ripe, Arngeir shall tell you more of Havelok your foster-brother, and there will be signs enough by which he shall know that it is time to speak. And then Havelok will need all the help that you can give him; and as your lord shall you serve him, with both hands, and with life itself if need be. And I seem to see that each of you has his place beside him—Radbard as his strong helper, and Raven as his watchful comrade, and Withelm as his counsellor. For 'Bare is back without brother behind it,' son Radbard and 'Ere one goes out, give heed to the doorways,' son Raven; and 'Wisdom is wanted by him who fares widely' son Withelm. So say the old proverbs, and they are true. No quarreller is Havelok; but if he must fight, that will be no playground. Careful is he; but he has met with no guile as yet, and he trusts all men.



Slow to think, if sure, are so mighty frames as his becomes, even when quick wit is needed.”



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He was silent for a while, and I thought that he had no more to say, and I knew that he had spoken rightly of what each was best fitted for, but he went on once more.

“This is my will, therefore, that to you shall Havelok be as the eldest brother from this time forward, that these places shall not have to come suddenly to you hereafter. Then will you know that I have spoken rightly, though maybe it seems hard to Radbard and Raven now, they being so much older.”

Then I said truly that already Havelok was first in our hearts. And that was true, for he was as a king among us—a king who was served by all with loving readiness, and yet one who served all. Maybe that is just what makes a good king when all is said and done.

Then my father bade us carry him out of the house and down to the shore where there was a lonely place in the sandhills, covered with the sweet, short grass that the sheep love; and, while Raven and I bore him, Withelm went and brought Havelok.

“This is well, father,” he said gladly. “I had not thought you strong enough to come thus far.”

“Maybe it is the last time that I come living out of the house,” Grim said; “but there is one thing yet to be done, and it must be done here. See, son Havelok, these are your brothers in all but blood, and they must be that also in the old Danish way.”

“Nothing more is needed, father,” Havelok said, wondering. “I have no brothers but these of mine, and they could be no more so.”

Thereat my father smiled, as well content, but he said that the ancient way must he kept.

“But I am sorely weak,” he added. “Fetch hither Arngeir.”

It was because of this illness that none of us were at the fishing on that day, and Arngeir was not long in coming. And while we waited for that little while my father was silent, looking ever northward to the land that he had given up for Havelok; and I think that foster-son of his knew it, for he knelt beside him and set his strong arm round him, saying nothing. So Arngeir came with Raven, who went for him, and my father told him what he needed to be done; and Arngeir said that it was well thought of, and went to work with his seax on the smooth turf.

He cut a long strip where it seemed to be toughest, leaving the ends yet fast, and carefully he raised it and stretched it until it would make an arch some three spans high, and so propped it at either end with more turf that it stayed in that position.



Then my father said, "This is the old custom, that they who are of different family should be brothers indeed. Out of one earth should they be made afresh, as it were, that on the face of earth they shall be one. Pass therefore under the arch, beginning with Havelok."

Then, while my father spoke strange and ancient runes, Havelok did as he was bidden, kneeling down and creeping under the uplifted turf; and as I came after him he gave me his hand and raised me, and so with each of the other two. And then, unbidden, Arngeir followed, for he too loved Havelok, and would fain be his brother indeed.

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After that my father took a sharp flint knife that he had brought with him, and with it cut Havelok's arm a little, and each of us set his lips to that wound, and afterwards he to the like marks in our right arms, and so the ancient rite was complete.

Yet it had not been needed, as I know, for not even I ever thought of him but as the dearest of brothers, though I minded how he came.

Now after this my father grew stronger, maybe because this was off his mind; but he might never go to sea again, nor even to Lincoln town, for he was not strong enough. What his illness was I do not rightly know, hut I do not think that any one here overlooked him, though it might be that from across the sea Hodulf had power to work him harm. It was said that he had Finnish wizards about his court; but if that was so, he never harmed the one whom he had most to fear—even Havelok. But then I suppose that even a Finn could not harm one for whom great things are in store.

So two years more passed over, and then came the time of which one almost fears to think—the time of the great famine. Slowly it came on the land; but we could see it coming, and the dread of it was fearsome, but for the hope that never quite leaves a man until the end. For first the wheat that was winter sown came not up but in scattered blades here and there, and then ere the spring-sown grain had lain in the land for three weeks it had rotted, and over the rich, ploughed lands seemed to rise a sour smell in the springtime air, when one longs for the sweetness of growing things. And then came drought in April, and all day long the sun shone, or if it were not shining the clouds that hid it were hard and grey and high and still over land and sea.

Then before the marsh folk knew what they were doing, the merchants of Lincoln had bought the stored corn, giving prices that should have told men that it was precious to those who sold as to the buyers; and then the grass failed in the drought, and the farmers were glad to sell the cattle and sheep for what they could gain, rather than see them starve.

Then my father bade us dry and store all the fish we might against the time that he saw was coming, and hard we worked at that. And even as we toiled, from day to day we caught less, for the fish were leaving the shores, and we had to go farther and farther for them, until at last a day came when the boats came home empty, and the women wept at the shore as the men drew them up silently, looking away from those whom they could feed no longer.

That was the worst day, as I think, and it was in high summer. I mind that I went to Stallingborough that day with the last of the fresh fish of yesterday's catch for Witlaf's household, and it was hotter than ever; and in all the orchards hung not one green apple, and even the hardy blackberry briars had no leaves or sign of blossom, and in the dikes the watercress was blackened and evil to see.



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But I will say that in Grimsby we felt not the worst, by reason of that wisdom of my father, and always Witlaf and his house shared with us. Hard it was here, but elsewhere harder.

And then came the pestilence that goes with famine always. I have heard that men have prayed to their gods for that, for it has seemed better to them to die than live.

With the first breath of the pestilence died Grim my father, and about that I do not like to say much. He bade us remember the words he had spoken of Havelok our brother, and he spoke long to Arngeir in private of the same; and then he told us to lay him in mound in the ancient way, but with his face toward Denmark, whence we came. And thereafter he said no more, but lay still until there came up suddenly through the thick air a thunderstorm from the north; and in that he passed, and with his passing the rain came.

Thereof Withelm said that surely Odin fetched him, and that at once he had made prayer for us. But the Welsh folk said that not Odin but the White Christ had taken the man who had been a father to them, and had staved off the worst of the famine from them.

Then pined and died my mother Leva, for she passed in her sleep on the day before we made the mound over her husband, and so we laid them in it together, and that was well for both, as I think, for so they would have wished.

So we made a great bale fire over my father's mound, where it stood over the highest sandhill; and no warrior was ever more wept, for English and Welsh and Danes were at one in this. We set his weapons with him, and laid him in the boat that was the best—and a Saxon gave that—and in it oars and mast and sail, and so covered him therein. And so he waits for the end of all things that are now, and the beginning of those better ones that shall be.

That thunderstorm was nothing to the land, for it skirted the shores and died away to the south, and after it came the heat again; but at least it brought a little hope. There were fish along the shore that night, too, if not many; and though they were gone again in the morning, there was a better store in every house, for men were mindful of Grim's teaching.

Now, of all men, Havelok seemed to feel the trouble of the famine the most, because he could not bear to see the children hungry in the cottages of the fishers. It seemed to him that he had more than his share of the stores, because so mighty a frame of his needed feeding mightily, as he said. And so for two days after my father died and was left in his last resting, Havelok went silent about the place. Here by the shore the pestilence hardly came, and so that trouble was not added to us, though the weak and old went, as had Grim and Leva, here and there.



Then, on the third day, Havelok called Arngeir and us, and spoke what was in his mind.

“Brothers, I may not bear this any longer, and I must go away. I can do no more to help than can the weakest in the town; and even my strength is an added trouble to those who have not enough without me. Day by day grows the store in the house less; and it will waste more slowly if I am elsewhere.”



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Then Arngeir said quickly, "This is foolishness, Havelok, my brother. Whither will you go? For worse is the famine inland; and I think that we may last out here. The fish will come back presently."

"I will go to Lincoln. All know that there is plenty there, for the townsfolk were wise in time. There is the court, and at the court a strong man is likely to be welcome, if only as one who shall keep the starving poor from the doors, as porter."

He spoke bitterly, for Alsi, the king, had no good name for kindness, and at that Withelm laughed sadly.

"Few poor would Havelok turn away," he said, under his breath; "rather were he likely to take the king's food from the very board, and share it among them."

That made us laugh a little, for it was true enough; and one might seem to see our mighty one sweeping the table, while none dared try to stay him.

But many times of late Havelok had gone dinnerless, that he might feed some weak one in the village. Maybe some of us did likewise; but, if so, we learned from him.

"Well, then," Havelok said, when we had had our wretched laugh, "Alsi, the king, can better afford to feed me than can anyone else. Therefore, I will go and see about it. And if not the king, then, doubtless, some rich merchant will give me food for work, seeing that I can lift things handily. But Radbard here is a great and hungry man also, and it will be well that he come with me; or else, being young and helpless, I may fall into bad hands."

So he spoke, jesting and making little of the matter. But I saw that he was right, and that we who were strong to take what might come should go away. It was likely that a day of our meals would make a week's fare for Arngeir's three little ones, and they were to be thought for.

Now for a little while Arngeir tried to keep us back; but it was plain that he knew also that our going was well thought of, and only his care for Havelok stood in the way. Indeed, he said that I and Raven might go.

"Raven knows as much about the fish as did our father," Havelok said. "He will go out in the morning, and look at sky and sea, and sniff at the wind; and if I say it will be fine, he says that the herrings will be in such a place; and so they are, while maybe it rains all day to spite my weather wisdom. You cannot do without Raven; for it is ill to miss any chance of the sea just now. Nor can Withelm go, for he knows all in the place, and who is most in want. It will not do to be without house steward. So we two will go. Never have I been to Lincoln yet, and Radbard knows the place well."



I think that I have never said that Grim would never take Havelok to the city, lest he should be known by some of the Danish folk who came now and then to the court, some from over seas, and others from the court of King Ethelwald, of whom I have spoken, the Norfolk king. But that danger was surely over now, for Havelok would be forgotten in Denmark; and Ethelwald was long dead, and his wife also, leaving his daughter Goldberga to her uncle Alsi, as his ward. So Alsi held both kingdoms until the princess was of age, when she would take her own. It was said that she lived at Dover until that time, and so none of her Danes were likely to be at court if we went there and found places.



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So Havelok's plan was to be carried out, and he and I were to set forth next morning. Arngeir was yet uneasy about it, nevertheless, as one could see; but I did not at that time know why it should be so doubtful a matter that two strong men should go forth and seek their fortune but thirty miles away. So we laughed at him.

"Well," he said, "every one knows Radbard; but they will want to know who his tall comrade may be. Old foes has Havelok, as Radbard knows, and therefore it may be well to find a new name for him."

"No need to go far for that," Withelm said. "The marsh folk call him Curan."

"Curan, the wonder, is good," Arngeir said, after a little thought, for we all knew Welsh enough by this time. "Or if you like a Danish name better, brother, call it 'Kwaran,' but silent about yourself you must surely be."

We used to call him that at times—for it means "the quiet" in our old tongue—seeing how gentle and courtly he was in all his ways. So the name was well fitting in either way.

"Silent and thoughtful should the son of a king be," says the Havamal, and so it was with Havelok, son of Gunnar.

Now when I came to think, it was plain that we three stood in the mind of our brother in the place which my father had boded for us, and I was glad. Well I knew that Raven, the watchful, and Withelm, the wise and thoughtful, would do their parts; and I thought that whether I could do mine was to be seen very shortly. If I failed in help at need it should not be my fault. It had been long growing in my mind who Havelok must be, though I said nothing of what I thought, because my father had bidden me be silent long ago, and I thought that I knew why.

We were to start early in the morning, so that we should get to the city betimes in the evening; and there was one thing that troubled the good sisters more than it did us. They would have had us go in all our finery, such as we were wont to wear on holidays and at feastings; but none of that was left. It had gone in buying corn, while there was any left to buy, along with every silver penny that we had. So we must go in the plain fisher gear, that is made for use and not for show, frayed and stained, and a trifle tarry, but good enough. It would not do to go in our war gear into a peaceful city; and so we took but the seax that every Englishman wears, and the short travelling spear that all wayfarers use. Hardly was it likely that even the most hungry outlaw of the wild woldland would care to fall on us; for by this time such as we seemed had spent their all in food for themselves and their families, and all the money in Lindsey seemed to have gone away to places where there was yet somewhat to buy.



Busy were those kind sisters of ours that night in making ready the last meal that we should need to take from them. And all the while they foretold pleasant things for us at the king's court—how that we should find high honour and the like. So they set us forth well and cheerfully.

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With the dawn we started, and Havelok was thoughtful beyond his wont after we had bidden farewell to the home folk, so that I thought that he grieved for leaving them at the last.

“Downhearted, are you, brother?” I said, when we had gone a couple of miles in silence across the level. “I have been to Lincoln two or three times in a month sometimes in the summer, and it is no great distance after all. I think nothing of the journey, or of going so short a way from home.”

“Nor do I,” he answered. “First, I was thinking of the many times my father, Grim, went this way, and now he can walk no more; and then I was thinking of that empty cottage we passed just now, where there was a pleasant little family enough three months ago, who are all gone. And then—ay, I will tell you—I had a dream last night that stays in my mind, so that I think that out of this journey of ours will come somewhat.”

“Food and shelter, to wit,” said I, “which is all we want for a month or two. Let us hear it.”

“If we get all that I had in that dream, we shall want no more all our lives,” he said, with a smile; “but it seems a foolish dream, now that I come to tell it.”

“That is mostly the way with dreams. It is strange how wonderful they seem until daylight comes. I have heard Witlaf’s gleeman say that the best lays he ever made were in his sleep; but if he remembered aught of them, they were naught.”

“It is not like that altogether with my dream,” Havelok said, “for it went thus. I thought that I was in Denmark—though how I knew it was Denmark I cannot say—and on a hill I sat, and at my feet was stretched out all the land, so that I could see all over it at once. Then I longed for it, and I stretched out my arms to gather it in, and so long were they that they could well fathom it, and so I drew it to myself. With towns and castles it was gathered in, and the keys of the strongholds fell rattling at my feet, while the weight of the great land seemed to lie on my knees. Then said one, and the voice was the voice of Grim, ‘This is not all the dream that I have made for you, but it is enough for now.’ That is the dream, therefore, and what make you of it?”

“A most amazing hunger, brother, certainly, and promise of enough to satisfy it withal. I think that the sisters have talked about our advancement at court until you have dreamed thereof.”

“Why,” he said, “that is surely at the bottom of the dream, and I am foolish to think more of it.”



Then we went on, and grew light hearted as the miles passed. But though I had seemed to think little of the dream, it went strangely with my thoughts of what might lie before Havelok in days to come.

As we went inland from the sea, the track of the pestilence was more dread, for we passed house after house that had none living in them, and some held the deserted dead. I might say many things of what we saw, but I do not like to think of them much. Many a battlefield have I seen since that day, but I do not think them so terrible as the field over which has gone the foe that is unseen ere he smites. One knows the worst of the battle when it is over and the roll is called, but who knows where famine and pestilence stay? And those have given life for king or land willingly, but these were helpless.



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It was good to climb the welds and look back, for in the high lands there was none of this. Below us the levels, with their bright waters, were wrapped in a strange blue haze, that had come with the famine at its worst, and, as men said, had brought or made the sickness. I had heard of it; but it was not so plain when one was in it, or else our shore was free, which is likely, seeing how little we suffered.

After that we kept to the high land, not so much fearing the blue robe of the pestilence as what things of its working we might see; and so it was late in the afternoon that we came in sight of Lincoln town, on its hill, with the wide meres and river at its feet. I have seen no city that stands more wonderfully than this of ours, with the grey walls of the Roman town to crown the gathering of red and brown roofs that nestle on the slope and within them. And ever as we drew nearer Havelok became more silent, as I thought because he had never seen so great a town before, until we passed the gates of the stockade that keeps the town that lies without the old walls, and then he said, looking round him strangely, "Brother, you will laugh at me, no doubt, for an arrant dreamer, but this is the place whereto in dreams I have been many a time. Now we shall come to yon turn of the road among the houses, and beyond that we shall surely see a stone-arched gate in a great wall, and spearmen on guard thereat."

It was so, and the gate and guard were before us in a few more steps. It was the gate of the old Roman town, inside which was the palace of the king and one or two more great houses only. Our English kin hate a walled town or a stone house, and they would not live within the strong walls, whose wide span was, save for the king's palace, which was built partly of the house of the Roman governor, and these other halls, which went for naught in so wide a meadow, empty and green, and crossed by two paved roads, with grass growing between the stones. There were brown marks, as of the buried stones of other foundations, on the grass where the old streets had been.

All the straggling English town was outside the walls, and only in time of war would the people use them as a stronghold, as they used the still more ancient camps on the hills.

"Many times have you heard us tell of this place, Havelok," I said. "It is no wonder that you seem to know it."

"Nay," he answered, "but this is the city of my dreams, and somewhat is to happen here."

CHAPTER VIII. BERTHUN THE COOK.

For that night we went to the house of the old dame with whom my father and I were wont to lodge when we came to the market, and she took us in willingly, though she could make little cheer for us. Truly, as had been said, the scarcity was not so great in Lincoln, but everything was terribly dear, and that to some is almost as bad.

“No money have I now, dame,” I said ruefully, “but I think that for old sake’s sake you will not turn us away.”



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“Not I, faith,” she answered. “I mind the first day your father came here, and never a penny had he, and since then there has been no want in this house. Luck comes with Grim and his folk, as I think. But this is a son whom I have not seen before, if he is indeed your brother.”

“I am Grim’s son Curan,” said Havelok, “and I have not been to Lincoln ere this. But I have heard of you many times.”

That pleased our old hostess, and then she asked after Grim. Hard it was to have to tell her that he was gone, and hard it was for her to hear, for the little house had been open to us for ten years.

“What will you do now, masters?” she asked, when she had told us of many a kindness done to her and her husband, who was long dead now, by my father.

I told her that we were too many at home since the fishing had failed, and had therefore come to find some work here, at the court if possible.

“Doubtless two strong men will not have to go far to find somewhat,” she said; “but the court is full of idle folk, and maybe no place is empty. Now I will have you bide with me while you are at a loose end, for there are yet a few silver pennies in store, and I ween that they came out of Grim’s pouch to me. Lonely am I, and it is no good hoarding them when his sons are hungry.”

We thanked her for that kind saying, but she made light of it, saying that almost did she hope that we should find no work, that we might bide and lighten her loneliness for a time.

“But if an old woman’s advice is good for aught, you shall not go to the court first of all. Sour is King Alsi, and he is likely to turn you away offhand rather than grant the smallest boon. But there is Berthun the cook, as we call him—steward is his court name though—and he orders the household, and is good-natured, so that all like him. Every morning he comes into the market, and there you can ask him if there is a place for you, and he loves to look on a man such as Curan. But if it is weapons you want—and I suppose that is in the minds of tall men always, though it brings sorrow in the end—there is the captain of the guard who lives over the gate, and he might be glad to see you enough.”

We said that we would see the steward, for we wanted no long employment. We would go back to Grimsby when the famine ended, if it were only by the coming of the fish again.

Then she gave us of the best she had—black bread and milk to wit; and after that we slept soundly before the fire, as I had done many times before in that humble house. Black bread and milk it was again in the morning; but there was plenty, and goodwill to



season it. Then the old dame sent us forth cheerfully and early, that we might not miss Berthun the steward, from whom she hoped great things for us.

So we sat in the marketplace for an hour or more watching the gates of the wall for his coming; and men stared at Havelok, so that we went to the bridge and waited there. One could see all the market from thence. There were a good many of the market folk coming in presently, and most of them knew me, and more than one stopped and spoke.



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Now Havelok grew restless, and wandered here and there looking at things, though not going far from me; and while I was thus alone on the bridge, a man I knew by sight came and leaned on the rail by me, and told me that he had just seen the most handsome man and the goodliest to look on that was in the kingdom, as he thought.

“Yonder he stands,” he said, “like a king who has fallen on bad times. I mind that I thought that Alsi, our king, would look like that, before I saw him, and sorely disappointed was I in him therefore. Now I wonder who yon man may be?”

I did not say that I knew, but I looked at Havelok, and for the first time, perhaps because I had never seen him among strangers before, I knew that he was wondrous to look on. Full head and shoulders was he above all the folk, and the Lindseymen are no babes in stature. And at the same moment it came to me that it were not well that men should know him as the son of Grim the fisher. If my father, who was the wisest of men, had been so careful for all these years, I must not be less so; for if there were ever any fear of the spies of Hodulf, it would be now when his foe might be strong enough in years to think of giving trouble. Not that I ever thought much of the said Hodulf, seeing how far off he was; but my father had brought me up to dread him for this brother of mine. Certainly by this time Hodulf knew that Grim had come to England in safety, for the name of the new town must have come to his ears: and if Grim, then the boy he had given to him.

The man who spoke to me went away soon, and Havelok strolled back to me.

“I would that the cook, or whoever he is, would come,” he said. “I grow weary of this crowd that seems to have naught to do but stare at a stranger.”

“What shall we ask, when he does come? and supposing that there is a place for but one of us?” I said.

“Why, then, the one it fits best will take it, and the other must seek some other chance. That is all.”

“As you will, brother,” I answered, “but I would rather that we should be together.”

“And I also. But after all, both will be in Lincoln, and we must take what comes. It is but for a little while, and we shall not like to burden that good old dame by being too hard to please. We want somewhat to do until we can go home, not for a day longer, and I care not what it is.”

“That is right,” I said; “and the sooner I see one of our folk coming over this bridge with a full basket of fish, the better I shall like it. But it may be a long day before that. Now, I have been thinking that it were not well that you should say that you are the son of Grim.”



I did not quite know how he would take this, for he was proud of my father as I. But that very pride made it easy.

“Maybe not,” he said thoughtfully, “for it seems unworthy of his sons that we have to ask for service from any man. But I do not think that he could blame us, as things are. Nevertheless, folk shall not talk.”

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“Men know me,” said I, “but that cannot be helped.”

He laughed gaily at that.

“Why, here we speak as if one man in a hundred knew you. And after all it may be that we shall get a place that none need be ashamed of. Look, here comes a mighty fine lord from the gateway.”

It was Berthun the steward, for whom we were waiting, and I knew him well by sight. Often had he bought our fish, but I did not think that he would remember me by name, if he had ever heard it. He was a portly and well-favoured man, not old, and as he came down the street to the marketplace at the hill foot he laughed and talked with one and another of the townsfolk, whether high or low, in very pleasant wise.

Presently he stopped at a stall, and priced some meat; and when he had bought it he looked round and called for some men to carry it for him; and at that the idlers made a rush for him, tripping over one another in haste to be first, while he laughed at them.

He chose two or three, and sent them up the hill to the palace with their burdens, and then went to another booth and bought.

“This is work at which I should make a good hand,” said Havelok, laughing at the scrambling men who ran forward when the steward again called for porters. “Well paid also the job must be, to judge of their eagerness.”

The three men who had been chosen took their burden and went away, and the steward came near us, to a bakery that was close to the bridge end.

“I have a mind to do porter for once,” Havelok said. “Then I can at least earn somewhat to take back to the dame tonight.”

“If you do so,” I answered, “I will wait here for you. But you will have to fight for the place.”

Now the steward bought all that he needed, and that was bread for the whole palace for the day, and again he called for porters. Whereon Havelok got up from the bridge rail and went towards him in no great hurry, so that the idlers were in a crowd before him.

“Ho! friends,” cried Havelok, “let the good cook see all of us and make his choice. He can only take one at a time.”

“One, forsooth,” said a man from the crowd; “why, there is a load for four men there.”

“Well, then, let him pick four little ones, and give these little ones a chance of being seen.”



Now I do not think that he would have troubled with the matter any more; but whether the men knew that this was the last load that the steward had to send home, or whether they quarrelled, I cannot say, but in their eagerness to raise the two great baskets they fell to struggling over them, and the steward tried to quiet the turmoil by a free use of his staff, and there was a danger that the bread should be scattered.

“Here will be waste of what there is none too much of just now,” said Havelok; and with that he went to the aid of the steward, picking up and setting aside the men before him, and then brushing the struggling rivals into a ruefully wondering heap from about the baskets, so that he and the steward faced each other, while there fell a silence on the little crowd that had gathered. Even the men who had been put aside stayed their abuse as they saw what manner of man had come to the rescue of the baskets, and Havelok and the cook began to laugh.



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“Fe, fi, fo, fum!” said Berthun; “here is surely a Cornish giant among us! Now I thank you, good Blunderbore, or whatever your name is, for brushing off these flies.”

“The folk in this place are unmannerly,” said Havelok; “hut if you want the bread carried up the hill I will do it for you.”

Berthun looked him up and down in a puzzled sort of way once or twice ere he answered, “Well, as that is your own proposal, pick your helpers and do so; I would not have asked such a thing of you myself.”

“There is not much help needed,” said Havelok. “I think this may be managed if I get a fair hold.”

Now we were used to seeing him carry such loads as would try the strength of even Raven and myself, who could lift a load for three men; but when he took the two great baskets of bread and swung them into place on either arm, a smothered shout went round the crowd, and more than once I heard the old Welsh name that the marsh folk had given him spoken.

“Let us be going,” said Havelok to the steward on that. “One would think that none of these had ever hefted a fair load in his life, to listen to them.”

So he nodded to me across the heads of the crowd, and followed Berthun, and the idlers followed him for a little. The guard turned these back at the gate, and Havelok went through, and I could see him no more.

Presently the crowd drifted back to their places, and I heard them talking. Havelok and his strength was likely to be a nine days’ wonder in Lincoln, and I was glad that I had asked him not to say whence he was.

“He is some thane’s son who is disguised,” said one.

“Maybe he is under a vow,” said another; and then one chimed in with a story of some prince of Arthur’s time, by name Gareth, who hid his state at his mother’s command.

“As for me,” said the baker, “I think that he is a fisher, as he looks—at least, that is, as his clothes make him.”

So even he had his doubts, and I will say that I understood well enough now why my father never brought him here before.

Havelok was long in coming back, as I thought, and I seemed to be wasting time here, and so I bethought me of the other man to whom the old dame had said we might go—namely, the captain of the gate. I should see Havelok if I stood there.



The captain was talking with some of his men as I came up, and of course it was of Havelok that they spoke; and seeing that I wore the same dress as he, they asked me if I knew who he was.

“He is a fisher from the coast,” I answered. “I have heard him called Curan.”

“Welsh then,” the captain answered, somewhat disappointed, as it seemed. “If he had been a Mercian, or even a Saxon, I would have had him here, but a fisher has had no training in arms after all.”

“Some of us have,” said I.

The captain looked me up and down, and then walked round me, saying nothing until we were face to face again.



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“That, I take it, is a hint that you might like to be a housecarl of the king’s,” he said. “Are you a Lindseyman?”

“I am the son of Grim of Grimsby,” I said.

“Why, then, I suppose you would not think of it, seeing that my place is not empty; but if you will dress in that way you must not wonder if I took you for a likely man for a housecarl. We know Grim well by repute. Come in and tell me about the famine, and this new town of yours that one hears of.”

Now I could not see Havelok as yet, and so I went into the stone-arched Roman guardroom, and Eglaf the captain fetched out a pot of wine and some meat, and made me very welcome while we talked. And presently I thought that I might do worse than be a housecarl for a time, if Eglaf would have me. I should be armed at least, and with comrades to help if Havelok needed me; though all the while I thought myself foolish for thinking that any harm could come to him who was so strong. Nevertheless, what my father had laid on us all was to be heeded, and I was to be his helper in arms. So presently I told Eglaf that the housecarl’s life seemed an easy one, and that it would be pleasant to go armed for a while, if he would have me for a short time, seeing that the famine had left us naught to do.

“Well, there is plenty to eat and drink,” he said, “and good lodging in the great hall or here, as one’s post may be, and a silver penny every day; but no fighting to be done, seeing that Alsi will sooner pay a foe to go away than let us see to the matter. Doing naught is mighty hard work at times.”

Then he asked if I had arms, and I said that I would send for them at once, and that settled the matter. If I chose to come with my own arms I should be welcome.

“I am glad to get you,” he said, “for there will be a crowd in the place ere long, for the Witan is to meet, and the thanes will come with their men, and there will be fine doings, so that we need another strong arm or two that we may keep the peace,”

He took a long pull at the wine pot, and then went on, “Moreover, the princess’s Danes are sure to want to fight some of the English folk for sport.”

“What! is she here?”

“Not yet. They say that she is coming when the Witan meets, because the Witan wants to see her, not because Alsi does. But he dare not go against them, and so it must be.”

Now Goldberga, the princess, was, as I have said, Alsi’s ward, and was at this time just eighteen, so that it would be time for her to take the kingdom that was hers by right. It was common talk, however, that Alsi by no means liked the thought of giving the wide lands of East Anglia up to her, and that he would not do so if he could anywise help it.



Maybe the Witan thought so also, and would see fair play. Ethelwald and his wife Orwenna had been well loved both here and in Norfolk, and it was said that Goldberga their daughter grew wondrous fair and queenly.



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I had learned one thing though, and that was that we should have Ethelwald's Danes here shortly, and that I did not like; but after all, what did these few men of an old household know of the past days in Denmark? There had been no going backwards and forwards between the two countries since the king died ten years ago. Nevertheless I was glad that I had found a friend in Eglaf, and that I was to be here.

Then I got up to go, and the captain bade me come as soon as I could, for he could talk to me as he could not to the men, maybe. So I bade him farewell, and went slowly back, down the street, sitting down in the old place.

It was not long after that before Havelok came, and I saw Berthun the steward come as far as the gate with him, and stand looking after him as he walked away; then Eglaf came out, and both looked and talked for a while, and therefore, as soon as I knew that Havelok saw me, I went away and across the bridge to a place that was quiet, and waited for him there.

"Well, brother," I said, "you have had a long job with the cook. What is the end of it all?"

"I do not know," he answered slowly. "That is to be seen yet."

I looked at him, for his voice was strange, and I saw that he seemed to have the same puzzled look in his eyes as he had last night when we came first into the city. I asked if anything was amiss.

"Nothing," he said; "but this is a place of dreams. I think that I shall wake presently in Grimsby."

We walked on, and past the straggling houses outside the stockade, and so into the fields; and little by little he told me what was troubling him.

Berthun the steward had said nothing until the palace was reached, and had led him to the great servants' hall, and there had bidden him set down his load and rest. Then he had asked if he would like to see the place, and of course Havelok had said that he would, wondering at the same time if this was all the pay that the porters got. So he was shown the king's hall, and the arms on the wall, and the high seat, and the king's own chamber, and many more things, and all the while they seemed nothing strange to Havelok.

"This Berthun watched me as a cat watches a mouse all the while," he said, "and at last he asked if I had ever seen a king's house before. I told him that I had a dream palace which had all these things, but was not the same. And at that he smiled and asked my name. 'Curan,' I said, of course; and at that he smiled yet more, in a way that seemed to say that he did not believe me. 'It is a good name for the purpose,' he said, 'but I have to ask your pardon for calling you by the old giant's name just now.' I said that as



he did not know my name, and it was a jest that fitted, it was no matter. Then he made a little bow, and asked if I would take any food before I went from the place; so I told him that it was just what I came for, and he laughed, and I had such a meal as I have not seen for months. It is in my mind that I left a famine in that house, so hungry was I. There is no pride about this Berthun, for he served me himself, and I thanked him.”



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Then Havelok stopped and passed his hand over his face, and he laughed a little, uneasy laugh.

“And all the while I could not get it out of my head that he ought to be kneeling before me.”

“Well,” he went on after a little, “when I had done, this Berthun asked me a question, saying that he was a discreet man, and that if he could help me in any way he would do so. Had I a vow on me? Nothing more than to earn my keep until the famine was over, I said. I had left poor folk who would have the more for my absence, and he seemed to think that this was a wondrous good deed. So I told him that if he could help me in this I should be glad. Whereon he lowered his voice and asked if I must follow the way of Gareth the prince. I had not heard of this worthy, and so I said that what was good enough for a prince was doubtless good enough for me, and that pleased him wonderfully.

“‘Gladly will I take you into my service,’ he said, ‘if that will content you.’ Which it certainly would; and so I am to be porter again tomorrow. Then I said that I had a comrade to whom I must speak first. He said that no doubt word must be sent home of my welfare, and he saw me as far as the gate.”

“Which of you went out of the hall first?” I asked.

“Now I come to think of it, I did. I went to let him pass, as the elder, though it was in my mind to walk out as if the place belonged to me; and why, I do not know, for no such thought ever came to me in Witlaf’s house, or even in a cottage; but he stood aside and made me go first.”

Now I longed for Withelm and his counsel, for one thing was plain to me, and that was that with the once familiar things of the kingship before him the lost memory of his childhood was waking in Havelok, and I thought that the time my father boded was at hand. The steward had seen that a court and its ways were no new thing to him, and had seen too that he had been wont to take the first place somewhere; so he had deemed that this princely-looking youth was under a vow of service, in the old way. It is likely that the Welsh name would make him think that he was from beyond the marches to the west, and that was just as well.

Then Havelok said, “Let us go back to the widow’s house and sleep. My head aches sorely, and it is full of things that are confused, so that I do not know rightly who I am or where. Maybe it will pass with rest.”

We turned hack, and then I told him what I meant to do; and that pleased him, for we should see one another often.



“We are in luck, brother, so far,” he said, “having lit on what we needed so soon; but I would that these dreams would pass.”

“It is the poor food of many days gone by,” I said. “Berthun will cure that for you very shortly.”

“It is likely enough,” he answered more gaily.

“Little want is in that house, but honest Berthun does not know what a trencherman he has hired. But I would that we had somewhat to take back to our good old dame tonight.”



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But she was more than satisfied with our news; and when she saw that Havelok was silent, she made some curious draught of herbs for him, which he swallowed, protesting, and after that he slept peacefully.

I went out to the marketplace and found a man whom I knew—one of those who carried our fish at times; and him I sent, with promise of two silver pennies presently, to Arngeir for my arms, telling him that all was well.

CHAPTER IX. CURAN THE PORTER.

There is no need for me to say how my arms came to me from Grimsby, and how I went to Eglaf as I had promised. I will only say that the life was pleasant enough, if idle, as a housecarl, and that I saw Havelok every day at one time or another, which was all that I could wish.

But as I had to wait a day or two while the messenger went and the arms came from home, I saw Havelok meet the steward on the next day: and a quaint meeting enough it was, for Berthun hardly knew how he should behave to this man, whom he had made up his mind was a wandering prince.

There was the crowd who waited for the call for porters, as ever; hut the steward would have none of them, until he saw his new man towering over the rest, and then he half made a motion to unbonnet, which he checked and turned into a beckoning wave of the hand, whereon the idlers made their rush for him, and Havelok walked through and over them, more or less, as they would not make way for him. But so good-naturedly was this done, that even those whom he lifted from his path and dropped on one side laughed when they saw who had cleared a way for himself, and stood gaping to see what came next.

“Ho—why, yes—Curan—that was the name certainly. I have been looking for you, as we said,” stammered the steward.

“Here am I, therefore,” answered Havelok, “and where is the load?”

“Truth to tell, I have bought but this at present,” said the steward, pointing to a small basket of green stuff on the stall at which he stood.

“Well, I suppose there is more to come,” Havelok said, taking it up; “it will be a beginning.”

“I will not ask you to carry more than that,” Berthun began.

“Why, man, this is foolishness. If you have a porter, make him carry all he can, else he will not earn his keep.”



“As you will,” answered the steward, shrugging his shoulders as one who cannot account for some folk’s whims, and going on to the next booth.

Now, I suppose that the idlers looked to see Havelok walk away with this light load gladly, as any one of them would have done, and that then their turn would have come; but this was not what they expected. Maybe they would have liked to see the strong man sweep up all the palace marketing and carry it, as a show, but it might interfere with their own gains. So there was a murmur or two among them, and this grew when Havelok took the next burden in like manner.



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“Ho, master cook,” cried a ragged man at last, “this is not the custom, and it is not fair that one man should do all the work, and all for one wage.”

Berthun took no notice of this; and so the cry was repeated, and that by more than one. And at last he turned round and answered.

“Go to, ye knaves,” he said with a red face and angrily; “if I find a man who will save me the trouble of your wrangles every day, shall I not do as I please?”

Then there was a tumult of voices, and some of them seemed sad, as if a last hope was gone, and that Havelok heard.

“There is somewhat in this,” he said to the cook. “What pay have you given to each man who carries for you?”

“A yesterday’s loaf each,” answered Berthun, wondering plainly that Havelok paid any heed to the noise.

“Well, then, let us go on, and we will think of somewhat,” Havelok said; and then he turned to the people, who were silent at once.

“I am a newcomer, and a hungry one,” he said, smiling quietly, “and I have a mind to earn my loaf well. Hinder me not for today, and hereafter I will take my chance with the rest, if need is.”

Thereat the folk began to laugh also, for it was plain that none had any chance at all if he chose to put forth his strength; but an old man said loudly, “Let the good youth alone now, and he shall talk with us when he has done his errand and fed that great bulk of his. He has an honest face, and will be fair to all.”

That seemed to please the crowd; and after that they said no more, but followed and watched the gathering up of Havelok’s mighty burden. And presently there was more than he could manage; and he spoke to Berthun, who checked himself in a half bow as he answered.

Then Havelok looked over the faces before him, and beckoned to two men who seemed weakly and could not press forward, and to them he gave the lighter wares, and so left the market with his master, as one must call the steward.

“What told I you?” said the old man, as they came back from the great gate. “Never saw I one with a face like that who harmed any man, either in word or deed.”

Now when Havelok had set down his load in the kitchen, he straightened himself and said to Berthun, who was, as one may say, waiting his pleasure.



“This is today’s task; but it is in my mind that I would stay up here and work.”

“What would you do?”

“There are men yonder who will miss the carrying if I am market porter always. But here are things I can earn my keep at, and help the other servants with at the same time. Water drawing there is, and carrying of logs for the fire, and cleaving them also, and many other things that will be but hardening my muscles, while they are over heavy to be pleasant for other folk.”

“Well,” answered Berthun, “that is all I could wish, and welcome to some here will you be. Let it be so.”



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“Now, I do not think that you would make a gain by my work this morning?”

“Truly not, if any one is wronged by my doing so,” the puzzled steward said.

Then Havelok asked how many men would have been needed to carry up the goods that he had brought, and Berthun said that he was wont to send one at least from each stall, and more if the burden was heavy.

“Then today four poor knaves must go dinnerless by reason of my strength, and that does not please me altogether,” said Havelok gravely. “Give these two their loaves; and then, I pray you, give me the other four, and let me go back to the market.”

And then he added, with a smile, “I think that I can order matters there so that things will be more fair, and that you will have less trouble with that unmannerly scramble.”

“If you can do that, you are even as your name calls you. Take them and welcome, Curan, and then come here and do what work you will,” Berthun said in haste.

“Tasks you must set me, or I shall grow idle. That is the failing of over-big men,” Havelok said; and he took the loaves and left the palace with the two market men at his heels.

I saw him come back, and at once the crowd of idlers made for him, but in a respectful way enough. I knew, however, how easily these folks took to throwing mud and stones in their own quarrels, and I was a little anxious, for to interfere with the ways of the market is a high offence among them.

But Havelok knew naught of that, and went his way with his loaves to the bridge end, and there sat on the rail and looked at the men before him. And *lo!* back to my mind came old days in Denmark, and how I once saw Gunnar the king sitting in open court to do justice, and then I knew for certain that I was looking on his son. And when Havelok spoke it was in the voice of Gunnar that I had long forgotten, but which came back to me clear and plain, as if it were yesterday that I had heard it. Never does a boy forget his first sight of the king.

“Friends,” said Havelok, “if I do two men’s work I get two men’s pay, or else I might want to know the reason why. But I am only one man, all the same, and it seems right to me that none should be the loser. Wherefore I have a mind to share my pay fairly.”

There was a sort of shout at that and Havelok set his four loaves in a row on the rail beside him. But then some of the rougher men went to make a rush at them, and he took the foremost two and shook them, so that others laughed and bade the rest beware.



“So that is just where the trouble comes in,” said Havelok coolly; “the strong get the first chance, as I did this morning, by reason of there being none to see fair play.”

“Bide in the market, master, and we will make you judge among us,” cried a small man from the edge of the crowd.

“Fair and softly,” Havelok answered. “I am not going to bide here longer than I can help. Come hither, grandfer,” and he beckoned to the old man who had bidden them wait his return, “tell me the names of the men who have been longest without any work.”



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The old man pointed out three, and then Havelok stopped him.

“One of these loaves is my own wage,” he said; “but you three shall have the others, and that will be the easiest day’s work you ever did. But think not that I am going to do the like every day, for Lincoln hill is no easy climb, and the loaf is well earned at the top. Moreover, it is not good to encourage the idle by working for them.”

So the three men had their loaves, and Havelok began to eat his own slowly, swinging his legs on the bridge rail while the men watched him.

“Master,” said the small man from behind, pushing forward a little, now that the crowd was looser, “make a law for the market, I pray you, that all may have a chance.”

“Who am I to make laws?” said my brother slowly, and, as he said this, his hand went up to his brows as it had gone last night when the palace had wearied him.

“The strong make laws for the weak,” the old man said to him in a low voice. “If the strong is honest, for the weak it is well. Things are hard for the weak here; and therefore say somewhat, for it may be of use.”

“It can be none, unless the strong is at hand to see that the law is kept.”

“Sometimes the market will see that a rule is not broken, for itself. There is no rule for this matter.”

Again Havelok passed his hand over his eyes, and he was long in answering. The loaf lay at his side now. Presently he looked straight before him, and, as if he saw far beyond Lincoln Hill and away to the north, he said, “This is my will, therefore, that from this time forward it shall be the law that men shall have one among them who may fairly and without favour so order this matter that all shall come to Berthun the steward in turns that shall be kept, and so also with the carrying for any other man. There shall be a company of porters, therefore, which a man must join before he shall do this work, save that every stranger who comes shall be suffered to take a burden once, and then shall be told of this company, and the custom that is to be. And I will that this old man shall see to this matter.”

And then he stopped suddenly, and seemed to start as a great shout went up from the men, a shout as of praise; and his eyes looked again on them, and that wonderingly.

“They will keep this law,” said the old man. “Well have you spoken.”

“I have said a lot of foolishness, maybe,” answered Havelok. “For the life of me I could not say it again.”



“There is not one of us that could not do so,” said his adviser. “But bide you here, master, in the town?”

“I am in service at the palace.”

Then the old man turned round to the others and said, “This is good that we have heard, and it is nothing fresh, for all trades have their companies, and why should not we? Is this stranger’s word to be kept?”

Maybe there were one or two of the rougher men who held their peace, for they had had more than their share of work, but from the rest came a shout of “Ay!” as it were at the Witan.



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“Well, then,” said Havelok suddenly, getting down from his seat and giving his loaf to the old man, “see you to it; and if any give trouble hereafter, I shall hear from the cook, and, by Odin, I will even come down and knock their heads together for them. So farewell.”

He smiled round pleasantly, yet in that way which has a meaning at the back of it; and at that every cap went off and the men did him reverence as to a thane at least, and he nodded to them and came across to me.

“Come out into the fields, brother, for I shall weep if I bide here longer.”

So he said; and we went away quickly, while the men gathered round the old leader who was to be, and talked earnestly.

“This famine plays strange tricks with me,” he said when we were away from every one. “Did you hear all that I said?”

“I heard all, and you have spoken the best thing that could have been said. Eight years have I been to this market, and a porters’ guild is just what is needed. And it will come about now.”

“It was more dreaming, and so I must be a wise man in my dream. Even as in the palace yesterday it came on me, and I seemed to be at the gate of a great hall, and it was someone else that was speaking, and yet myself. It is in my mind that I told these knaves what my lordly will was, forsooth; and the words came to me in our old Danish tongue, so that it was hard not to use it. But it seems to me that long ago I did these things, or saw them, I know not which, somewhere. Tell me, did the king live in our town across the sea?”

“No, but in another some way off. My father took me there once or twice.”

“Can you mind that he took me also?”

I shook my head, and longed for Withelm. Surely I would send for him, or for Arngeir, if this went on. Arngeir for choice, for I could tell him what I thought; and that would only puzzle Withelm, who knew less than I.

“We will ask Arngeir some day,” I said; “he can remember.”

“I suppose he did take me,” mused Havelok; “and I suppose that I want more sleep or more food or somewhat. Now we will go and tell the old dame of my luck, for she has lost her lodger.”

Then he told me of his fortune with the steward.



“Half afraid of me he seems, for he will have me do just what I will. That will be no hard place therefore.”

But I thought that if I knew anything of Havelok my brother, he would be likely to make it hard by doing every one’s work for him, and that Berthun saw this; or else that, as I had thought last night, the shrewd courtier saw the prince behind the fisher’s garb.

So we parted presently at the gate of the palace wall, and I went back to the widow to wait for my arms, while he went to his master. And I may as well tell the end of Havelok’s lawmaking.

Berthun went down to the market next day, and came back with a wonder to be told. And it was to Havelok that he went first to tell it, as he was drawing bucket after bucket of water from the deep old Roman well in the courtyard to fill the great tub which he considered a fair load to carry at once.



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“There is something strange happening in the market,” he said, “and I think that you have a hand in it. The decency of the place is wonderful, and you said that you thought I might have less trouble with the men than I was wont if you went down with the loaves. What did you? For I went to the baker’s stalls and bought, and looked round for the tail that is after me always; and I was alone, and all the market folk were agape to see what was to be done. I thought that I had offended the market by yesterday’s business, as they had called out on me, and I thought that I should have to come and fetch your—that is, if it pleased you. But first I called, as is my wont, for porters. Now all that rabble sat in a row along a wall, and, by Baldur, when I looked, they had cleaned themselves! Whereupon an old gaffer, who has carried things once or twice for me when there has been no crowd and he has been able to come forward, lifted up his voice and asked how many men I wanted, so please me.

“Two,” I said, wondering, and at that two got up and came to me, and I sent them off. It was the same at the next booth, and the next, for he told off men as I wanted them; and here am I back a full half-hour earlier than ever before, and no mud splashes from the crowd either. It is said that they have made a porters’ guild; and who has put that sense into their heads unless your—that is, unless you have done so, I cannot say.”

Havelok laughed.

“Well, I did tell them that they should take turns, or somewhat like that; and I also told them that if you complained of them I would see to it.”

“Did you say that you would pay them, may I ask—that is, of course, if they were orderly? For if so, I thank—”

“I told them that if you complained I would knock their heads together,” said Havelok.

And that was the beginning of the Lincoln porters’ guild; and in after days Havelok was wont to say that he would that all lawmaking was as easy as that first trial of his. Certainly from that day forward there was no man in all the market who would not have done aught for my brother, and many a dispute was he called on to settle. It is not always that a law, however good it may be, finds not a single one to set himself against it. But then Havelok was a strong man.

Now there is naught to tell of either Havelok or myself for a little while, for we went on in our new places comfortably enough. One heard much of Havelok, though, for word of him and his strength and goodliness, and of his kindness moreover, went through the town, with tales of what he had done. But I never heard that any dared to ask him to make a show of himself by doing feats of strength. Only when he came down to the guardroom sometimes with me would he take part in the weapon play that he loved, and the housecarls, who were all tried and good warriors, said that he was their master in the use of every weapon, and it puzzled them to know where he had learned so well, for

he yet wore his fisher's garb. They sent his arms with mine from Grimsby, thinking that he also needed them; but he left them with the widow.



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Havelok used to laugh if they asked him this, and tell them that it came by nature, and in that saying there was more than a little truth. So the housecarls, when they heard how Berthun was wont to treat him, thought also that he was some great man in hiding, and that the steward knew who he was. They did not know but that my close friendship with him had sprung up since he came, and that was well, and Eglaf and he and I were soon much together. The captain wanted him to leave the cook and be one of his men, but we thought that he had better bide where he was, rather than let Alsi the king have him always about him. For now and then that strange feeling, as of the old days, came over him when he was in the great hall, and he had to go away and brood over it for a while until he would set himself some mighty task and forget it.

But one day he came to me and said that he was sure he knew the ways of a king too well for it all to be a dream, adding that Berthun saw that also, and was curious about him.

“Tell me, brother, whence came I? Was I truly brought up in a court?”

“I have never heard,” I answered. “All that I know for certain is that you fled with us from Hodulf, the new king, and that for reasons which my father never told me.”

Then said Havelok, “There was naught worth telling, therefore. I suppose I was the child of some steward like Berthun; but yet—”

So he went away, and I wondered long if it were not time that Arngeir should tell all that he knew. It was of no good for me to say that in voice and ways and deed he had brought back to me the Gunnar whom I had not seen for so many long years, for that was as likely as not to be a fancy of mine, or if not a fancy, he might be only a sister's son or the like. But in all that he said there was no word of his mother, and by that I knew that his remembrance must be but a shadow, if a growing one.

But there was no head in all the wide street that was not turned to look after him; and now he went his way from me with two children, whom he had caught up from somewhere, perched on either shoulder, and another in his arms, and they crowed with delight as he made believe to be some giant who was to eat them forthwith, and ran up the hill with them. No such playmate had the Lincoln children before Havelok came.

CHAPTER X. KING ALSI OF LINDSEY.

Three weeks after we came the Witan[8] began to gather, and that was a fine sight as the great nobles of Lindsey, and of the North folk of East Anglia, came day by day into the town with their followings, taking up their quarters either in the better houses of the place or else pitching bright-coloured tents and pavilions on the hillside meadows beyond the stockades. Many brought their ladies with them, and all day long was



feasting and mirth at one place or another, as friend met with friend. Never had I seen such a gay sight as the marketplace was at midday, when the young thanes and their men met there and matched their followers at all sorts of sports. The English nobles are far more fond of gay dress and jewels than our Danish folk, though I must say that when the few Danes of Ethelwald's household came it would seem that they had taken kindly to the fashion of their home.



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Our housecarls grumbled a bit for a while, for with all the newcomers dressed span new for the gathering, we had had nothing fresh for it from the king, as was the custom, and I for one was ashamed of myself, for under my mail was naught but the fisher's coat, which is good enough for hard wear, but not for show. But one day we were fitted out fresh by the king's bounty in blue and scarlet jerkins and hose, and we swaggered after that with the best, as one may suppose.

Berthun had the ordering of that business, and he came and sat with Eglaf in the gatehouse and talked of it.

"Pity that you do not put your man Curan into decent gear," the captain said. "That old sailcloth rig does not do either him or you or the court credit."

"That is what I would do," said the steward, "but he will not take aught but the food that he calls his hire. He is a strange man altogether, and I think that he is not what he seems."

"So you have told me many times, and I think with you. He will be some crack-brained Welsh princeling who has been crossed in love, and so has taken some vow on him, as the King Arthur that they prate of taught them to do. Well, if he is such, it is an easy matter to make him clothe himself decently. It is only to tell him that the clothes are from the king, and no man who has been well brought up may refuse such a gift."

"But suppose that he thanks the king for the gift. Both he and the king will be wroth with me."

"Not Curan, when he has once got the things on; and as for Alsi, he will take the thanks to himself, and chuckle to think that the mistake has gained him credit for a good deed that he never did."

"Hush, comrade, hush!" said Berthun quickly; "naught but good of the king!"

"I said naught ill. But if Woden or Frey, or whoever looks after good deeds, scores the mistake to Alsi as well, it will be the first on the count of charity that—"

But at this Berthun rose up in stately wise.

"I may not listen to this. To think that here in the guardroom I should hear such—"

"Sit down, comrade," said Eglaf, laughing, and pulling the steward into his seat again. "Well you know that I would be cut to pieces for the king tomorrow if need were, and so I earn free speech of him I guard. If I may not say what I think of him to a man who knows as much of him as I, who may?"



“I have no doubt that the king would clothe Curan if I asked him,” said Berthun stiffly, but noways loth to take his seat again.

“But it is as much as your place is worth to do it. I know what you would say.”

Berthun laughed.

“I will do it myself, and if Alsi does get the credit, what matter?”

Wherefore it came to pass that as I was on guard at the gate leading to the town next day I saw a most noble-looking man coming towards me, and I looked a second time, for I thought him one of the noblest of all the thanes who had yet come, and the second look told me that it was Havelok in this new array. I will say that honest Berthun had done his part well; and if the king was supposed to be the giver, he had nothing to complain of. Eglaf had told me of the way in which the dressing of Havelok was to be done.



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“Ho!” said I, “I thought you some newcomer.”

“I hardly know myself,” he answered, “and I am not going to grumble at the change, seeing that this is holiday time. Berthun came to me last evening, and called me aside, and said that it was the king’s wont to dress his folk anew at the time of the Witan, and then wanted to know if my vow prevented me from wearing aught but fisher’s clothes. And when I said that if new clothes went as wage for service about the place I was glad to hear it, he was pleased, as if it had been likely that I would refuse a good offer. So the tailor went to work on me, and hence this finery. But you are as fine, and this is more than we counted on when we left Grimsby. I suppose it is all in honour of the lady of the North folk, Goldberga.”

“Maybe, for I have heard that she is to come.”

“To be fetched rather, if one is to believe all that one hears. They say that Alsi has kept her almost as a captive in Dover, having given her into the charge of some friend of his there, that she may be far from her own kingdom and people. Now the Norfolk Witan has made him bring her here. Berthun seems to think there will be trouble.”

“Only because Alsi will not want to let the kingdom go from his hand to her. But that will not matter. He is bound by the old promise to her father.”

Now we were talking to one another in broad Danish, there being none near to hear us. We had always used it among ourselves at Grimsby, for my father loved his old tongue. But at that moment there rode up to the gate a splendid horseman, young and handsome, and with great gold bracelets on his arms, one or two of which caught my eye at once, for they were of the old Danish patterns, and just such as Jarl Sigurd used to wear. But if I was quick to notice these tokens of the old land, he had been yet quicker, for he reined up before I stayed him, as was my duty if he would pass through this gate to the palace, so that I might know his authority.

“If I am not mistaken,” he said in our own tongue, “I heard you two talking in the way I love best. Skoal, therefore, to the first Northman I have met between here and London town, for it is good to hear a friendly voice.”

“Skoal to the jarl!” I answered, and I gave the salute of Sigurd’s courtmen, which came into my mind on the moment with the familiar greeting of long years ago. And “Skoal,” said Havelok.

“Jarl! How know you that I am that?”

“By the jarl’s bracelet that you wear, surely.”



“So you are a real Dane—not an English-bred one like myself. That is good. You and I will have many a talk together. Odin, how good it is to meet a housecarl who speaks as man to man and does not cringe to me! Who are you?”

“Radbard Grimsson of Grimsby, housecarl just now to this King of Lindsey.”

“And your comrade?”

I was about to tell this friendly countryman Havelok’s name without thought, but stopped in time. Of all the things I had been brought up to dread most for him, that an English Dane should find him out was the worst, so I said, “He is called Curan, and he is a Lindsey marshman.”



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“Who can talk Danish though his name is Welsh. That is strange. Well, you are right about me. I am Ragnar of Norwich, the earl, as the English for jarl goes. Now I want to see Alsi the king straightway.”

“That is a matter for the captain,” I said, and I called for him.

Eglaf came out and made a deep reverence when he saw the earl, knowing at once who he was, and as this was just what the earl had said that he did not like, he looked quaintly at me across Eglaf’s broad bent back, so that I had to grin perforce.

All unknowing of which the captain heard the earl’s business, and then told me to see him to the palace gates, and take his horse to the stables when he had dismounted and was in the hands of Berthun.

So I went, and Havelok turned away and went on some errand down the steep street.

This Ragnar was one of whom I had often heard, for he was the governor of all the North folk for Alsi until the Lady Goldberga should take her place. He was her cousin, being the son of Ethelwald’s sister, who was of course a Dane. Danish, and from the old country, was his father also, being one of the men who had come over to the court of East Anglia when Ethelwald was made king.

All the way to the door we talked of Denmark, but it was not far. There Berthun came out and greeted the earl in court fashion, and I thought that I was done with, because the grooms had run to take the great bay horse as they heard the trampling. But, as it happened, I was wanted.

Ragnar went in, saying to me that he would find me out again presently; and I saw him walk across the great hall to the hearth, and stand there while Berthun went to the king’s presence to tell him of the new arrival. Then I stood for a minute to look at the horse, for the grooms had had no orders to take him away; and mindful of Eglaf’s word to me, I was going to tell them to do so, and to see it done, when Berthun came hurriedly and called me.

“Master Housecarl,” he said rather breathlessly, “by the king’s order you are to come within the hall and guard the doorway.”

I shouldered my spear and followed him, and as we were out of hearing of the grooms I said that the captain had ordered me to take the horse to the stables.

“I will see to that,” he said. “Now you are to bide at the door while the king speaks with Earl Ragnar, for there will be none else present. Let no one pass in without the king’s leave.”



We passed through the great door as he said that, and he closed it after him. Ragnar was yet standing near the high seat, and turned as he heard the sound, and smiled when he saw me. Berthun went quickly away through a side entrance, and the hail was empty save for us two. The midday meal was over an hour since, and the long tables had been cleared away, so that the place seemed desolate to me, as I had only seen it before when I sat with the other men at the cross tables for meals. It was not so good a hall as was Jarl Sigurd's in Denmark, for it was not rich with carving and colour as was his, and the arms on the wall were few, and the hangings might have been brighter and better in a king's place.



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"Our king does not seem to keep much state," Ragnar said, looking round as I was looking, and we both laughed.

Then the door on the high place opened, and the king came in, soberly dressed, and with a smile on his face which seemed to me to have been made on purpose for this greeting, for he mostly looked sour enough. Nor did it seem that his eyes had any pleasure in them.

"Welcome, kinsman," he said, seeming hearty enough, however; "I had looked for you before this. What news from our good town of Norwich?"

He held out his hand to Ragnar, who took it frankly, and his strong grip twisted the king's set smile into a grin of pain for a moment.

"All was well there three weeks ago when I left there to go to London. Now, I have ridden on to say that the Lady Goldberga is not far hence, so that her coming may be prepared for."

Now, as the earl said this, the king's smile went from his face, and black enough he looked for a moment. The look passed quickly, and the smile came back, but it seemed hard to keep it up.

"Why, that is well," he said; "so you fell in with her on the way."

"I have attended her from London," answered the earl, looking steadfastly at Alsi, "and it was as well that I did so, as it happened."

"What has been amiss?" asked the king sharply, and trying to look troubled. He let the smile go now altogether.

"Your henchman, Griffin the Welshman, had no guard with her that was fitting for our princess," Ragnar said. "He had but twenty men, and these not of the best. It is in my mind also that I should have been told of this journey, for I am surely the right man to have guarded my queen who is to be."

At that Alsi's face went ashy pale, and I did not rightly know why at the time, but it seemed more in anger than aught else. But he had to make some answer.

"We sent a messenger to you," he said hastily; "I cannot tell why he did not reach you."

"He must have come too late, and after I had heard of this from others; so I had already gone to meet the princess. I am glad that I was sent for, and it may pass. Well, it is lucky that I was in time, for we were attacked on the road, and but for my men there would have been trouble."



Then Alsi broke into wrath, which was real enough.

“This passes all. Where and by whom were you attacked? and why should any fall on the party?”

“Five miles on the other side of Ancaster town, where the Ermin Street runs among woods, we were fallen on, but who the men were I cannot say. Why they should fall on us seems plain enough, seeing that the ransom of a princess is likely to be a great sum.”

“Was it a sharp fight?”

“It was not,” answered Ragnar, “for it seemed to me that the men looked only to find your Welsh thane Griffin and his men. When they saw my Norfolk housecarls, they waited no longer, and we only rode down one or two of them. But I have somewhat against this Griffin, for he helped me not at all. Until this day he and his men had ridden fairly with us, but by the time this attack came they were half a mile behind us.”



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“Do you mean to say that you think Griffin in league with these— outlaws, as one may suppose them?” said Alsi, with wrath and more else written in twitching mouth and crafty eyes.

“I would not have said that,” Ragnar answered, looking in some surprise at the king, “it had never come into my head. But I will say that as the Ermin Street is straight as an arrow, and he was in full sight of us, he might have spurred his horses to our help, whereas he never quickened his pace till he saw that the outlaws, or whoever they were, had gone. I put this as a complaint to you.”

“These men seem to have scared you, at least,” sneered the king.

Ragnar flushed deeply.

“For the princess—yes. It is not fitting that a man who is in charge of so precious a lady should hold back in danger, even of the least seeming, as did Griffin. And I told him so.”

Now I thought that Alsi would have been as angry with Griffin as was the earl, and that he would add that he also would speak his mind to him, hut instead of that he went off in another way.

“It was a pity that a pleasant journey with a fair companion was thus broken in upon. But it was doubtless pleasant that the lady should see that her kinsman was not unwilling to draw sword for her. A pretty little jest this, got up between Griffin and yourself, and such as a young man may be forgiven for playing. I shall hear Goldberga complain of honest Griffin presently, and now I shall know how to answer her. Ay, I will promise him the like talking to that you gave him, and then we three will laugh over it all together.”

And with that the king broke into a cackle of laughter, catching hold of the earl’s arm in his glee. And I never saw any man look so altogether bewildered as did Ragnar.

“Little jest was there in the matter, lord king, let me tell you,” he said, trying to draw his arm away.

“Nay, I am not angry with you, kinsman; indeed, I am not. We have been young and eager that bright eyes should see our valour ourselves ere now,” and he shook his finger at the earl gaily. “I only wonder that you induced that fiery Welshman to take a rating in the hearing of the princess quietly.”

“What I had to say to him I said apart. I will not say that he did take it quietly.”

“Meaning—that you had a good laugh over it;” and Alsi shook the earl’s arm as in glee. “There now, you have made a clean breast, and I am not one to spoil sport. Go and meet Goldberga at the gates, and bring her to me in state, and you shall be lodged



here, if you will. Quite right of you to tell me this, or Griffin would have been in trouble. But I must not have the lady scared again, mind you.”

He turned quickly away, then, with a sort of stifled laugh, as if he wanted to get away to enjoy a good jest, and left Ragnar staring speechless at him as he crossed the high place and went through the private door.



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Then the earl turned to me, “By Loki, fellow countryman, there is somewhat wrong here. What does he mean by feigning to think the whole affair a jest? It won’t be much of a jest if Griffin and I slay one another tomorrow, as we mean to do, because of what was not done, and what was said about it.”

“It has seemed to me, jarl,” I said plainly, “that all this is more like a jest between the king and Griffin.”

“Call it a jest, as that is loyal, at least. But I think that you are right. If Goldberga had been carried off—Come, we shall be saying too much in these walls.”

I had only been told to wait while the king and earl spoke together, and so I opened the door and followed him out. The horse was yet there waiting for him, and it was plain that the king had not meant him to stay.

“Bid the grooms lead the horse after us, and we will go to your captain. Then you shall take me to one of my friends, for you will know where their houses are.”

But at that moment a man from the palace ran after us, bringing an order from the king that I was to go back to him. So Ragnar bade me farewell.

“Come to me tonight at the gatehouse,” he said. “I will speak to the captain to let you off duty.”

“Say nothing to him, jarl, for it is needless. I am only with him for a time, and am my own master. I have no turn on watch tonight, and so am free.”

So I went back, and found the king in the hall again, and he was still smiling. If he had looked me straight in the face, I suppose that he might have seen that I was not a man to whom he was used, but he did not. He seemed not to wish to do so.

“So, good fellow,” he said, “you have heard a pleasant jest of our young kinsman’s contriving, but I will that you say nothing of it. It is a pity to take a good guardroom story from you, however, without some recompense, and therefore—”

With that he put a little bag into my hand, and it was heavy. I said nothing, but bowed in the English way, and he went on, “You understand; no word is to be said of what you have heard unless I bid you repeat it. That I may have to do, lest it is said that Griffin the thane is ‘nidring’ [9] by any of his enemies. You know all the story—how the earl and he planned a sham attack on the princess’s party, that Ragnar might show his valour, which, of course, he could not do if Griffin was there. Therefore the thane held back. But maybe you heard all, and understood it.”

“I heard all, lord king, and I will say naught.”



The king waved his hand in sign that I was dismissed, and I bowed and went. There were five rings of gold in the bag, worth about the whole year's wage of a courtman, and I thought that for keeping a jest to myself that was good pay indeed. There must be more behind that business, as it had seemed to me already.

Now, as I crossed the green within the old walls on my way to the gate, it happened that Havelok came back from the town, and as he came I heard him whistling softly to himself a strange wild call, as it were, of a hunting horn, very sweet, and one that I had never heard before.



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“Ho, brother!” I said, for there was no one near us. “What is that call you are whistling?”

He started and looked up at me suddenly, and I saw that his trouble was on him again.

“In my dream,” he said slowly, “there is a man on a great horse, and he wears such bracelets as Ragnar of Norwich, and he winds his horn with that call, and I run to him; and then I myself am on the horse, and I go to the stables, and after that there is nothing but the call that I hear. Now it has gone again.”

And his hand went up in the way that made me sad to see.

“It will come back by-and-by. Trouble not about it.”

“I would that we were back in Grimsby,” he said, with a great sigh. “This is a place of shadows. Ghosts are these of days that I think can never have been.”

“Well,” said I, wanting to take him out of himself, “this is no ghost, at all events. I would that one of our brothers would come from home that I might send it to them in Grimsby. We do not need it.”

So I showed him the gold, and he wondered at it, and laughed, saying that the housecarls had the best place after all. And so he went on, and I back to the gate.

Surely he minded at last the days when Gunnar his father had ridden home to the gate, as the Danish earl had ridden even now, and had called his son to him with that call. It was all coming back, as one thing or another brought it to his mind; and I wondered what should be when he knew that the dream was the truth. For what should Havelok, foster-son of the fisher, do against a king who for twelve long years had held his throne? And who in all the old land would believe that he was indeed the son of the lost king? Better, it seemed to me, that this had not happened, and that he had been yet the happy, careless, well-loved son of Grim, with no thought of aught higher than the good of the folk he knew.

When I got back to the gate, we were marched down the town, that we might be ready to receive the princess; and as I went through the market, I saw one of the porters whom I knew, and I beckoned to him, so that he came alongside me in the ranks, and I asked him if he would go to Grimsby for me for a silver penny. He would do it gladly; and so I sent him with word to Arngeir that I needed one of them here to take a gift that I had for them. I would meet whoever came at the widow’s house, and I set a time when I would look for them. I thought it was well that the king’s gold should not be wasted, even for a day’s use, if I could help it. And I wearied to see one of the brothers, and hear all that was going on.



CHAPTER XI. THE COMING OF THE PRINCESS.

There is no need for me to tell aught of the entry of the Lady Goldberga into the town, for anyone may know how the people cheered her, and how the party were met by the Norfolk thanes and many others, and so rode on up the hill to the palace. What the princess was like I hardly noticed at that time, for she was closely hooded, and her maidens were round her. And I had something else to think of; for foremost, and richly dressed, with a gold chain round his neck, rode a man whose strange way of carrying his head caught my eye at once, so that I looked more than a second time at him.



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And at last I knew him. It was that man of ours whose neck had been twisted by the way in which he had been hauled on board at the time of the wreck, and had afterwards gone to Ethelwald's court. One would say that this Mord had prospered exceedingly, for he was plainly a man of some consequence in the princess's household. He did not know me, though it happened that he looked right at me for a moment; but I did not expect him to do so after twelve years, seeing that I was but a boy when we parted. I thought that I would seek him presently.

Then I saw Griffin, the Welsh thane, and I did not like the looks of him at all. He was a black-haired man, clean shaven, so that the cruel thinness of his lips was not hidden, and his black eyes were restless, and never stayed anywhere, unless he looked at Ragnar for a moment, and then that was a look of deadly hatred. He wore his armour well, and had a steady seat on his horse; but, if all that I had heard of him was true, his looks did not belie him. Men had much to say of him here, for, being some far-off kin to Alsi's Welsh mother, he was always about the court, and was hated. He had gone to Dover to fetch the princess before we came here, but it happened that I had once or twice seen him at other times when I was in Lincoln, so that I knew him now.

There was great feasting that night in the king's hall, as one may suppose, and I sat with the housecarls at the cross tables beyond the fire, and I could see the Lady Goldberga at Alsi's side. Tired she was with her long journey, and she did not remain long at the table; but I had never seen so wondrously beautiful a lady. Griffin sat next to her on the king's right hand, for Ragnar was at the king's left, in the seat of next honour; and I saw that the lady had no love for the Welsh thane. But I also thought that I saw how he would give his all for a kindly glance from her; and if, as Alsi had seemed to hint, Ragnar was a favoured lover, I did not wonder that Griffin had been ready to do him a bad turn. I had rather that the thane was my friend than my foe, for he would be no open enemy.

I left the feast when the first change of guard went out, for I saw that the ale cup was passing faster than we Danes think fitting, being less given to it than the English. And when the guard was set I waited alone in the guardroom of the old gate, for Eglaf was yet at the hall, and would be there all night maybe. And presently Earl Ragnar came in and sat down with me.

He was silent for a while, and I waited for him to speak, until he looked up at me with a little laugh, and said, "I told you that I had to fight Griffin tomorrow?"

"You did, earl. Is that matter settled otherwise?"

"Not at all," he answered. "I believe now that he was acting under orders, but I have said things to him which he cannot pass over. I called him 'nidring' to his face, and that I still mean; for though I thought of cowardice at the time, he is none the less so if he has plotted against the princess. So naught but the sword will end the feud."



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He pondered for some moments, and then went on, "It is a bad business; for if I slay Griffin, he is the king's favourite; and if he slays me, the Norfolk thanes will have somewhat to say. And all is bad for the Lady Goldberga, who needs all the friends that she has, for in either case there will be trouble between the two kingdoms that Alsi holds just now."

"If Griffin is slain," I said, "I think that the lady has one trouble out of the way."

"Ay; and the king will make out, as you heard him do even now, that I am looking that way myself. It is not so, for I will say to you at once that to me there is but one lady in all the world, and she is in Norfolk at this time. Now I am going to ask you something that is a favour."

I thought that he would give me some message for this lady, in case he fell; but he had more to ask than that. Nothing more or less than that I should be his second in the fight, because I was a fellow countryman, while to ask an East Anglian thane would he to make things harder yet for Goldberga.

"I am no thane, earl," I said plainly. "This is an honour that is over high for me."

"It seems that you own a town, for I asked Eglaf just now," he answered; "and that is enough surely to give you thane's rank in a matter like this. But that is neither here nor there; it is as Dane to Dane that I ask you. If I could find another of us I would ask him also, that you might not have to stand alone. I am asking you to break the law that bids the keeping of the peace at the time of the meeting of the Witan."

"That is no matter," I said. "If I have to fly, it will be with you as victor; and if it is but a matter of a fine, I have had that from the king today which will surely pay it."

And I told him of the gift for silence, whereat he laughed heartily, and then said that the secret was more worth than he thought. This looked very bad, and like proof that the king was at the bottom of the whole business.

Now I had been thinking, and it seemed better that there should be two witnesses of the fight on our side, and I thought that Havelok was the man who would make the second. So I told Ragnar that I could find another Dane who was at least as worthy as I, and he was well pleased. Then he told me where the meeting was to be, and where we should meet him just before daylight; and so he went back to the hall, where the lights were yet burning redly, and the songs were wilder than ever.

And I found Havelok, and told him of the fight that was to be, and asked him to come with us. His arms were at the widow's, and he could get them without any noticing him.

There is no need to say that he was ready as I to help Ragnar, and so we spoke of time and place, and parted for the night.



Very early came Havelok to the house, for I lodged at the widow's when I was not on night duty; and we armed ourselves, and then came Ragnar. He greeted me first, and then looked at Havelok in amaze, as it seemed, and then bowed a little, and asked me to make my friend known to him.

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“If you are the friend of whom Radbard has told me, I think that I am fortunate in having come to him.”

“I am his brother, lord earl,” answered Havelok, “and I am at your service.”

Ragnar looked from one of us to the other, and then smiled.

“A brother Dane and a brother in arms, truly,” he said. “Well, that is all that I need ask, except your name, as I am to be another brother of the same sort.”

Then Havelok looked at me, and I nodded. I knew what he meant; but it was not right that the earl should not know who he was.

“Men call me Curan here, lord earl, and that I must be to you hereafter. But I am Havelok of Grimsby, son of Grim.”

In a moment I saw that the earl knew more of that name than I had deemed possible; and then I minded Mord, the wry-necked, who was the chamberlain now. But Ragnar said nothing beyond that he would remember the request, and that he was well seconded. And then we went out into the grey morning, and without recrossing the bridge, away to the level meadows on the south of the river, far from any roadway.

“There is not an island in the stream,” said Ragnar, “or I should have wanted the old northern holmgang battle. I doubt if we could even get these Welshmen to peg out the lists.”

“That we must see to,” I said. “We will have all things fair in some way.”

Half a mile from the town we came to what they call a carr—a woody rise in the level marsh—and on the skirts of this two men waited us. They were the seconds of Griffin, Welsh or half Welsh both of them by their looks, and both were well armed. Their greeting was courteous enough, and they led us by a little track into the heart of the thickets, and there was a wide and level clearing, most fit for a fight, in which waited Griffin himself.

Now I had never taken any part in a fight before, and I did not rightly know what I had to do to begin with. However, one of the other side seemed to be well up in the matter, and at once he came to me and Havelok and took us aside.

“Here is a little trouble,” he said: “our men have said nothing of what weapons they will use.”

“I take it,” said Havelok at once, “that they meant to use those which were most handy to them, therefore.”



The Welshman stared, and answered rather stiffly, "This is not a matter of chance medley, young sir, but an ordered affair. But doubtless this is the first time you have been in this case, and do not know the rules. Let me tell you, therefore, that your earl, being the challenged man, has choice of weapons.

"Why, then," answered Havelok, "it seems to me that if we say as I have already said, it is fair on our part. For it is certain that the earl will want to use the axe, and your man is about half his weight, so that would be uneven."

"As the challenged man, the earl is entitled to any advantage in weapons."



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“He needs none. Let us fight fairly or not at all. The earl takes the axe.—What say you, Radbard? Griffin takes what he likes.”

“You keep to the axe after all, and yet say that it gives an advantage.”

“Axe against axe it does, but if your man chooses to take a twenty-foot spear and keep out of its way, we do not object. We give him his own choice.”

Then the other second said frankly, “This is generous, Cadwal. No more need be said. But this young thane has not yet asked his earl whether it will suit him.”

“Faith, no,” said Havelok, laughing; “I was thinking what I should like myself, and nothing at all of the earl.”

So I went across to Ragnar, who was waiting patiently at one end of the clearing, while Griffin was pacing with uneven steps backward and forward at the other, and I told him what the question was.

“I thought it would be a matter of swords,” he said, “but I am Dane enough to like the axe best. Settle it as you will. Of course he knows naught of axe play, so that you are right in not pressing it on him. He is a light man, and active, and maybe will be glad not even to try sword to sword; for look at the sort of bodkin he is wearing.”

The earl and we had the northern long sword, of course; but when I looked I saw that the Welsh had short, straight, and heavy weapons of about half the length of ours, and so even sword to sword seemed hard on the lighter man; wherein I was wrong, as I had yet to learn.

I went back, therefore, and told the others.

“The earl takes the axe, and the thane has his choice, as we have said.”

“We have to thank you,” said the other second, while Cadwal only laughed a short laugh, and bade us choose the ground with them.

There was no difficulty about that, for the light was clear and bright, and though the sun was up, the trees bid any bright rays that might be in the eyes of the fighters. However, we set them across the light, so that all there was might be even; and then we agreed that if one was forced back to the edge of the clearing he was to be held beaten, as if we had been on an island. It was nearly as good, for the shore of trees and brushwood was very plain and sharp.

Now Ragnar unslung his round shield from his shoulders, and took his axe from me, for I had carried it for him, and his face was quiet and steady, as the face of one should be who has a deed to do that must be seen through to the end. But Griffin and his men



talked quickly in their own tongue, and I had to tell them that we understood it well enough. Then they looked at each other, and were silent suddenly. I wondered what they, were about to say, for it seemed that my warning came just in time for them.

Griffin took a shield from the thane they called Cadwal, and it was square—a shape that I had not seen before in use, though Witlaf had one like it on the wall at Stallingborough. He said that it had been won from a chief by his forefathers when the English first came into the land, and that it was the old Roman shape. It seemed unhandy to me, but I had no time to think of it for a moment, for now Cadwal had a last question.



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“Is this fight to be to the death?”

“No,” I answered; “else were the rule we made about the boundary of no use.”

Then Griffin cried in a sort of choked voice, “It shall be to the death.”

But I said nothing, and the other second, with Cadwal, shook his head.

Ragnar made no sign, but Cadwal said to Havelok, “You were foremost in the matter just now. What say you?”

“Rules are rules, and what my comrade says is right. If the first blow slays, we cannot help it, but there shall be no second wound. The man who is first struck is defeated.”

“I will not have it so,” said Griffin.

“Well, then, thane, after you have wounded the earl you will have to reckon with me, if you must slay someone.”

Griffin looked at the towering form of my brother and made no answer, and the other second told him that it was right. There was naught but an angry word or two to be atoned for. So there was an end, and Ragnar went on guard. Griffin made ready also, and at once it was plain that here was no uneven match after all.

Both of them wore ring mail of the best. We had set the two six paces apart, and they must step forward to get within striking distance. At once Griffin seemed to grow smaller, for he crouched down as a cat that is going to spring, and raised his shield before him, so that from where I stood behind Ragnar I could only see his black glittering eyes and round helm above its edge. And his right arm was drawn back, so that only the point of his heavy leaf-bladed sword was to be seen glancing from the right edge steadily. And now his eyes were steady as the sword point, which was no brighter than they. If once he got inside the sweep of the great axe it would be bad for Ragnar.

One step forward went the earl, shield up and axe balanced, but Griffin never moved. Then Ragnar leapt forward and struck out, but I could see that it was a feint, and he recovered at once. Griffin’s shield had gone up in a moment above his head, and in a moment it was back in its place, and over it his eyes glared as before, unwavering. And then, like a wildcat, he sprang at Ragnar, making no sweeping blow with his sword, but thrusting with straight arm, so that the whole weight of his flying body was behind the point. Ragnar struck out, but the square shield was overhead to stay the blow, and full on the round Danish buckler the point of the short sword rang, for the earl was ready to meet it.

In a moment the Welshman was back in his crouching guard, leaving a great ragged hole in the shield whence he had wrenched his weapon point in a way that told of a



wrist turn that had been long practised. Ragnar had needed no leech, had his quick eye not saved him from that thrust.

Then for a breathing space the two watched each other, while we held our breath, motionless. And then Griffin slowly began to circle round his foe, still crouching.



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Then, like a thunderbolt, Ragnar's axe swept down on the thane, and neither shield nor helm would have been of avail had that blow gone home. Back leapt Griffin, and the axe shore the edge only of his shield; and then, shield aloft and point foremost, he flew on the earl before the axe had recovered from its swing, and I surely thought that the end had come, for the earl's shield was lowered, and his face was unguarded.

But that was what he looked for. Up and forward flew the round shield, catching the thane's straightened arm along its whole length, and then, as sword and arm were dashed upwards, smiting him fairly in the face; and, like a stone, the Welshman was hurled from it, and fell backward in a heap on the grass three paces away. It seemed to me that he was off his feet in his spring as the shield smote him.

There he lay, and Havelok strode forward and stood between the two, with his face to Griffin, for Ragnar had dropped his axe to rest when his foe fell.

"No blood drawn," said my brother, "but no more fighting can there be. The man's arm is out."

And so it was, for the mighty heave that turned the thrust had ended Griffin's fighting for a long day. But he did not think so.

The sweat was standing on his face in great beads from the pain, but he got up and shifted his sword to his left hand.

"It is to the death," he cried; "I can fight as well with the left. Stand aside."

"An it had been so, you were a dead man now," said Havelok, "for the earl held his hand where he might have slain. If he had chosen, you might have felt his axe before you touched the ground."

Thereat, without warning other than a snarl of "Your own saying," Griffin leapt at my brother fiercely, only to meet a swing of his axe that sent his sword flying from his hand. And that was deft of Havelok, for there is nothing more hard to meet than a left-handed attack at any time, and this seemed unlooked for.

"Well, I did say somewhat of this sort," said Havelok; "but it was lucky that I had not forgotten it."

Then he took the thane by the waist and left arm and set him down gently; and after that all the fury went from him, and he grew pale with the pain of the arm that was hurt. But both I and the Welshmen had shouted to Griffin to hold, all uselessly, so quick had been his onset on his new foe.

Cadwal held his peace, biting his lip, but the other Welshman began to blame Griffin loudly for this.



“Nay,” said Havelok, smiling; “it was my own fault maybe. The thane was overhasty certainly, but one does not think with pain gnawing at one. Let that pass.

“Now, earl, I think that you may say what you have to say that will set things right once more.”

“Can none of us put the arm back first?” I said. “I will try, if none else has done such a thing before, for it will not be the first time.”

“Put it back, if you can,” said Cadwal. “If there is anything to be said, it had better be in some sort of comfort.”



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So I put the arm back, for when once the trick is learned there is not, as a rule, much trouble. But Griffin never thanked me. He left that to his seconds, who did so well enough.

Then Ragnar came forward and said gravely, "I was wrong when I called you 'nidring,' and I take back the word and ask you to forget it. No man who is that will face the Danish axe as you have faced it, and I will say that the British sword is a thing to be feared."

But Griffin made no answer, and when Ragnar held out his hand he would not see it.

"Maybe I have not yet made amends," Ragnar went on. "I will add, therefore, as I know that my words will go no farther, that I am sure that the thing concerning which we quarrelled yesterday was done by you at the orders of another. It was not your own doing, and no thought of cowardice is in my mind now."

But Griffin never answered; and now he turned his back on the earl, who was plainly grieved, and said no more to him, but turned to us and the two Welshmen.

"I do not think that I can say more. If there is aught that is needed, tell me. We have fought a fair fight, and I have taken back the words that caused it."

Then said Cadwal, "No more is needed. I did not think that we had met with so generous a foe. If Griffin will say naught, we say this for him. He has no cause for enmity left. And I say also that he has to thank this thane for his life as well as the earl."

"No thane am I," said Havelok, "but only Havelok Grimsson of Grimsby. And even that name is set aside for a while, so that I must ask you to forget it. I have seen a good fight, if a short one, and one could not smite a wounded man who forgot himself for a moment."

There was nothing more to be had from Griffin, for we waited a minute or two in silence to see if he would speak, and then we saluted and left the wood.

The last thing that I saw seemed to be a matter of high words between Griffin and his seconds; and, indeed, if they were telling him what they thought, it is likely that he wished he had been more courteous. It is easy enough for a man who wants a quarrel to have done with one and then start another.

CHAPTER XII. IN LINCOLN MARKETPLACE.

We went quietly back to the town, and there was only one thing that I wished, and that was that Havelok had not had to tell his name twice. Ragnar was full of thanks to us for our help, and said that he would that we would come to Norfolk with him.



“We have a man who knows you also,” he said, “but he has been with our princess for a long time now. He is called Mord, and is her chamberlain. He has often told me how he came by his wry-neck at the time of your shipwreck.”

So he said, and looked at Havelok. But this was a thing that he had not seen, as he was so sick at the time. I said that I remembered Mord well, and would seek him some time in the day.



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And as I said this I was thinking that I must find out from Mord whether he knew and had told more than I could of who Havelok was and whence he came to us. It seemed to me that the earl had heard some tale or other, and unless it was from him I could not think from whence.

Now the earl said, "This business has ended better than I could have hoped, and I think that Alsi will not hear of it. Griffin can well account for a slipped shoulder by any sort of fall that he likes to own to, and Alsi would be hardly pleased to hear that he had run the risk of setting all Norfolk against him for nothing after all."

"There is no doubt that he meant you to know that he does not consider the quarrel done with," I said. "You have an enemy there."

"Nothing new, that," answered Ragnar, laughing. "He thinks that I stand in his way with the princess. I suppose it is common talk that if he wedded her Alsi would still hold the East Anglian kingdom, making him ealdorman, if only I were out of the way. But were I to wed the lady, then it is certain that she would take the crown at once. I do not mean to do so, for then it is likely that three people would be unhappy for the rest of their days. But that would be less wretched for her than to wed Griffin."

"This is no pleasant strait for the poor lady," said Havelok grimly. "Do none ask what she herself can wish?"

"That is the trouble," said the earl, "for she is in Alsi's hand, and there is some old promise and oath sworn between him and Ethelwald her father that holds him back. Else had she been wedded to Griffin before now."

Then we came to the widow's house, and Havelok left his arms there, and we went on to the marketplace. As we crossed the bridge we saw that there was something going forward, for there was a gathering in the wide space, and a shouting and cheering now and then, and even Berthun himself was there looking on and seeming to be highly entertained.

"Here is a crowd that I will not face just now, in my arms," said the earl; "for this hole in my shield looks bad, not having been there when I went out. Farewell for the time, therefore, and think of what I said about your coming to Norwich with me."

He turned away therefore, and Havelok looked after him for a moment. The shield hung at his back, plain to be seen.

"It is a hole, for certain," he said; "but there is no need to show it in that wise."

So he strode after him.



“By your leave, earl, I will arrange your cloak across the shield, and then you can get it to your armourer without notice.”

“That is well thought of,” answered Ragnar, as Havelok did as he had said. “I do not forget that I think that I owe you my life, though I have said nothing as yet.”

“How is that?”

“Griffin would have flown on me as he did on you, certainly; and it is in my mind that you foresaw it, which I did not. I could not have stayed him.”



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“Well I did,” answered my brother; “else had either I or you a hole in us like the one that is well covered now. But I feared what came to pass.”

Ragnar held out his hand, and Havelok took it, and so they parted without more words; but I knew that these two were friends from that time forward, whatever happened.

There were some sports of some sort on hand, when we came to see what all the noise was; and Berthun, seeing us, called Havelok to him.

“I have been looking for you,” he said, with that curious tone of his that always seemed to be asking pardon for his boldness in speaking to my brother; “for here are games at which they need some one to show the way.”

“This is a sport that I have not seen before,” answered Havelok, looking over the heads of the crowd. “I should make a poor hand at it.”

They had been tossing a great fir pole, which was now laid on one side, with its top split from its falls, and they, thanes and freemen in turn, were putting a great stone, so heavy that a matter of a few inches beyond the longest cast yet made would be something to be proud of. Good sport enough it was to see the brawny housecarls heave it from the ground and swing it. But no one could lift it above his knee, so that one may suppose that it flew no great distance at a cast.

“Nay, but the thanes are trying,” Berthun said. “It is open to all to do what they can. One of your porters is best man so far.”

“Well, I will not try to outdo him.”

“I would that you would lift the stone, Curan. That is a thing that I should most like to see.”

“Well then, master, as you bid me, I will try. But do not expect too much.”

The man who had the stone made his cast, which was nothing to speak of; and then the stone lay unclaimed for a time, while all the onlookers waited to see who came forward next. Then Havelok made his way through the crowd, and a silence as of wonder fell on the people; for some knew him, and had heard of his strength, and those who did not stared at him as at a wonder. But the silence did not last long, for the porters who were there set up a sort of shout of delight, and that one who had made the longest cast so far began to tell him how best to heft the stone and swing it.

Then Havelok bent to raise the stone, and the noise hushed again. I saw his mighty limbs harden and knot under the strain, and up to his knee he heaved it, and to his middle, and yet higher, to his chest, while we all held our breaths, and then with a mighty lift it was at his shoulder, and he poised it, and swung as one who balances for a



moment, and then hurled it from him. Then was a shout that Alsi might have heard in his hilltop palace, for full four paces beyond the strong porter's cast it flew, lighting with a mighty crash, and bedding itself in the ground where it lit. And I saw the young thanes with wide eyes looking at my brother, and from beside me Berthun the cook fairly roared with delight.

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And then from across the space between the two lines of onlookers I saw a man in a fisher's dress that caught my eye. It was Withelm, and we nodded to each other, well pleased.

Now there seemed to be a strife as to who should get nearest to Havelok, for men crowded to pat him and to look up at him, and that pleased him not at all. One came and bade him take the silver pennies that the thanes had set out for the prize, but he shook his head and smiled.

"I threw the thing because I was bidden, and not for any prize," he said. "I would have it given to the porter who fairly won it."

Then he elbowed his way to Berthun, and said, "let us go, master; we have stayed here too long already."

"As it pleases you," the steward said; and Havelok waved his hand to me, and they went their way.

He had not seen Withelm, and I was glad, for I wanted to speak to him alone first.

Now men began to ask who this was, and many voices answered, while the porter went to claim the prize from the thane who held it.

Two silver pennies the thane gave him, and said, "This seems to be a friend of yours, and it was good to hear you try to help him without acrimony. Not that he needed any hints from any one, however. Who is he?"

"Men call him Curan, that being the name he gives himself; but he came as a stranger to the place, and none know from whence, unless Berthun the cook may do so. Surely he is a friend of mine, for he shook me once, and that shaking made an honest man of me. He himself taught me what fair play is, at that same time."

So said the porter, and laughed, and the thane joined him.

"Well, he has made a sort of name for himself as a wonder, certainly, now. I think that this cast of his will be told of every time men lift a stone here in Lincoln," said the thane.

They left the stone where he had set it, and any one may see it there to this day, and there I suppose it will be for a wonder while Havelok's name is remembered.

Then they began wrestling and the like, and I left the crowd and went to Withelm, going afterwards to the widow's. I was not yet wanted by Eglaf for any housecarl duty.



“I sent a man to Grimsby yesterday,” I said; “but you must have passed him on the way somewhere, for he could not have started soon enough to take you a message before you left.”

“I met him on the road last night, for I myself thought it time to come and see how you two fared. I bided at Cabourn for the night, and your messenger came on with me.”

Then he told me that all were well at Grimsby; for fish came now and then and kept the famine from the town, though there were none to send elsewhere; and it was well that we had left, though they all missed us sorely.

Then we began to talk of the doings here; and at last I spoke of Havelok’s trouble, as one may well call it, telling him also of the strange dream with which it all began.



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"All this is strange," he said thoughtfully; "but if Havelok our brother is indeed a king's son, it is only what he is like in all his ways. Wise was our father Grim, and I mind how he seemed always to be careful of him in every way, and good reason must he have had not to say what he knew. We will not ask aught until the time of which Arngeir knows has come. Nor can we say aught to Havelok, though he is troubled, for we know nothing. As for the dream, that is part of it all, and it is a portent, as I think."

"Did I know the man who could read it, I would go to him and tell him it."

"There is one man who can read dreams well," Withelm answered, flushing a little, "but I do not know if you would care to seek him. I stayed with him last night, and he is on his way even now to Lincoln, driven by the famine. I mean the old British priest David, who has his little hut and chapel in the Cabourn woods. His people have no more to give him."

I knew that Withelm thought much of this old man of late, and I was not surprised to hear him speak of him now. All knew his wisdom, and the marsh folk were wont to seek him when they were in any trouble or difficulty. But I did not care to go to him, for he seemed to belong to the thralls, as one might say.

"Well, if he comes here, no doubt you will know where to find him if we need him," I said. "Bide with us for a few days at least, for here is plenty, and there is much going on."

So we went into the town, and then to the palace, and found Havelok, and after that I had to go to the gate on guard. And what these two did I cannot say, but, at all events, there is nothing worth telling of.

Now, however, I have to tell things that I did not see or hear myself, and therefore I would have it understood that I heard all from those who took some part or other in the matter, and so know all well.

I have not said much of the meetings of the Witan, for I had naught more to do with them than to guard the doors of the hall where they met now and then; but since the princess and Ragnar came they seem to have somewhat to do with the story, as will be seen.

On this day one of the Norfolk thanes asked in full meeting what plans the king had for his ward Goldberga, and her coming into her kingdom, saying that she, being eighteen years of age, was old enough to take her place.

Now Alsi had thought of this beforehand, and was ready at once.

"It is a matter of concern to us always," he said, "and much have I thought thereof. It is full time that she took her father's place with the consent of the Witan, which is needed."

He looked round us for reply to this, and at once the Norfolk thanes said, "We will have Goldberga for our queen, as was the will of Ethelwald."



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“That,” said Alsi, “is as I thought. I needed only to hear it said openly. Now, therefore, it remains but to speak of one other thing and that is a weighty one. It was her father’s will and I swore to carry it out, that she should be wedded to the most goodly and mightiest man in the realm. It seems to me that on her marriage hangs all the wealth of her kingdom; and ill it would be if, after she took the throne, she took to herself one who made himself an evil adviser. I would say that it were better to see her married first, for it does not follow that you would choose to have the man whom I thought fitting to be over you, as he certainly would be.”

Now all this was so straightforward in all seeming that none of the thanes could be aught but pleased. Moreover, it took away a fear that they had had lest Griffin was to be the man. None could say that he fulfilled the conditions of the will of Ethelwald. The spokesman said, therefore, that it was well set before them, and that it was best to wait, saying at the end, “For, after all, we might have to change our minds concerning the princess, if with her we must take a man who will prove a burden or tyrant to us all.”

Then they asked the king to find a good husband for the princess as soon as might be, so that he was not against her liking.

“Well,” said Alsi, “it is a hard task for a man who has no wife to help him; but we will trust to the good sense of my niece. Now, I had thought of Ragnar of Norwich; but it is in my mind that the old laws of near kin are somewhat against this.”

I suppose that he had no intention of letting the earl marry the princess; but this was policy, as it might please the thanes. However, the matter of kinship did not please some, and that was all that he needed, for there was excuse then for him if he forbade that match, which was the last he wanted.

Ragnar sat in his place and heard all this, and he wished himself back at Norwich.

So there the matter ended, and that was the last sitting of the Witan. There was to be a great breaking-up feast that night before the thanes scattered to their homes.

Now while this was going on I ended my spell of duty, and bethought me of Mord the chamberlain, and so went to Berthun and asked for him. He said that if I had any special business with Mord I might see him; and I said, truly enough, that my errand was special, having to do with friends of his; so it was not long before they took me to him. He was in a long room that was built on the side of the great hall, as it were, and I could hear the murmur of the voices of those who spoke at the Witan while I waited.

Now Mord was not so much changed as I, and at first he did not know me at all.

“Well, master housecarl, what may your message be, and from whom is it?” he said, without more than a glance at me.

“Why, there are some old friends of yours who are anxious to know if you have forgotten the feeling of a halter round your neck,” I said in good Danish.



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Then, after one look, he knew me at once, and ran to me, and took my hand, and almost kissed me in his pleasure, for since I could handle an oar he had known me, and had taught me how to do that, moreover.

Then he called for wine and food; and we sat down together and had a long talk of the old days, and of how we had fared after he left, and of all else that came uppermost. And sorely he grieved at my father's death, and at the trouble that was on us. The famine had not been so sore in the south, and pestilence had not been at all.

As for himself, he had been courtman, as we call the housecarls, at first, and so had risen to be chamberlain to the king, and now to the princess, and had been with her everywhere that Alsi had sent her since her father died.

"It was a good day for me, and wise was Grim when he bade me go to Ethelwald to seek service," he said; "yet I would that I had seen him once more. I have never been to this place before, else I should have sought him."

Now I was going to ask him about Havelok, but hardly knew how to begin. He saved me the trouble however, by speaking first.

"Who were the lady and the boy we had on board when we came to England?" he said. "I never heard, and maybe it was as well that I did not."

"My father never told me. But why do you think that it was well not to know?"

"Because I am sure that Grim had good reason for not telling. Before I had been a year at Norwich there came a ship from Denmark into the river, and soon men told me that her master was asking for news of one Grim, a merchant, who was lost. So I saw him, not saying who I was or that I had anything to do with Grim; and then I found that it was not so much of the master that he wanted news as of the boy we had with us. He did not ask of the lady at all, and I was sure that this was the man who came and spoke to Grim just as we were sailing, if you remember. So then it came to me that we knew nothing of the coming on board of these two, only learning of their presence when we were far at sea. And now, if Hodulf troubled himself so much about this boy, there must be something that he was not meant to know about his flight, for he must be of some note. Did I not know that the king's son was in his hands at that time, I should have thought that our passenger was he. However, I told him of the shipwreck as of a thing that I had seen, saying that Grim and his family and a few men only had been saved; and I told him also that I had heard that he had lost some folk in an attack by Vikings. With that he seemed well satisfied, and I heard no more of him. I have wondered ever since who the boy was, and if he was yet alive. I mind that he was like to die when he came ashore."



Then I laughed, and said that he would hear of him soon enough, for all the town was talking of him; and he guessed whom I meant, for he had heard of the cook's mighty man.



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Now I said no more but this:

“My father kept this matter secret all these years, and with reason, as we have seen; and so, while he is here, we call this foster-brother of mine Curan, until the time comes when his name may be known. Maybe it will be best for you not to say much of your knowledge of him. What does Earl Ragnar know of our wreck? For he told me that you knew me.”

“I told him all about it at one time or another,” Mord answered. “He always wanted to hear of Denmark.”

So that was all that the chamberlain knew; but it was plain to me that the earl had put two and two together when he heard Havelok’s name, and had remembered that this was also the name of Gunnar’s son. Afterwards I found that Mord had heard from Denmark that Hodulf was said to have made away with Havelok, but he never remembered that at this time. Ragnar knew this, and did remember it.

Pleasant it was to talk of old days with an old friend thus, and the time went quickly. Then Mord must go to his mistress and I to my place, and so we parted for the time. But my last doubt of who Havelok my brother might be was gone. I was sure that he was the son of Gunnar the king.

CHAPTER XIII. THE WITAN’S FEASTING.

Now I have to tell of a strange thing that happened in the night that was just past, the first that the Lady Goldberga had spent here in Lincoln for many a year, for on that happening hangs a great deal, and it will make clear what I myself saw presently at the breaking-up feast of the Witan. That puzzled me mightily at the time, as it did many at the feast, but I see no reason why it should not be told at once.

Now I have said that Goldberga left the hall early overnight, being wearied with the journey, and having the remembrance of the attack on her party so near to Lincoln to trouble her also. Not much cause to love her uncle Alsi had she; though perhaps, also, not much to make her hate him, except that he had kept her so far away from her own people of late, in a sort of honourable captivity. Now it was plain to her that had it not been for the presence of Ragnar and his men, her guard would not have been able to drive off the attackers; and the strange way in which Griffin had held back had been too plain for her not to notice. Already she feared him, and it seemed that he might have plotted her carrying off thus. That Alsi might have had a hand in the matter did not come into her mind, as it did into the minds of others, for she knew little of him, thinking him honest if not very pleasant in his ways, else had not her father made him her guardian.



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I will say now that in the attack he did have a hand. Many a long year afterward it all came out in some way. He dared not give his niece to Griffin openly, but he wished to do so, as then he would have an under-king in East Anglia of his own choosing. Sorely against the grain with him was it that he should have to give up those fair lands to this girl, who would hold the throne by her own right, and not at all under him. So he and Griffin had plotted thus, and only Ragnar's presence had spoiled the plan, though Griffin had tried to save it by holding back. But I must say also that up to this time none had had ought to say against Alsi as a ruler, though he was over close, and not at all hearty in his ways at home. But now, for the sake of the kingdom, he had begun to plot; and this plan having come to naught, he must make others, as will be seen. I do not think that this planning to keep Ethelwald's kingdom from his daughter was anything fresh to Alsi, but the time for action had come now.

He had made ready by keeping the fair princess far away, and there were none who could speak of her goodness, or, indeed, had heard much of her since she was a child. Therefore, as men were content enough with him, none would trouble much if the princess came not to the throne, given good reason why she should not do so. And the very best reason would be that which Alsi had given at the Witan—if her husband was not fit to be king.

It is possible that Goldberga knew that her marriage would be talked of at this Witan: but I do not think that she troubled herself much about it, not by any means intending to be married against her will. I have heard that so ran the will of Ethelwald, that she was to have choice to some extent. However that may be, with so many thoughts to trouble her she went to rest, and her sleep was not easy until the morning was near, and then came quiet.

But presently, in the grey of the dawn, she woke, and called her old nurse, who was in the chamber with her; and when she came she told her that she had had a strange vision or dream, so real that she did not know which it was. And what it portended she could not say, for it was wonderful altogether, and surely was good.

"I thought that a voice wakened me, calling me to look on somewhat; and so I rose as I was bidden, and saw before me the most mighty and comeliest man that could be thought of. Kinglike he was, though he had no crown and was meanly clad, without brooch or bracelet that a king should wear. But the wonder was that from his mouth came a bright shaft of flame, as it were of a sunbeam, that lighted all the place, and on his shoulder shone a cross of burning light as of red-hot gold, and I knew that it was the mark of a mighty king.

"Then I heard the voice again, and I turned, and saw that it was an angel who spoke to me, and his face was bright and kind.



“Fear not, Goldberga,’ he said, ‘for this is your husband that shall be. King’s son and heir is he, as that token of the fiery cross shows. More, also, it will betoken—that he shall reign in England and in Denmark, a great king and mighty. And this you shall see, and with him shall you reign as queen and well-loved lady.’



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“So the voice ceased, and the angel was gone, and when I looked up there was naught but the growing dawn across yon window, and the voice of the thrush that sings outside.”

Now the old nurse pondered over the dream for a while without speaking, for she could not see what it might mean at first.

But at last she said, “It is a good dream surely, because of the angel that spoke; but there seems only one way in which it can come to pass. A prince must come for you from Denmark, for there he would reign by his own right, and here he would do so by yours. Yet I have heard that the Danish kings are most terrible heathen, worse than the Saxon kin, of whom we know the worst now. Maybe that is why the angel told you to have no fear. I mind Gunnar Kirkeban, and what he wrought on the churches and Christian folk in Wales—in Gower on the Severn Sea, and on the holy Dee—when I was young.”

For both Goldberga and this old nurse of hers were Christian, as had been Orwenna, Ethelwald’s wife, her mother. It had been a great day for them when the King of Kent had brought over his fair wife, Bertha, from France, for she, too, was Christian, and had restored the ancient church in the very castle where Goldberga was kept.

Now the princess went to sleep again, and woke refreshed; but all day long the memory of the dream and of him whom she saw in it bided with her, until it was time for her to go to the great hall for the feast of the Witan.

Now it happened that on this night I must be one of the two housecarls who should stand, torch in hand, behind the king. It was a place that none of the men cared for much, since they saw their comrades feasting at the end of the room, while they must bide hungry till the end, and mind that no sparks from the flaring pine fell on the guests, moreover. Eglaf would have excused me this had I wished; but I would take my turn with the rest, and maybe did not mind losing the best of the feast so much as the others. There were some three hundred guests at that feast, and it was a wondrous fair sight to me as I stood on the high place and saw them gather. The long table behind which I was ran right across the dais, rich with gold and silver and glass work: and below this, all down the hall, ran long tables again, set lengthwise, that none might have their backs to the king. And at the end of the hall, crosswise, were the tables for the housecarls, and the men of the house, and of the thanes who were guests. And as the housecarls came in they hung their shields and weapons on the walls in order, so that they flashed bright from above the hangings that Berthun and his men had set up afresh and more gaily than I had seen yet in this place.



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There was a fire on the great hearth in the midst of the hall; but as it was high summer, only a little one, and over it were no cauldrons, as there would have been in the winter. Berthun was doing his cookery elsewhere. But between the tables were spaces where his thralls and the women could pass as they bore round the food and drink. And backwards and forwards among them went Berthun until the very last, anxious and important, seeing that all was right, and showing one guest after another to their places. No light matter was that either, for to set a thane in too low a place for his rank was likely to be a cause of strife and complaint. Also he must know if there were old feuds still remembered, lest he should set deadly enemies side by side. I did not envy him, by any means.

When it seemed that there were few more guests to come, and only half a dozen seats were vacant on the high place, Berthun passed into the room beyond the hall, and at once a hush fell on the noisy folk, who had been talking to one another as though they had never met before. The gleemen tuned their harps, and I and my comrade lit our torches from those already burning on the wall, and stood ready, for the king was coming.

Out of the door backed Berthun with many bows, and loud sang the gleemen, while all in the hall stood up at once; and then came Alsi, leading the princess, first; and then Ragnar, with the wife of some great noble; and after him that noble and another lady; but Griffin was not there. Bright looked Goldberga in her blue dress, with wondrous jewels on arm and neck, and maybe the brighter for the absence of the Welsh thane, as I thought.

So they sat as last night, save that the noble who had come next to Ragnar was in Griffin's place; and therefore I stood behind the king and the princess, with the light of my torch falling between the two.

Now they were set, and at once Berthun bore a great beaker of wine to the king, and all down the hall ran his men with the pitchers of wine and mead and ale, and with them the women of the household and the wives of the courtmen, filling every drinking horn for the welcome cup.

Then the gleemen hushed their song, and Alsi stood up with the gold-rimmed horn of the king in his hand, and high he raised it, and cried, "Waeshael!"

And all the guests rose up, cup in hand, with a wonderful flashing of the glorious English jewels, and cried with one voice, "Drinc hael, Cyning!"

Then all sat them down, and at once came Berthun's men with the laden spits and the cauldrons, and first they served the high table, kneeling on the dais steps while each noble helped himself and the lady next him with what he would. And then down the hall



the feast began, and for a time befell a silence—the silence of hungry folk who have before them a good reason for not saying much for a little while.

I looked for Havelok among Berthun's men, but he was not there. Nor was he at the lower cross tables with the other people of the palace. But Withelm was there, for Eglaf had seen him with me not an hour ago, and had bidden him come, as a stranger from far off. There were a few other strangers there also, as one might suppose, for the king's hall must be open at these times.



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Now I looked on all this, and it pleased me; and then I began to hear the talk of those at the high table, and that was pleasant also. First I heard that Griffin had fallen off his horse, and had put his arm out. Whereon one said that he only needed one hand to feed with, and marvelled that so small a hurt kept him away from so pleasant a place as was his.

“It seems that he fell on his face,” answered a thane who had seen him. “He is not as handsome as he was last night. That is what keeps him away. Some passerby put his arm in straightway.”

At that I almost laughed, but kept a face wooden as that of our old statue of Thor, for Eglaf had warned me that I was but a torch, as it were, unless by any chance I was spoken to. But Ragnar glanced my way with a half smile. Presently they began to talk of the stone putting, and of the mighty man who had come with Berthun, and I saw several looking idly down the hall to see if they could spy him. One of the thanes on the high seat, at the end, was he who had held the prizes at these sports.

Now it seemed that Alsi had not heard of this before; and when he had been told all about it, he said that he did not know that he had any man who was strong enough to make such a cast as they spoke of, though Eglaf had picked up a big man somewhere lately, whom he had noticed at the hall end once or twice.

Then he ran his eyes over the tables, for now the women folk had sat down among the men, and one could see everywhere. But he did not see the man he meant, and so turned sharply on us two housecarls behind him.

“Here he is,” he said, laughing and looking at me. “Were you the mighty stone putter they make such a talk of?”

“I am not, lord,” I said, somewhat out of countenance, because every one looked at me together. It had never seemed to me that I was so big before; perhaps because I was used to Havelok, and to Raven, who was nigh as tall as myself, and maybe a bit broader.

“Why, then, who was he?” said the king. “We must ask Berthun, unless anyone can see him in the hall.”

Then the thane of the prizes said, “He is not here, lord; for little trouble would there be in seeing him, if he were, seeing that he is a full head and shoulders over even this housecarl of yours.”

Now the princess had turned to look at me, and she saw that I was abashed, and so she smiled at me pleasantly, as much as to say that she was a little sorry for me, and turned away. Then thought I that if ever the princess needed one to fight for her, even



to death, I would do so for the sake of that smile and the thought for a rough housecarl that was behind it.

Now came Berthun with more wine, before the matter of the stone was forgotten in other talk, and the king said, "It seems that you have found a new man, steward, for all are talking of him. I mean the man who is said to have thrown a big stone certain miles, or somewhat like it, from all accounts. Where is he?"



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“He is my new porter,” answered Berthun, with much pride; “but he is not in the hail, for he does not like to hear much of himself, being quiet in his ways, although so strong.”

“Here is a marvel,” laughed Alsi, “and by-and-by we must see him. I wonder that Eglaf let you have him.”

Now Eglaf sat at the head of the nearest of the lower tables, and all in hearing of the king were of course listening by this time. So he said, “The man had his choice, and chose the heavier place, if you will believe me, lord. It is terrible to see how Berthun loads him at times; so that I may get him yet.”

Then all laughed at the steward, whose face grew red; but he had to laugh also, because the jest pleased the king. He went away quickly; and one told Eglaf that he had better eat no more, else would he run risk of somewhat deadly at the cook’s hands. But those two were old friends, as has been seen, and they were ever seeking jests at each other’s expense.

Now the talk drifted away to other things, and I hoped that Havelok had been forgotten, for no more than I would he like being stared at. The feast went on, and twice I had to take new torches, but Berthun saw that I had wine, if I could not eat as yet. Then had men finished eating, and the tables were cleared, and the singing began, very pleasant to hear. Not only the gleemen sang, but the harp went round, and all who could did so. Well do the Lindsey folk sing, after their own manner, three men at a time, in a gladsome way, with well-matched voices, and that for just long enough to be pleasant.

So the harp went its way down the hall, and the great folk fell to talk again; and at last one said, so that Alsi heard him, “Why, we have not seen the strong man yet. Strange that he is not feasting with the rest.”

Whereat the king beckoned Berthun.

“Bring your new wonder here,” he said. “Say that I have heard of his deed, and would look on him.”

Berthun bowed and went his way; and I wondered how my brother would bear this, for the hall and its ordering was wont, as I have said, to bring back his troubled thoughts of things half remembered.

Presently he came in at the door at the lower end of the hall, and at first none noticed him, for there was singing going on, and through that door came and went many with things for the feast from the kitchens. Then some one turned to see who towered over them thus, and when he saw Havelok he went on looking, so that others looked also. Then one of the three singers looked, and his voice stayed, for he was a stranger, and had heard nothing of this newcomer, and then Havelok followed Berthun up the hall in a



kind of hush that fell, and he was smiling a little, as if it amused him. He had on the things that the steward had given him, and they were good enough—as good as, if more sober than, my housecarl finery. But I suppose that not one in all the gathering looked at what he wore; for as he passed up the long tables, it seemed that there was no man worth looking at but he, and even Ragnar seemed to be but a common man when one turned to him with eyes that had seen Havelok.



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Now Alsi the king sat staring at him, still as a carven image, with his hand halfway to his mouth, as he raised his horn from the table; and Ragnar looked wide-eyed, for he knew him again, and I saw a little smile curl the corners of his lips and pass; and then Havelok was at the step of the high place, and there he gave the salute of the courtmen of a Danish king, heeding Berthun, who tried to make him do reverence, not at all.

Now a spark from my torch drew my eyes from him, lest it should fall on the princess's robe; and when it went out, I saw that the fair hand that rested on the arm of the great chair was shaking like a leaf. When I looked, her face was white and troubled, and she half rose from her seat and then sank back in it gently, and the thane who sat next her spoke anxiously to her in a low voice, and the lady by his side rose up and came to her.

Then Alsi turned, and he too spoke, asking if aught was amiss.

"The princess faints with the heat of the hall," said the thane's wife. "She yet feels the long journey. May she not go hence?"

Then Goldberga said bravely, "It is naught, and it will pass."

But they made her rise and leave the hall; and the guests stood up as she went with her ladies round her, and many were the murmurs of pity that I heard.

"As though she had seen a ghost, so white is she," one whispered.

But none knew how much the lady was to be pitied. She had seen the man of her vision; and, lo! for all that she knew, he was a thrall who toiled in the palace kitchens.

And after her, as she withdrew, looked Havelok with eyes in which there was more than pity. I could see him well, but I did not know how he had seen the fair princess tremble and grow white as she gazed on him. I know that, as he saw her for this first time, it was with the wish that he were in Ragnar's place. But I thought that if Havelok were king, here was the queen for him.

Now Alsi bade the feast go on, and he spoke a few words only to Havelok, letting him go at once, and I was glad. This sudden faintness of the princess had put all out somewhat, and none cared to take up a jest where it had stayed. Nevertheless, I saw the king's eyes follow my brother down the hall, and in them was a new and strange look that was not pleasant at all.

Then it seemed that one was staring at me, and as will happen, I must look in a certain place; and there was Cadwal, the Welsh thane, halfway down one of the long tables, glaring first at me, and then at Havelok, as he went. It came into my mind that he would be wroth with Ragnar for bringing a kitchen knave as his second, as it were, in derision of Griffin. I thought that I would find a chance presently to tell him why my fellow



second chose to be serving thus, and so make things right with him, for this seemed to be due to Ragnar, if not to all concerned.

Not long after Goldberga had gone, the king withdrew also, and then the hall grew noisy enough, and I could leave my place. But by that time Cadwal had left also; and next day, when I sought him, both he and Griffin were no longer in Lincoln, none knowing whither they had gone. So I troubled no more about them.



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But had I known that these two had been among the Welshmen that Hodulf led to Denmark when he slew Gunnar Kirkeban, and therefore knew all the story of the loss of Havelok, and how Hodulf had sought for news of him, I should have been in fear enough that we had not yet done with them. Rightly, too, should I have feared that, as will be seen.

Now while I looked about the hall for Cadwal, Mord the chamberlain saw me, and made me sit down by him while I ate. Hungry enough was I by that time, as may be supposed, for one cannot make a meal off the sight of a feast; and as I ate, the noise of the hall grew apace as the cups went round. Then some of the older thanes left, and soon Mord and I had that table to ourselves. It was plain that he was full of something that he would say to me, and when I was ready to listen he bent near me and said, "So that was the boy who fled with us."

"Ay. He has grown since you saw him last."

"That is not all," answered Mord. "Well I knew Gunnar, our king, and tonight I thought he had come back to us from Valhalla, goodlier yet and mightier than ever, as one who has feasted with the Asir might well be. For if this boy of ours is not Gunnar's son, then he is Gunnar himself."

Now that was no new thought to me, as I have shown, and I was ready for it, seeing that even I had seen the likeness to the king as I remembered him.

"Keep that thought to yourself for a while, Mord," I said. "It is in my mind that you are right, but the time has not yet come for me to know."

"That is wisdom, too," he answered; "for if once he gathers a following, there is a bad time in store for Hodulf. And it will be better that we fall on him unawares, before he knows that Havelok, son of Gunnar, lives."

"We fall on him?"

"Ay, you and I, mail on chest and weapon in hand, with Havelok to lead us. What? think you that I would hold back when Gunnar's son is calling?"

"Steady, friend," I said, laughing; "men will be looking at us."

So he was silent again; and now I thought that the time of which my father spoke had surely come, for it was plain that Havelok was a man whom men would gladly follow as he went to win back his kingdom. And I went and fetched Withelm from where he sat, and so we three talked long and pleasantly, until it was time for us to go forth from the hall. And we thought that it was good for Arngeir to come here, for the secret was coming to light of itself, as it were, and we would have him speak with Mord.



CHAPTER XIV. THE CRAFT OF ALSI THE KING.

Now Alsi the king went from the feast with a new and cruel thought in his mind under the smiling face that he wore, and long he sat in his own chamber, chin on hand and eyes far off, thinking; and at last he called Berthun.

“What is the name of this big knave of yours?” he asked, when the steward stood before him.



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“He calls himself Curan, lord.”

“Calls himself. Well, it is likely that he knows his own name best. Is he Welsh, therefore?”

“So I think, lord.”

“You might have been certain by this time, surely. I like Welshmen about the place, and I was giving you credit for finding me a good one. Whence comes he?”

Now it was on Berthun’s tongue to say that he thought that Curan came from the marshland, yet clinging to his own thoughts of what he was. He did not at all believe that he came from that refuge of thralls. But he must seem certain unless he was to be laughed at again.

So he said, “He comes from the marsh-country.”

“Does he speak Welsh?”

“I have heard him do so to the market people, if he happened to meet a Briton there.”

“Why, then, of course he is Welsh: and here have I found out in two minutes what you have taken I do not know how long to think about. Go to, Berthun; you grow slow of mind with good living.”

The king chuckled, and Berthun bowed humbly; but now the steward was determined to say no more than he was obliged in answer to more questions. Also he began to hope that Alsi would ask nothing about the clothes this man of his wore, else he would be well laughed at for spending his money on a stranger.

But Alsi seemed pleased with himself, or else with what he had heard, and went on.

“Has this Curan friends in the town?”

“None, lord, so far as I know.”

“Let me tell you that you may know a man’s friends by the company he keeps. With whom does he talk?”

“None come to seek him, lord, except one of the housecarls—the big man to whom you spoke tonight. Seldom does he go into the town, and then only the porters seem to know him, for he was among them, as a stranger, when I met him first.”

“A big man will always make an acquaintance with another,” Alsi said, “and the porters are the lowest in the place. One may be sure that he has left his friends in some



starving village in the marsh, and has none here. That will do, Berthun. Take care of him, for I may have use for him. But next time you hire a man, use your wits to learn somewhat of him, if it is too much trouble to ask.”

So Berthun was dismissed, and went out in a bad temper with himself. Yet he knew that he would have been laughed at for a fool if he had said that he thought Curan more than he seemed.

Now Alsi was alone, and he fell to thought again. By-and-by it was plain to be understood what his thoughts had been, and they were bad. And after he had slept on them they were no better, seeing what came of them. But I think that he was pleased to find that Havelok was, as he thought, a Welsh marshman, and well-nigh friendless, for so he would be the more ready to do what he was bidden; though, indeed, there seemed little doubt that the plan Alsi made for himself would find no stumbling block in Curan, if it might meet with a check elsewhere. That, however, was to be seen.



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Well pleased was Alsi the king with somewhat, men said in the morning.

But there was one who rose heavy and sorely troubled, and that was the Lady Goldberga, for all the fancies that had been brought to her by the vision had come to nothing, or worse than nothing, as she looked on Havelok and saw in the cook's knave the very form of him of whom she had dreamed, and whom she could not forget. Glad had she been to go to her own chamber and away from the kindly ladies who could not know her real trouble; but not even to her old nurse did she tell what that was. Her one thought now was to seek someone who was skilful in the reading of dreams, and so find some new hope from it all. But no one could tell her of such a one here, unless it were to be a priest of Woden, and that she would not hear of.

Then, early in the morning, Alsi sent for her, saying that he would speak with her alone for a while. So she went to him, where he sat in the chamber beyond the high place; and he greeted her kindly, asking after her rest, and saying that he hoped that the sudden faintness had hurt her not. Then he led her to a seat, and bade her rest while he talked of state affairs.

"For it must be known to you, my niece, that the Witan thinks it time that you should take your father's kingdom."

Now Goldberga knew that, and had long made up her mind that when the time came she would not shrink from the burden of the crown.

It may well have been that Alsi thought that she would wish to wait for a time yet, for he did not seem altogether pleased when she answered, "If the Witan thinks right, I am ready."

"But," he said, "there is one thing to come before that. The Witan must know who your husband shall be. And that is reasonable, for he will have a share in ruling the kingdom."

Then said Goldberga, "They need have no fear in that matter, for I will wed none but a king or the heir of a king."

"Well," said Alsi, dryly enough, "they are not so plentiful as are blackberries, and there may be two words to that."

"I am not anxious to be wedded," answered the princess, "and I can wait. It is, as you say, a matter that is much to the country."

Then Alsi tried another plan, seeing that Goldberga was not at all put out by this. So he forced a cunning smile that was meant to be pleasant, and said, "I had thought that your mind ran somewhat on Ragnar."



He looked to see the lady change colour, but she did not.

“Ragnar is my cousin,” she said, “or a good brother to me, if you will. Moreover, until the other day when he met me in London by some good fortune, I had hardly seen him since my father died.”

“What think you of Griffin?”

“Nothing at all, for nidring he is,” answered Goldberga with curling lip.

Now that angered Alsi, for he had so much to do with that business; and if Griffin was to be called thus by his fault, he was likely to lose a friend.



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"I would have you remember," he said, "that in all this choosing it remains for me to give consent or withhold it."

"I shall only ask your consent to my wedding such a man as I have told you of, uncle—a king or a king's son."

"So," said Alsi, "you would choose first, and ask me afterwards, forsooth! That is not the way that things are to be between us. It is for me to choose, and that according to the oath which I took when your father made me guardian of you and his realm."

"Yet," said Goldberga very gently, "I think that my father would not have meant that I should be the only one not to be asked."

"I can only go by what I swore, and that I will carry out. I promised to see you married to the most goodly and mightiest man in the land."

"That can be none but a king, as I think."

Now Alsi grew impatient, for he meant to settle one matter before he went much farther.

"I will say at once that I can have no king over the East Anglian kingdom. It is not to be thought of that after all these years I should have to take second place there. You will hold the kingdom from me, and I shall be overlord there. I will send you some atheling who can keep the land in order for you, but there shall be no king to bring that land under the power of his own kingdom."

That was plain speaking, and it roused Goldberga.

"Never have you been overlord of my kingdom," she said. "Well have you ruled it for me while I could not rule it myself, and for that I thank you heartily. But it is not right that I should seem to hold it from you."

"That is to be seen," sneered Alsi, "for it lies with me to say what marriage you make, and on that depends whether the Witan, in its wisdom, sees fit to hail you as queen. Not until you are married will you take the kingdom at all."

"Then," said the princess, growing pale, "I will speak to the Witan myself, and learn their will."

"The Witan has broken up," answered Alsi, "and the good thanes are miles on their way homewards by this time. You are too late."

"I will call them up again."



“Certainly—that is, if I let my men run hither and thither to fetch them. But after all, in this matter I am master. Whom you wed lies with me.”

Goldberga saw that she was in the hands of the king, and maybe as much a prisoner as at Dover. So her spirits fled, and she asked what the king willed.

Alsi knew now that nothing but his utmost plan would be of any avail to save that kingdom for himself, and so he broke out into wrath, working up his fury that he might not go back.

“My will is that you obey me in this carrying out of the oath I took on the holy ring, [10] and on the Gospels also to please your mother. You shall marry the man whom I choose, so that he be according to the words of that oath.”

“So that he be king or son of a king, I will obey you,” answered Goldberga.



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“Then you defy me. For that I have told you that I will not have. Now shall we see who is master. You mind yon kitchen knave of last night? There can be none in all England mightier or more goodly than he is to look on, and him shall you wed. So will my oath be well kept. Then if your precious Witan will have him, well and good, for his master shall I be.”

Thereat the princess said that it were better that she should die; but now Alsi had set out all his plan to her, and he did not mean to flinch from carrying it out. There was no doubt that the Norfolk people would hold that she had disgraced herself by the marriage, and so would refuse to have her as queen. And that was all he needed.

But Goldberga had no more to say, for she was past speaking, and the king was fain to call her ladies. And when they came he went away quickly, and gave orders for the safe keeping of the princess, lest she should try to fly, or to get any message to Ragnar or other of the Norfolk thanes.

Now he must go through with this marriage, for he had shown himself too plainly, and never would the princess trust him again. I have heard that he sent for Griffin at this time; but, as I found, he was gone; and if the king thought that perhaps the princess would wed him now to escape from the kitchen knave, he had no chance to bring him forward. I suppose he could have made out that Griffin, or for that matter any one else he chose, was such a one as his oath to Ethelwald demanded.

Sore wept Goldberga when she was back in her own place, and at first it was hard for her to believe that Alsi could mean what he had threatened. But then she could not forget her dream, and in that she had most certainly seen the very form of him who stood before her at the high place last night; and that perhaps troubled her more than aught, for it seemed to say that him she must wed. But no king's son could he be, so that there must be yet such another mighty man to be found.

And then in her heart she knew that there could not be two such men, both alike in all points to him of the vision. And she knew also, though maybe she would not own it, that if this Curan had been but a thane of little estate, she could have had naught to say against the matter.

And so at last she found that in her trouble and doubt and wish for peace she was thinking, “Would that he were not the kitchen knave!”

Now, it chanced that the old nurse had gone out into the town, and was away all this while, so that she knew nothing of this new trouble; and presently she was coming back with her arms full of what she had bought, and there met her Havelok and Withelm, who had been to the widow's, and were on their way to find me at the gate.

“Mother,” said Havelok, “let me help you up with these things.”

That frightened the old lady, for she had been looking at him, and had made up her mind that he was some mighty noble, as did most strangers.



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“Nay, lord,” she said; “that is not fitting for you.”

“Less fitting is it that a strong man should see you thus burdened and not help. No lord am I, but only the cook’s man. So I am going to the palace.”

But this she would not believe at first, and still refused. However, Lincoln Hill is very steep, and she was not sorry when Havelok laughed and took the things from her so soon as she had to halt for breath.

“Curan will carry you up also, if you will, mother,” said Withelm.

The nurse tossed her head at him and made no answer, being on her dignity at once. Moreover, she had heard of Curan by this time, though she had not seen him before. So she said no more, and went on proudly enough, with her mighty attendant after her; but all the while it was in her mind that there was some jest, or maybe wager, between the two.

Now Withelm stopped at the gate; but I was not there, for I had been sent to the palace, where guards were to be at each door. The word was that some plot had been found out against the princess, and that therefore we had to be careful. One easily believed that with all the talk about the attack made on her party that was flying about. So he came on to the palace kitchens, for Berthun knew him well, having so often bought fish from him in the market; and there he sat down to talk with the steward, for there was nothing much going on at the time, and I was on guard.

Now, the old nurse went to her mistress; and Goldberga sat in the shadow, and was weeping no longer, seeing that it would not help at all.

“There is a wonder down yonder,” said the old lady, not seeing that there had been any trouble yet—“such a man as I never saw in all my days; and he even carried my goods up all the hill for me, old and ugly as I am. That is not what every young man would do nowadays. Maybe it was different when I was young, or else my being young made the difference. The youth with him called him Curan, which is the name of the strong porter they prate of, but doubtless that was a jest. This is the most kingly man that could be; and I ween that those two made a wager that he dared not carry a bundle up to the palace, whereby I was the gainer, for breath grows short up that pitch. And when I thanked him he bowed in that wise that can only come of being rightly taught when one is young. Now, I am going to ask Berthun who he is, for he spoke to him when he saw him, and that humbly, as it seemed.”

So talked the nurse, and to all Goldberga answered never a word, for all the trouble came back again, and with it the thought that she hated, that if only—

Then, as the nurse was leaving her, she called her back.



“Nurse,” she said, “I am in sore trouble about the dream. It bides with me, and will not cease to puzzle me until I weary for some one to read it plainly. I would that Queen Bertha’s good chaplain were here, for I might have been helped by him.”



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Then the nurse came back, quick to hear the sad tone in the voice of her whom she had tended and loved since she was a child.

“Why, my pretty, have you been weeping?” she said. “There was naught in a dream like that to fray you thus.”

“Nay, but it has come to me that this place is altogether heathen; and it may have come from the hand of Freya, the false fiend that they worship as a goddess, so that I may be ready to wed a heathen. Is there no Christian in all this place?”

“There are Welsh folk yet left in the marsh,” said the nurse, pondering; “and where there is a Briton there is a Christian, and there, also, will be a hidden priest. But it would be as much as his life is worth to come here, even could we find one.”

Then Goldberga said, “Alsi is not altogether heathen. If I asked he would surely grant this.”

For she thought that she knew how to gain consent.

“If one can be found, and that is not likely. Well, then, I will ask Berthun, who is good-natured enough, and most likely will not trouble about a Christian coming here; and if so, we need not even ask Alsi.”

So she went, not thinking for a moment that there was a priest of the faith to be heard of. Mostly she wanted to hear more of Havelok, but she would honestly do her other errand.

But on her way across the courtyard she met Mord, and he was a great friend of hers.

“Whither now, nurse? They will not let you go out of the palace. They say that there is trouble on hand with those folk that fell on us, and we have to bide in shelter for a day or two.”

“Well, I have been down the town this hour, and all is quiet enough. This Alsi is an over-timid man. But I was seeking Berthun with a strange message from the princess, and one that is not over safe here.”

“Let me give it then.”

“Well, it is nothing more or less than to ask if he can find a Christian priest. Our mistress has had a strange dream, and it is true that it sorely troubles her. So she wants one to whom she may tell it, that it may be read aright. But though I must ask, I do not hope to find one.”

“Why,” said Mord, “there is not one Christian in all Lindsey.”



“I would not say that. When I was first here with Orwenna the queen, before she married Ethelwald, there were some in the marsh; for one day I heard my own tongue spoken there, hunting with my mistress; and so she stayed and talked with these poor folk, though the Welsh they spoke was bad enough. But they were Christians, as they told her in fear and trembling. They have not so much need to fear now.”

“Then I can help you,” said Mord gladly. “Say nothing to the cook, for I have found old friends who come from far in the marsh, and they will tell me at once if they have heard of any priest. Why, when I think, they know Welsh, and one has called himself by a Welsh name, and you have seen him—Curan the porter.”



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“Ay; then do you ask these friends, and tell them that the sooner they can bring a priest the better shall they be rewarded. I would give much to have Goldberga’s mind set at rest.”

So Mord said that he would go at once; and glad he was to see Withelm sitting with Berthun,

“Well,” said the steward, “I have known Withelm of Grimsby for the last ten years or so, and I do not suppose that it matters if you speak with him.”

“Why should it matter if I speak with any one I choose?” asked Mord, somewhat angrily.

“That you must ask the king; for his orders are that the people of the princess have no dealings with outsiders for two days.”

“Mighty careful of us is Alsi all of a sudden,” said Mord. “I suppose he thinks that someone will stick a seax into some of us in all friendly wise while we are talking.”

But Berthun only laughed, and went to where the nurse was beckoning to him. He told her his own thoughts of Havelok, being glad to have a ready hearer.

At once Withelm was able to tell Mord that the old priest who was his friend was in Lincoln at this time by good chance, and that he would surely come to the princess at need. But when they came to talk of when and how, it did not seem all so easy; and Mord went to the nurse to tell her all.

Then they had to speak to Berthun about it, and he was kindly and willing to help; but he said that none might come to speak with the princess without leave from the king. No doubt he would grant it easily, if asked by Goldberga herself.

“I will go and tell her,” said the old lady. “Keep your man here till I return.”

Now she brought this good news to the princess, and one need not say how she rejoiced. And now a thought had come to her, and she was eager to send a message to Alsi.

“Surely,” she thought, “he does but threaten me with the kitchen knave, that he may make me change my will. And, therefore, if I say that I am ready to obey him, he will be pleased; and then time is gained at the least, and it is not possible that he will choose so badly for me after all.”

So when the nurse asked her what she would do about getting the priest to her presence, she said, “Go and tell my uncle first that I am willing to obey him in the matter of which we spoke this morning.”



“So that was what has troubled you after all, and not the dream? I thought it should not have made all these tear marks,” said the nurse quickly. “Now, why did you not tell me? I dare give Alsi a talking to if he needs it.”

“Nay, nurse, but it was the dream. My uncle and I did but disagree on somewhat, and maybe I was wrong. By-and-by I will tell you.”

“Tell me now, and then I shall know better how to ask for what you need.”

But Goldberga could not bring herself to say what Alsi had threatened, and now felt sure that she would hear no more of that. So she told the nurse that she had vowed only to marry a king, and that Alsi had been angry, saying that kings were not so easily found. Also, that he was the man who had to find her a husband.



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“That is the best sense that this king ever spoke,” said the nurse. “Many a long year might you wait if you had your way thus. You are wise in sending that message. Well, after that I will ask him to let you see the priest, saying, if he is cross-grained, that a talk with him will make your mind even better fitted to obey. Many things like that I can say. We shall have him here presently.”

Now, all that seemed very good to both of them, and the nurse went her way. And when she came to Alsi, she gave the message plainly.

“That will save a great deal of trouble,” said the king. “Tell her that I am glad to hear it. She says this of her own accord, and not at your advice?”

“She told me before I had heard a word of what the trouble was between you. It was no word of mine.”

“I am glad of it. But I will say that I am somewhat surprised.”

And that was true, for this message seemed to Alsi to be nothing more or less than that Goldberga would marry his man. When he thought for a moment, however, he saw that it could not be thus; and also, it was plain to him what the poor girl had in her mind. And now he chuckled to think what a weapon he had against her. Nor would he be slow to use it.

Then the nurse said that he need have no surprise, for Goldberga was ever gentle and willing to be led, though sometimes the pride of her race came uppermost for a time. And then she asked if a certain priest of the faith might come and speak with her.

Now, Alsi knew that only one could be meant—namely, the hermit who bided at Cabourn. He had heard of him often, and would not suffer him to be hurt, for his sister Orwenna had protected him. The heathen English minded him not at all by this time, for he was the best leech in the land, and so useful to them. So Alsi said pleasantly that he was quite willing that the priest should come, deeming that he was at Cabourn, and that it would be a day or two before he would be brought.

So he called the housecarl from outside the door, and when he came he said, “Pass the word that when one who calls himself David comes and asks for the princess, he is to be admitted to her.”

So that was made easy, and the nurse thanked him and withdrew; and when he was alone, Alsi grinned evilly and rubbed his hands.

“Now is East Anglia mine in truth,” he said; and with that he bade the housecarl fetch Curan, the cook’s porter, to him. And then he sent one to Ragnar with such a message that he rode out that night and away to Norwich.



CHAPTER XV. THE FORTUNE OF CURAN THE PORTER.

While the nurse told Wilhelm to fetch the priest when Alsi was in the hall that evening, the housecarl came for Havelok; and much wondering, he followed the man to the king, and presently stood before him and saluted.

“Where did you get that salute?” said Alsi sharply, seeing at once that it was not English; and, indeed, it was that of Gunnar’s courtmen.



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"I cannot tell," answered my brother. "It seems to be there when needed."

"Well, it is not that used here. Get the housecarls to teach you better manners."

Then Havelok bowed a little, in token that he would do so; and when Alsi spoke to him next it was in Welsh.

"You are a marshman, as I hear?"

Now Havelok had learned fairly well from the poor folk who loved him, but carelessly, so that when he answered Alsi frowned at his way of speaking.

"I am from the marsh," he said simply.

"We had better get back to English!" the king said; "you people forget your own tongue. Now, are you married?"

Thereat Havelok laughed lightly.

"That I am not," he answered.

"Well, then, if I find you a fair wife, you would be willing, doubtless?"

"That I should not," answered Havelok bluntly, and wondering what this crafty-looking king was driving at. "What could I do with a wife? For I have neither house nor goods, nor where to take her, nor withal to keep her; else had I not been the cook's knave."

"It would seem that you carry all your fortune on your back, therefore," said Alsi, looking at Havelok's gay attire with somewhat of a sneer.

"That may well be, King Alsi, for even these clothes are not my own. Berthun gave them me, and I think that they come from yourself."

Alsi grinned, for Eglaf's saying of him was not so far wrong; but he had more serious business on hand than to talk of these things with a churl.

"Now, if I bid you, it is your part to obey. I have a wife for you, and her you shall wed."

"There are two words to that, King Alsi. Neither will I wed against my will, nor will I wed one who is unwilling."

"As to that first," said the king, for he began to be angered with Havelok's boldness, "if a man will not do my bidding, I have dungeons where he can have time to think things over, and men who can keep him there, be he never so mighty; and if a man will not see with my eyes when I bid him, blinded shall he be."



This he said somewhat hurriedly, for a dark flush came on the face of the man before him, and he thought that he must try some other plan than force with him.

“And as for that other point, I did not so much as hint that the bride was likely to be unwilling. I will say that she is willing, rather.”

Now that troubled Havelok, for it seemed that all was arranged already, and the thought of the dungeon was not pleasant. There was no doubt that if the king chose he could cast him into one until he was forgotten; and the light and the breath of the wind from the sea were very dear to Havelok. So he thought that he would at least gain time by seeming to listen to the proposal; for, after all, it might come to nothing, and maybe it was but a jest, though a strange one.

“Well, lord king,” he said, “if the bride knows enough of me to be willing, it is but fair that I should have the like chance of choice.”



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Now Alsi thought that it was impossible that this churl, as he deemed him, would not be overjoyed to hear of the match he had made for him, and he must needs know it soon. Yet there was that about Havelok that puzzled him, for his ways were not those of a churl, and he spoke as a freeman should speak.

So much the more likely that the people would believe him when he said that Goldberga wedded him of her own wish, he thought. It was as well that he was not altogether a common-seeming man.

“You have seen the damsel already,” he said therefore. “Now I will not say that this match is altogether of my choosing; but I have an oath to keep, and it seems that I can only keep it by making you her husband. But, as I say, she is willing, and, I will add, well dowered.”

Now it grew plain to my brother that there was something strange in all this, so he said, “An oath is a thing that must not be hindered in the fulfilling, if a man can further it. But what has a king’s oath to do with me?”

“I have sworn to find her the goodliest and mightiest man alive; and, though I must needs say it to your face, there is none like yourself. No flattery this to bend you to my will, but sober truth—at least, as I see it.”

At that Havelok grew impatient.

“Well, if that be so, who is the bride?” he asked, not caring to give the king his title, or forgetting to do so, for on him was coming the feeling that he was this man’s equal here in the palace. And at last, not seeming to notice this, Alsi answered plainly.

“The Princess Goldberga.”

Then Havelok stared at him in blank wonder for some moments; and Alsi grew red under his gaze, and his eyes were shifty, and would not meet the honest look that was on him.

Then at last said Havelok slowly, and watching the king intently all the while, “What this means I cannot tell. If you speak truth, it is wonderful; and if not, it is unkingly.”

“On my word as a king, truth it is,” said Alsi hastily, for there was that in Havelok’s face that he did not like.

One might think that the king was growing afraid of his own kitchen knave.

“If that is so, there is no more to be said,” answered Havelok. “Yet you will forgive me if I say that I must have this from the lips of the princess herself as well. It may be that her mind will change.”



“That is but fair,” answered Alsi; “and you are a wise man. The mind of a damsel is unsteady, whether she be princess or milkmaid; but have no fear.”

“No man fear I; but I do fear to hurt any lady, and I would not do that.”



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Then Alsi thought that all was well, and he spoke smooth words to my brother, so that Havelok doubted him more than ever. Therefore it came into his mind that all he could do for the best was to seem to agree, and wait for what the princess herself said. And if Alsi was working some subtlety, then he would wring his neck for him, if need be; and after that—well, the housecarls would cut him in pieces, and he would slay some of them, and so go to Valhalla, and dreams would be at an end. And he would have died to some purpose here, for he knew that Goldberga would come to her kingdom, ay, and maybe Alsi's as well, for she was his sister's daughter, and his next of kin, and well loved by those who had been allowed to know aught of her.

But I would not have any think that the promise of so wondrous a bride was not pleasing to him. It was more, for he had seen her grow white and troubled as she looked on him, and he had seen her bear well whatever pain had caused that; and he had known that in the one sight he had of Goldberga somewhat had taught him what it was to have one face unforgotten in his mind.

So he said to Alsi, "All this fortune that you hold out to me is most unlooked for, seeing what I am in your hall; and I have not thanked you yet, King Alsi. That, however, is hard to do, as you may understand."

"I understand well enough," answered the king, in high good humour again, now that all seemed to be going well. "And after all, it is the lady whom you must thank."

"But when shall I see her to do so?"

"Tomorrow, surely; ay, tomorrow early shall you speak with her," answered the king quickly. "Now go, and hold your peace. Let me warn you that there are those about the court who would go any lengths to remove you from the face of the earth if they knew of this. Tell no man of the honour that has come to you as yet. Be the porter for a short time longer, and then you will be the man whom all envy. It is likely that I must make you a thane, by right of the choice of the princess."

"I know well when to speak and when to keep silence, lord king," said my brother, and with that he bowed and left the hall.

Then Alsi put his lips to a silver whistle that he carried, and blew a call that brought Eglaf hurriedly to him from the outer door.

"The guards may go," said the king; "but see that the porter Curan leaves not the palace until I myself send him forth tomorrow."

The captain saluted and went his way. He had had six men within call of the king all the time that he spoke with Havelok, and one may make what one likes of that. At least the threat of the dungeon was no idle one.



Now went Havelok from the hall very heavy and troubled, for beyond the fair talk of the king lurked surely some plan that was not fair at all. It was not to be thought that he could not prevent, if he chose, a foolish marriage of the princess, even did she desire it ever so much. And my brother could not believe that she had set her heart on one whom she had but seen once, and then in the midst of faintness. That, however, might be known easily when he was face to face with her. It was a thing that could not be made a matter of pretence.



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Now when he came back to the great kitchen, which was nigh as big as the hall, Withelm was yet there, for the priest was at the widow's, and there was no haste to bring him; and by that time I had come in also, and was sitting with him at the far end, where none had need to come. It was Berthun's own end, as one might say, and he was lord in his own place. Only a few thralls were about, and the cook himself had gone into the town.

"Here is our brother," I said, "and there is somewhat wrong."

He came moodily up to us, and sat him down, saying nothing, and he leaned his head on his hands for a while.

"What is amiss, brother?" said Withelm.

"Wait," he answered. "I will think before I speak."

I could see that this was not the old puzzlement, but something new and heavy, so we held our peace. Long was he before he moved or spoke, and when he did so it was wearily.

"Well knew I that somewhat was to happen to me in this town, even as I told you, brother, when we first passed its gates. And now it seems to be coming to pass. For this is what is on me, as it seems to me— either that I must see the light of day no more, or must live to be a scorn and sorrow to one for whom it were meet that a man should die."

"Surely the black dream is on you, my brother! Neither of these things can be for you!" I cried.

"Would that it were the dream, for that is not all of sorrow, and that also is of things so long past that they are forgotten. I can bear that, for your voice always drives it away. But now the hand of Alsi the king is on me for some ill of his own—"

"Stay," said Withelm. "Let us go out and speak, if that name is to be heard. It were safer."

"Less safe, brother," answered Havelok. "At once we should be kept apart. Listen, and I will tell you all, and then say your say."

Then he told us, word for word, all that had just passed between him and the king. And as we listened, it grew on us that here was no wrong to the princess, but rather the beginning of honour. I could see the downfall that was in store for Alsi, and I thought also that I saw hope for the winning back of the Danish kingdom, with an East Anglian host to back us. And this also saw Withelm, and his eyes sparkled. But Havelok knew not yet all that had grown so plain to us.



He ended, and we said nothing for a moment.

“Well?” he said, not looking up, but with eyes that sought the floor, as if ashamed.

“By Odin,” said I, speaking the thought that was uppermost, “here will be a downfall for Alsi!”

“Ay, you are right, brother. I will not wed her.”

But that was by no means what I meant, as may be known; and now Withelm held up a warning hand to me, and I knew that his advice was always best.

“If the maiden is unwilling, wed her not,” he said. “If she is willing, even as the king said, that is another matter. We have no reason to doubt his word as yet.”



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“You saw not his face as he spoke. And then, how should the princess think of me?”

“Who knows? Even Odin owned that the minds of maids were hard to fathom. But one may find a reason or two. Maybe that oath has somewhat to do with it. A good daughter will go far to carry out her father’s will, and, in the plain sense thereof, she will certainly do it thus. Then it is likely that she knows that you are no churl, but the son of Grim, though we have fallen on hard times for a while. I have heard say that it is the custom here that a man who has crossed the seas in his own ship so many times is a thane by right of that hardihood. Thane’s son, therefore, might we call you. Then there is the jealousy of every other thane, if she chooses an East Anglian. Then she needs one who shall be mighty to lead her forces. Even the greatest thane will be content to follow a man who is a warrior of warriors. Ragnar can have told her what you are in that way. Faith, brother, there are reasons enough.”

Havelok laughed a short laugh at all this, and he grew brighter. There was sense in Withelm’s words, if they would not bear looking deeply into.

Then I said, adding to these words, “Moreover, Alsi could stop the whole foolishness of his niece if he did not think it a fitting match in some way.”

“So he could,” answered Havelok. “But yet—I tell you that there was naught but evil in his face. Why did he try to force me?”

Then he went back to the thing that weighed mostly on his noble heart— the thought that he was unworthy altogether.

“I fear that the princess does but think of me because she must. It is in my mind that Alsi may have threatened her also until she has consented. How shall I know this?”

“Most easily, as she speaks with you,” answered Withelm. “Tomorrow will tell you that. And then, if you find things thus, what shall prevent your flying?”

“Brother Radbard and the other housecarls,” said Havelok grimly.

“Not if you ask the princess to help you out of her own way by pretending to be most willing. If Alsi thinks you a gladsome couple, there is no difficulty. You walk out of the palace as a master there. Then you fly to Ragnar. That is all.”

Now that was such an easy way out of the whole coil that we planned it out. And yet it seemed to me that it was a pity that Havelok knew not more of what seemed to us so sure now. So, seeing that things were fairly straightened by this last thought, I got up and said that I must be going, making a sign to Withelm to come also; and, with a few more words, we went out. I saw Havelok set himself to a mighty task of water drawing as I looked back.



“Now,” said I, “here is a strange affair with a vengeance. Neither head nor tail can I make of it. But if all we think is right, this is the marriage for the son of Gunnar.”

“Son of Gunnar, or son of Grim,” said Withelm, “princess or not, happy is the maiden who gains Havelok for a husband. Maybe her woman’s wit has told her so. She will have many suitors whom she knows to be seeking her throne only, and to him she gives it as a gift unsought.”



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“That is all beyond me,” I said; “but he would fill a throne well. But his own modesty in the matter of his worthiness is likely to stand in the way. Why should we not tell him all that we know? Then he will feel that he is doing no wrong.”

“Because we are not sure, and because it is not for us to choose the time. I have sent for Arngeir this morning, as we said would be well last night. If the princess is unwilling, there are many things that may be said; and if not, there must be many days before the wedding; and, ere the day, Havelok may feel that he is her equal in birth at least, if we are not wrong. But since I have waited here, Mord has told me the dream that has troubled the princess, that I may tell the priest, so that he can think it over. She has dreamed that she is to wed a man who shall be king both in Denmark and England, and she saw the man, moreover. Strangely like Havelok’s dream is that. Now what else made her turn faint but that this vision was like Havelok? And does not that make it possible that she wishes to wed him? Therefore I am going to tell the priest the story of Havelok, so far as I know it.”

“Well thought of. Tell him this also, for now I may surely tell you what you have not yet heard thereof.”

So I told him how Grim and I had taken Havelok from Hodulf, and then he was the more certain that we had saved the son of our king.

Now we thought that we had got to the bottom of the whole matter of the wedding. Of course the dream had all to do with the fainting, but nothing to do with the supposed wish. But we did not know that.

“Speak not of Gunnar by name, however,” I said; “he was a terror to Christian folk. The priest is likely to hinder the marriage with all his might else.”

Withelm flushed as he had when he first spoke of the priest to me.

“I think not, brother; for he knows Havelok well, and loves him.”

“So,” said I shortly, “he hopes to make him a Christian, doubtless.”

“I think that he will do so, if he has a Christian wife to help.”

“That would not suit Havelok,” I said, laughing.

“Nay, but such a mind as his it seems to suit well already, though he has not heard much.”

“Why, then,” said I, wondering, “if it suits our best and bravest, it must be a wondrous faith. It seems strange, however; but I know naught of it. What is good for him and you, my brother, is sure to be best.”



“I feared that you would be angry.”

“Nay, but with you and Havelok? How should that be? Why, if you two said that we must turn Christian, I should hold it right; so would Raven. I suppose that I go to the Ve [11] because you do.”

Now I troubled no more about the matter, being nothing but a sea dog who could use a weapon. And now I said that I was going to Eglaf to say that I might have to leave him at any time for home, in case we had to fly with Havelok. So Withelm went his way to the old priest with a light heart, and I to the captain.



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“Well,” said Eglaf, “this is about what I expected when your brother came. Good it has been to have you here; and I think that I shall see you as a housecarl for good yet. When do you go?”

“The first time that I do not turn up on guard I am gone, not till then.”

“Come and drink a farewell cup first.”

“I shall be in a great hurry if I do not do that,” I answered, laughing.

But it was my thought that maybe when once my back was turned on the town, I should not have time to think of going near King Alsi’s guard.

Then I went to find Ragnar the earl, for we thought it well that he should know what was on hand. But when I came to the house of the thane with whom he was quartered, they told me that he had gone hastily with all his men, for word had come of some rising in his land that must be seen to at once. That was bad; and as one must find a reason for everything, I thought that the going of Griffin had much to do with the outbreak. There I was wrong, as I found later. But then, too, I knew that the craft of Alsi was at work in this message. He had his own reasons for wishing the earl out of the way.

CHAPTER XVI. A STRANGEST WEDDING.

Long spoke Withelm and the priest David together, until it was time for them to seek the palace; and when they came there, they spoke to Mord also. Then David thought it was well to say naught to Havelok until more was learned from Goldberga herself, for he would soon see how things stood with her. Then he would see Withelm again, and they would plan together for the best. So Withelm waited for the return of the priest, whom Mord took to his mistress. Alsi and his men were supping in the hall, but Goldberga was waiting in her own chamber.

Now the princess thought that, after her message to the king, she would hear no more of the kitchen knave, and so was happier. But all the while she pondered over her dream the thought of Havelok must needs come into it, and that was troublesome. Nevertheless, it was not to be helped, seeing that there was no doubt at all that he and the man of the vision were like to each other as ever were twins. Wherefore if the thought of one must be pleasant so at last must be that of the other. And then came the nurse with tales of what Berthun thought of this man of his—how that he was surely a wandering prince, with a vow of service on him, like Gareth of the Round Table in the days of Arthur.

So presently it seemed to the princess that the churl was gone, as it were, and in his place was a wandering atheling, at least, who was not a terror at all. Then at length the slow time wore away until Mord came with David the priest.



No priestly garb had the old man on, for that had made his danger certain; but though he was clad in a thrall's rough dress, he was not to be mistaken for aught but a most reverend man.



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“Peace be with you, my daughter,” he said; “it is good to look on the child of Orwenna, the queen whom we loved.”

Then the chamberlain left those two alone, and at once Goldberga told the priest why she had asked him to run the risk of coming to her, for there is no doubt that he was in peril, though not from Alsi himself.

At first she asked him many things about her mother, and learned much of her goodness to the poor folk, and of their love to her; and presently, when she grew more sure of the kindness and seeming wisdom of the priest, she told him all her dream, adding no thoughts of her own, as she mistrusted them.

Then said David, “There seems naught but good in this, and it is not hard to unravel. I think that all shall come to pass even as it was told you.”

“I feared the heathen ways of the place, and thought that it might be some snare of the old gods,” said Goldberga.

But David told her that they could have no power on her, and asked her if the king knew of the vision, that being one thing of which he was not sure; and when he found that he did not, the whole affair seemed more strange than before.

But now the princess asked him, “Plain were the words that I heard, hut what meant the light as of a sunbeam that came from the mouth of the man of the vision?”

“That surely means that in word and in heart and in all else the man shall be kingly altogether, so that there shall be no mistaking the same; and it may also mean that you shall know the man at once when you see him.”

At that Goldberga grew pale and red by turns, so that David, quick to read the thoughts of those who came to him for help, asked if she had seen anyone who she thought must be meant, not at all knowing that she must needs say that this was Curan.

Not at all willingly did she tell him this; but she did so, adding at last that Alsi had threatened to wed her to this man.

Now it was plain to David that all was pulling the same way, for surely Alsi wrought, unknowing, for the fulfilling of the dream; and all seemed to prove that Havelok was the son of the Danish king, and that he would win back his kingdom. Then he found out that the princess had no knowledge that the king had spoken to Havelok, but it did not seem to be needful that he should tell her that he had done so. That would be told by Alsi himself if he meant, as seemed certain, to carry out his threat. So he thought awhile, and at last he saw what he might do without saying anything to bend the choice of the princess in any way.



“It will soon be plain in what way the dream shall be fulfilled,” he said; “and this is certain, that you shall be wedded to none but the right man, else had it not been sent. Have no fear, therefore, even as it was bidden you.”

Then the princess said that the only thing which troubled her was the fear lest Alsi should yet force her to wed this one who was so like him she had seen in her dream.



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“That,” said the priest, “is doubtless the most strange part of the whole matter, yet I think that even thus there need be no fear. I will tell you now that I know this one who is called Curan well, and I, and all who know him, love him. Truly he is not a Christian, but he is no hater of the faith, and that is much in these days. Nor is he a churl, but rather one of the most noble of men. It is certain that, whatever Alsi might wish, he would not wed you against your will. He has but to know your thoughts in order to help you in any way. But I must also tell you this, that he is a Dane, who fled from his land when he was a child; and it is thought that he is the son of the Danish king, who was slain at the time when Mord, your servant, fled also. He came to England in the same ship as did Mord, who can tell you more of him. It is certain that there is a secret about his birth, and the one who knows that secret is not far off. If need is, we can learn it, for there was a set time for its telling, and maybe this is it. Now, if it is true that he is the son of the Danish king, it does seem as if your dream might be bidding you to have no fear of what seems doubtful in the matter, though I cannot tell, and do not like to say so for certain. His name is not Curan, but Havelok.”

Then Goldberga said, “I have heard of that flight and of the wreck from Mord often. He was wont to tell me of the child, and of the lady who was drowned, and he said that he thought him the king’s son.”

After that she was greatly cheered, for the worst of the trouble seemed to be over and gone. It was in her mind now that Alsi knew who Havelok was, and that he tried her, for she was not one to think ill of any.

So she let the priest go, with many thanks, saying, “Now I know that whatever happens is the will of Heaven, and must be for the best. I am ready for whatever shall befall.”

Now I do not know what had seemed good to Alsi, for he had changed his mind concerning David’s visit to Goldberga, and had suddenly given orders that if he came he was to be put in ward at once. So Mord met the old man as he left the chamber, and told him that he must fly; and after that Withelm took him away in the dusk, for none hindered his going, and went to the widow’s with him, hearing all that had been said; and that which they thought was even as Goldberga had said, that all must needs be for the best. In a day or two all would be plain, for Arngeir would have come. So Withelm sent forth the old man to his own place with a good store of food, going with him for some miles, and promising him help for coming days until the death was ended.

Now into the palace none might come after the feast was set; and all this time I was on guard, for there were double posts round the place, by reason of Alsi’s fear of the attackers of the princess, as was said. So it happened that neither of us saw Havelok until next morning; and now I have to tell how we saw him, and what happened with the first sunlight, when men were thinking of breaking their fast.



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We of the housecarls took that first meal of the day in the great hall —so many of us, that is, who were not on duty; and when we had nigh finished, Alsi would come in and seat himself on the high place, where Eglaf and half a dozen other thanes sat also at times when there was no special state to be kept.

I was early this morning, having just taken my spell of watching at the gate, and being, therefore, free for the rest of the day, and I was hungry with the sweet air of the July weather and the freshness that comes with sunrise. So I was not altogether pleased to see that there was seemingly some new affair of state on hand, while the breakfast was not yet set out by reason of preparations that were going on where the king's chair was wont to stand. There was Berthun, looking puzzled and by no means pleased, and his men were busy setting out benches on the high place, of a sort that were not those that were wont to be there, in three sides of a square, the open side facing the hall. One bench made each side, and all three were carved from back rail to clawed feet wondrously. Old they seemed also. Then, too, instead of the sweet sedges that strewed the high place, men had spread a cloth of bright hues underfoot there, and the sedges had been swept among the rushes of the lower places. All this was so strange that I went forward, and when I had a chance I asked the steward what was on hand.

“If you know not, master housecarl, no more do I. ‘Justice to be done,’ says the king, and so I suppose that you have some notable prisoner in ward—maybe the leader of those villains who scared our fair princess.”

“But we had taken no man, and I will say that we had wondered that we had not been sent out to hunt those people, instead of biding to see if they came to trouble us here.”

“Why, then,” said Berthun, “some thane must be bringing a captive shortly. But why Alsi orders these benches, it passes me to make out. They are those that have been used for the weddings of his kin since the days of Hengist. Last time was when Orwenna, his sister, wedded Ethelwald of Norfolk. Maybe he thinks that they need airing.”

He laughed and went on directing his men; but knowing what I knew, I wondered what it all might mean, for there was one wedding that I could not help thinking of.

Presently the hall began to fill as men came in, and every one had somewhat to say, and all marvelled at this that was going on. Then Berthun came and beckoned to me, for I must fetch Eglaf the captain at once, as the king had need of him, in haste. Then Eglaf hurried to the hall; and after a word or two with Alsi, the horns were blown outside the hall door to call every man of the guard to the place. And when they came, we were all set round the wall as if guarding all that were in it. But there were none but the folk of the palace to guard, and they were wondering as were we; and when that was done, and the click and rattle of arms as we moved to our places was ended, there was a silence on all —the silence of men who wait for somewhat to happen.



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Now Berthun went to the door on the high place, as he was wont when all was ready for the king's presence, and the hush deepened, none knowing what they expected to see.

Forth came Berthun backward, as was the custom, and he turned aside to let the king pass him. His face was red and angry, as I thought, but amazed also. I was standing next to Eglaf, and he was at the foot of the dais, at the end of his line of men, so that I could see all plainly.

Then came Alsi, leading the princess, and after Goldberga came her nurse. No other ladies were with her; and now I noticed that there was not one thane on the high place, which was strange, and the first time that such a thing had been since I came here. I looked down the hall, and none were present. Now I looked at Alsi; and on his pale face was a smile that might have been as of one who will be glad, though he does not feel so. But the eyes of the princess were bright with tears, and hardly did she look from the floor. Hers was a face to make one sad to see at that time, wondrously beautiful as it was.

Alsi led her by the hand, and set her on the bench that was to his left, and signed to the nurse to sit beside her, which the old lady did, bridling and looking with scorn at the king as she took her place. There she sought the hand of the princess, and held it tightly, as in comforting wise. Very rich garments had the nurse, but Goldberga was dressed in some plain robe of white that shone when the light caught it. Mostly I do not see these things, but now I wished that she always wore that same.

As for Alsi, he had on his finest gear, even as at the great feast of the Witan—crimson cloak, fur-lined, and dark-green hose, gold-gartered across, and white and gold tunic. He had a little crown on also, and that was the only thing kingly about him, to my mind.

Now he cast one look at Goldberga, which made her shrink into herself, as it were, and turned with a smile to us all.

"Friends," he said, "this is short notice for a wedding, but all men know that 'Happy is the wooing that is not long a-doing,' so no more need be said of that. All men know also that when good Ethelwald died he made me swear to him that I would wed his daughter to the mightiest and goodliest and fairest man that was in the land. I have ever been mindful of that oath, and now it seems that the time for keeping it has come. Whether the man whom my niece will wed is all that the oath requires, you shall judge; and if he is such a one, I must not stand in the way. I do not myself know that I have ever seen one who is so fully set forth in words as is this bridegroom in those of the oath."

Now I heard one whisper near me, "Whom has Goldberga chosen?"

And that was what Alsi would have liked to hear, for his speech seemed to say that thus it was, and maybe that he did not altogether like the choice.

But now Alsi said to Berthun, "Bring in the bridegroom."



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“Whom shall I bring, lord?” the steward asked in blank wonder, and Alsi whispered his answer.

At that Berthun’s hands flew up, and his mouth opened, and he did not stir.

“Go, fool,” said Alsi, and I thought that he would have stamped his foot.

Now I knew who was meant in a moment, and even as the steward took his first step from off the dais to go down the hail to his own entrance, I said to Eglaf, “Here is an end to my service with you. My time is up.”

“Why, what is amiss?”

“The bridegroom is my brother—that is all; and I must be free to serve him as I may.”

“Well, if that is so, you are in luck. But I do not think that either of Grim’s sons can be the man. Big enough are you, certainly, but goodly? Nay, but that red head of yours spoils you.”

I daresay that he would have said more about Raven and Withelm, for a talk was going round; but a hush came suddenly, and then a strange murmur of stifled wonder, for Havelok came into the hall after Berthun, and all eyes were turned to him.

Now I saw my brother smile as he came, seeing someone whom he liked first of all; and then he looked up the hall, and at once his face became ashy pale, for he saw what was to be done. Yet he went on firmly, looking neither to right nor left, until he came to the high place. There he caught my eye, and I made a little sign to him to show that I knew his trouble.

They came to the step, and Berthun stood aside to let Havelok pass, and then Alsi held out his hand to raise my brother to the high place. But Havelok seemed not to see that, stepping up by himself as the king bade him come. Then the women who were in the hall spoke to one another in a murmur that seemed of praise; but whiter and more white grew the princess, so that I feared that she would faint. But she did not; and presently there seemed to come into her eyes some brave resolve, and she was herself again, looking from Alsi to Havelok, and again at Alsi.

Now, too, the king looked at him up and down, as one who measures his man before a fight. And when he met Havelok’s eyes he grew red, and turned away to the folk below him.

“So, friends,” he cried, “what say you? Am I true to the words of my oath in allowing this marriage?”



There was not one there who did not know Havelok, whom they called Curan; and though all thought these doings strange, there was a hum of assent, for the oath said naught of the station in life of the bridegroom. Good King Ethelwald had been too trustful.

“That is well,” said Alsi, with a grave face. “All here will bear witness that this was not done without counsel taken. Now, let the bridegroom sit in his place here to my right.”

He waved his hand, and Havelok sat down on the bench that faced Goldberga; and now he looked long at her with a look that seemed to be questioning. Alsi was going to his seat in the cross bench, where the parents of the couple are wont to sit at a wedding while the vows are made, but he seemed to bethink himself. It is my belief that he said what he did in order to shame both Havelok and Goldberga.



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“Why, it is not seemly that the bridegroom should sit alone without one to be by him. Where are your friends, Curan?”

At that Alsi met with more than he bargained for. At once Berthun came forward, and forth came I, and without a word we sat one on each side of him. There were others who would have come also, for I saw even Eglaf take a step towards the high place, had we not done so.

Alsi’s face became black at that, for here was not the friendless churl he was scoffing at. But he tried to smile, as if pleased.

“Why, this is well,” he said. “Good it is to see a master helping his man, and a soldier ready to back a comrade of a sort. Now we have witnesses. Let us go on with the wedding.”

Now the golden loving cup that was used at the feasts had been filled and set at a little side table that stood there, and it was to be the bride cup that should be drunk between the twain when all was settled. So Alsi took this cup and held it, while he sat in the place of the father of the bride. Now, I knew nothing of what should he done, but Berthun did so, and well he took my brother’s part, having undertaken for him thus.

“It is the custom,” said Alsi, “that the bridegroom should state what he sets forth of the dowry to the bride.”

Whereat Berthun, without hesitation, spoke hastily to Havelok, and told him to let him answer, meaning, as I have not the least doubt, to promise all that he had saved in long years of service. But Havelok smiled a little, and set his hand to his neck, and I remembered one thing that he had—a ring which had always hung on a cord under his jerkin since he came to Grimsby, and which my father had bidden him keep ever.

“This give I,” he said, setting it on the floor at his feet, “and with it all that I am, and all that I shall hereafter be, and all that shall be mine at any time.”

Alsi looked at the ring as it flashed before him, and his face changed. No such jewel had he in all his treasures, for it was of dwarf work in gold, set with a deep crimson stone that was like the setting sun for brightness. I do not know whence these stones came, unless it were from the East. Eleyne the queen, his mother, was thence, and I know now that the ring was hers. But I think that when Alsi saw this he half repented of the match, though he had gone too far now to draw back. So he bowed, and said that it was well, as he would have said had there been nothing forthcoming.

Then Berthun, in his turn, asked for the bridegroom that the dowry of the bride should be stated for all to hear.



“The wealth left my niece by her father,” said Alsi. “The matter of the kingdom is for the Witan of the East Anglians to settle.”

Then came from out the king’s chamber two men bearing bags of gold, and that was set before the princess. It was a noble dowry, and honest was the king in this matter at least.

Now were the vows to be said and the bride cup to be drunk, and that was the hardest part of all to Havelok.



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Slowly he rose as the king held it out to him, and he took it from his hand and stood before Goldberga; and she, too, rose and faced him, and for a moment they stood thus, surely the most handsome couple that had ever been.

Then Havelok said, looking in the clear eyes of the princess, "This have I sworn, that I will wed no unwilling bride. It is but for you to say one word, and the cup falls, and all is ended."

Alsi started at that, and I thought he was going to speak, but he held his peace. Still as a rock was Havelok while he waited for the answer, and the folk in the hall were as still as he. They began to see that all was not right as the king would have it thought.

Once the princess looked at Alsi, and that with pride in her face, and then she looked long and steadfastly at Havelok, and one by one his fingers loosened themselves on the golden stem of the cup, that she might know him ready for her word.

Then she put forth her hand and closed it round his strong fingers, that he must hold it fast by her doing, and that was all that was needed. It was more than words could have told. And she smiled as she did it.

And at that a light came on Havelok's face, and he smiled gravely back at her, and he said in a low voice that shook a little, "May the gods so treat me as I treat you, my princess. Can it be that you will trust me thus?"

She answered in no words, but I saw her hand tighten over his, and her eyes never left his face.

Then Havelok raised his other hand, and took that of Goldberga, which was on the cup, and faced to the people.

"Thus do I pledge her who shall be henceforward my wife through good and ill; and may Odin, Freya, and Niord be witnesses of my oath of faith to her in all that the word may mean."

So he drank, and I stole a glance at the king. Never saw I a man so amazed, for to him the Danish names of the Asir had come as some sort of a shock, seeing that he had deemed this man, with the name of Curan, a Briton. And he looked at Berthun with a look that seemed to say more than was likely to be pleasant by-and-by. But the steward paid no heed to him.

Now Havelok had made his vow, and he gave the cup to the princess; and she, too, turned a little toward the people, but still she looked on Havelok.



“Faith shall answer to faith,” she said in a clear voice. “Here do I take this man for my husband, in the sight of God, and with you all as witnesses, and I pray that the blessing of Him may be on us both.”

So she drank also, and Havelok stopped and raised the wondrous ring from where it had been unheeded on the floor, and took the band of Goldberga, and set it on her finger, and kissed the hand ere he let it go.

But Goldberga lifted her face toward him, and he bent and kissed her forehead, and so they were wedded.

I have heard men scoff at the thought of love at first sight, but never can any one of us do so who saw this wedding.



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CHAPTER XVII. HOW THE BRIDE WENT HOME.

Now the folk cheered, and loudest of all honest Eglaf and his warriors. I wondered what should come next, for neither feast nor bride ale was prepared, and Berthun was looking puzzled. Then I saw that the only face in all the wide hall which was not bright was that of Alsi, and his brow was black as a thunder cloud, while his fingers were white with the force with which he clutched and twisted the end of his jewelled belt. Plainly he was in a royal rage that none had scoffed at this wedding, but that all had taken it as a matter that was right altogether.

But he had one more evil thing in his mind that must be seen through; and he came forward, smoothing his face, as best he might, to the fixed smile that I had seen when he spoke with Ragnar, and learned that his first plot had miscarried.

“Now, friends,” he said, “all this has been so hasty that we have prepared no feast. Even now, it seems that the horses stand at the door to take bride and bridegroom hence, and doubtless there waits somewhere the feast that has been bespoken without my knowledge. Well, strange are the ways of lovers, and we will pardon them. I have therefore only to bid them farewell.”

With that he turned to Havelok, and held out his hand, as in all good fellowship, but Havelok would not see it.

“Fare as it shall be meted to you by the Asir, King Alsi,” he said, “for at least Loki loves craft.”

Then he turned to me, and asked hurriedly where we should go if we must leave thus.

“To Grimsby,” I said. “That is home.”

Alsi spoke to the princess now, and maybe it was as well that he did not offer so much as his hand. Wise was he in his way.

“Farewell, niece,” he said; “all this shall come shortly before the Witan of Ethelwald’s folk.”

“Farewell, uncle,” she answered calmly. “That is a matter which I will see to myself. You have carried out your oath to the letter, so far, and now it remains that you should leave the government of the realm to me.”

With that she put her hand on Havelok’s arm.

“Come, husband; we have heard that the horses wait. Let us be gone.”



And then in a quick whisper she added, as if nigh overdone, “Take me hence quickly, for I may not bear more.”

They wasted no more words; and through a lane of folk, who blessed them, those two went to the great door down the long hall, and I followed, and Berthun and the nurse came after me. One flung the door open; and on the steps, all unaware of what had happened, lounged Mord, waiting, and up and down on the green the grooms led the horses of the princess—six in all. On two were packed her goods, and the third had a pack saddle that waited for the bags that held her dowry. The other three were for herself and Mord and the nurse. There was not one for Havelok.



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“This is hasty, my princess,” Mord said. “Whither are we bound?”

“For Grimsby, Mord,” I answered quickly. “Are there no more horses to be had?”

“Never a one, unless we steal from the king,” he answered.

The people were crowding out now that they might see the start, and I saw Berthun speak to a man among them who was a stranger to me. And from him he turned directly with a glad face.

“Go down to such a hostelry,” he said to me, “and there ask for what horses you will. Maybe I shall have to follow you for my part in this matter—that is, if I am not put in the dungeon.”

“Faith,” I answered, “better had you come with us than run that risk. Alsi is in a bad mood.”

He shook his head; and then the people behind him made way, for the king was coming.

“Almost had you forgotten this,” he said; “and I think you will want it.”

The men with the money were there, and he waved his hand to them. Havelok lifted the princess to her horse without heeding him, and the men set the bags on the pack horses.

“See the bridegroom down the street, you who were his witnesses,” the king went on, with a curling lip; “and if you are a wise man, master Berthun, you will not come back again.”

Berthun bowed and went into the hail, past the king, and across to his own door, without a word. After him the thronging people closed up, and though I thought that a housecarl would have been sent to see what he was about, this would have made an open talk, and Alsi forbore.

“Let Havelok take your horse, Mord,” I whispered to him; “I will tell you why directly.”

He nodded, and I told Havelok to mount. Then I helped up the nurse, who wept and muttered to herself; and so we started, Alsi standing on the steps with words of feigned goodspeed as we did so.

But the housecarls and the people shouted with wishes that were real, no doubt thinking that we were bound for the far-off kingdom of the prince who had won Goldberga by service as a kitchen knave in her uncle’s hall for very love of her.



Directly we were outside the gate that leads down the hill, I saw Withelm, who was there waiting for me, and he knew at once what had happened.

He came to my side, and asked only, "Already?"

"Already," I answered; "but it is well. Go to the widow's straightway, and bring Havelok's arms to him at the hostelry at the end of the marketplace, where we have to find more horses."

He went at once, and silently we came down the street and to the courtyard of the inn. Some few folk stared at us; but the princess was hardly known here, and she had cast her long, white mantle hoodwise over her head and face, so that one could not tell who she was. So early in the day there were few people in the marketplace either.

Berthun was in the courtyard of the inn, and I was glad to see him, for I did not know what would happen to him. It was likely that Alsi would seek for someone on whom to visit his anger at the way things had gone. But the steward had been warned, and was not one to run any risk.



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"I did but go back for a few things that I did not care to leave," he said; and he showed me that he had brought his own horse from the stables, and on it were large saddlebags. No poor man was Berthun after years of service in the palace, where gifts from thane and lady are always ready for the man who has had the care of them. Across the saddle bow also were his mail shirt and arms, and his shield hung with his helm from the peak.

"You see that I must needs cast in my lot with yours, or rather Curan's," he said, laughing; "but it is in my mind that in the end I shall not be sorry to have done so. I think that I am tired of the fireside, and want adventure for a while."

"Well," I answered, "you are likely to have them, and that shortly, if I am not mistaken; but we shall see. Now about these horses, for we had better get out of Lincoln as soon as we may."

The man he had spoken with was a merchant, who came yearly, and was a friend of his. He had more horses than he meant to keep, as he had here each year; for every one knows that a horse can always be sold in Lincoln, and they were good ones. Then my gold came in well, and I bought three, one for each of us brothers. I daresay that I paid dearly for them, but there was no time for haggling in the way that a horse dealer loves. Out of the way of Alsi we must get, before he bethought him of more crafty devices. And I thought, moreover, that we should be riding towards East Anglia shortly, and it was not everywhere that a steed fit to carry Havelok on a long journey was to be had.

I had bidden him leave all this to me as we came down the hill, and glad he was to do so. Now he had dismounted, and stood by the side of the princess, speaking earnestly to her. It was plain that what he said was pleasant to her also. But we left them apart, as one might suppose.

Now came a warrior into the courtyard, and he bore more arms. It was Withelm, who had borrowed the gear of the widow's dead husband, that he might be ready for whatever might happen: and it was good to see Havelok's eyes grow bright as he spied the well-known weapons that his brother had in his arms. He said one word to Goldberga, and then came to us.

"Let me get into war gear at once," he said, laughing in a way that lightened my heart. "I shall not feel that I have shaken off service to Alsi until I have done so."

And then he saw Berthun here for the first time.

"Nay, but here is my master," he added. "And I will say that I owe him much for his kindness."



“Now the kindness shall be on your part, if any was on mine. Take me into your service, I pray you, henceforward.”

“Good friend of mine,” said Havelok, “naught have I to offer you. And how should one serve me?”

“With heart and hand and head, neither more nor less,” answered Berthun. “I have seen you serve, and now will see you command. Let me bide with you, my master, at least, giving you such service as I may.”



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“Such help as you may, rather. For now we all serve the princess,” Havelok said.

And with that Berthun was well content for the time.

“Well, then,” said I, “see to Havelok’s arms, while we get the horses ready, for I want Withelm here.”

So Havelok and his new man went into the house with his arms, and then I saw Goldberga beckoning to us. It was the first time that I had spoken to her, and I think that I was frightened, if that is what they call the feeling that makes one wish to be elsewhere. But there was nothing to fear in the sweet face that she turned to us.

“Brothers,” she said, “Havelok tells me that it was one of you who brought David the priest to me. I do not rightly know yet which is Withelm.”

With that she smiled and blushed a little, and I stood, helm in hand, stupidly enough. But my brother was more ready.

“I am Withelm, my princess—” he began.

“Nay; but ‘sister’ it shall be between me and my husband’s brothers. Now, brother Withelm, there is one thing that is next my heart, and in it I know you will help me.”

There she wavered for a moment, and then went on bravely.

“Christian am I, and I do not think that we are rightly wedded until the priest has done his part. And to that Havelok agrees most willingly, saying that I must ask you thereof, for he does not know where the old man is now.”

“Wedded in the little chapel that is in the thick of Cabourn woods shall you be, for David has gone there already. We can ride and find him before many hours are over, sweet lady of ours.”

She thanked him in few words, and with much content.

Then came forth from the house Havelok, in the arms that suited him so well—golden, shining mail shirt of hard bronze scales, and steel, horned helm, plain and strong, and girt with sword and seax, and with axe and shield slung over shoulder, as noble a warrior surely as was in all England, ay, or in the Northlands that gave him birth either; and what wonder that the eyes of the princess glowed with a new pride as she looked at her mighty husband?

But Mord almost shouted when he saw him come thus, and to me he said,

“It is Gunnar—Gunnar, I tell you—come back from Asgard to help my princess.”



“Wait till we get to Grimsby, and Arngeir will make all clear,” I said. “Get into your arms, and we will start. All is ready now.”

We did not wait for Mord, but mounted and rode out, and the princess looked round at us as she rode first beside Havelok, and said, “Never have I ridden so well attended, as I think.”

And from beside me, with broad face from under his helm, Berthun answered for us all, “Never with men so ready to die for you, at least, my mistress.”

And that was true.

Half a mile out of the town we rode at a quick trot, and then thundered Mord after us, and his hurry surely meant something. I reined up and waited for him.



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“What is the hurry, Mord?” said I.

“Maybe it is nothing, and maybe it is much,” he answered; “but Griffin of Chester has gone up to the palace, for I saw him. He has his arm in a sling, and his face looks as if it had been trodden on. Now Alsi will tell him all this, and if we are not followed I am mistaken. He would think nothing of wiping out our party to take the princess, and Alsi will not mind if he does. How shall we give him the slip?”

Withelm rode with his chin over his shoulder, and I beckoned him and told him this. Not long was his quick wit in seeing a way out of what might be a danger.

“Let us ride on quickly down the Ermin Street, and he will think us making for the south and Norwich. Then we will turn off to Cabourn, and he will lose us. After that he may hear that some of us belong to Grimsby, and will go there; but he will be too late to hurt us. Hard men are our fishers, and they would fight for Havelok and the sons of Grim.”

So we did that, riding down the old Roman way to a wide, waste forest land where none should see us turn off, and then across the forest paths to Cabourn; and there we found the hermit, and there Havelok and Goldberga were wedded again with all the rites of Holy Church, and the bride was well content.

Now while that was our way, I will say what we escaped by this plan of my brother’s, though we did not hear all for a long time. Presently we did hear what had happened at Grimsby towards this business, as will be seen.

To Lincoln comes Griffin, with Cadwal his thane, just as we had left the town thus by another road, and straightway he betakes himself to the palace. There he finds Alsi in an evil mood, and in the hall the people are talking fast, and there is no Berthun to receive him.

So, as he sits at the high table and breaks his fast beside the king, he asks what all the wonderment may be. And Alsi tells him, speaking in Welsh.

“East Anglia is mine,” he says, “for I have rid myself of the girl.”

Griffin sets his hand on his dagger.

“Hast killed her?” he says sharply.

“No; married her.”

“To whom, then?”

“To a man whom the Witan will not have as a king at any price.”



“There you broke faith with me,” says Griffin, snarling. “I would have taken her, and chanced that.”

“My oath was in the way of that. You missed the chance on the road the other day, which would have made things easy for us both. There was no other for you.”

Now Griffin curses Ragnar, and the Welsh tongue is good for that business.

“Who is the man, then?” he says, when he has done.

“The biggest and best-looking countryman of yours that I have ever set eyes on,” answers Alsi, looking askance at Griffin’s angry face. “There is a sort of consolation for you.”

“His name,” fairly shouts Griffin.

“Curan, the kitchen knave,” says Alsi, chuckling.



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“O fool, and doubly fool!” cries Griffin; “now have you outdone yourself. Was it not plain to you that the man could be no thrall? Even Ragnar looks mean beside him, and I hate Ragnar, so that I know well how goodly he is.”

Now Alsi grows uneasy, knowing that this had become plainer and plainer to him as the wedding went on.

“Why, what do you know of this knave of mine?” he asks. “He was goodly enough for the sake of my oath, and the Witan will have none of him. That is all I care for.”

“What do I know of him? Just this—that you have married the queen of the East Angles to Havelok, son of Gunnar Kirkeban of Denmark, for whom men wait over there even now. The Witan not have him? I tell you that every man in the land will follow him and Goldberga if they so much as lift their finger. Done are the days of your kingship, and that by your own deed.”

Alsi grows white at this and trembles, for he minds the wondrous ring and the names of the Asir, but he asks for more certainty.

Then Griffin tells him that he was with Hodulf, and knew all the secret of the making away with the boy, and how that came to naught. Then he says that Hodulf had heard from certain Vikings that they had fallen on Grim’s ship, and that in the grappling of the vessel the boy and a lady had been drowned. It is quite likely that they, or some of them, thought so in truth, seeing how that happened. After that Hodulf had made inquiry, and was told that there were none but the children of Grim with him, and so was content. So my father’s wisdom was justified.

“Now I learned his name the other day; and I have a ship waiting to take me at once to Hodulf, that I may warn him. I have ridden back from Grimsby even now to say that, given a chance, say on some lonely ride, that might well have been contrived, I would take Goldberga with me beyond the sea. I thought more of that than of Hodulf, to say the truth.”

Now Alsi breaks down altogether, and prays Griffin to help him out of this.

“Follow the party and take her. They are few and unarmed, and it will be easy, for men think that there is a plot to carry her off, and this will not surprise any. Go to the sheriff and tell him that it has happened, and he will hang the men on sight when you have taken them. Then get to sea with the girl, and to Hodulf, and both he and I will reward you.”

“Thanks,” says Griffin, with a sneer; “I have my own men. Yours might have orders that I am the one to be hanged. It would be worth your while now to make a friend of your kitchen knave. You are not to be trusted.”



So these two wrangle for a while bitterly, for Alsi is not overlord of Griffin in any way. And the end is that the thane rides towards Grimsby first of all, with twenty men at his heels, knowing more than we thought. But he hears naught of us, and presently meets Arngeir on his way thence to see us. Him he knows, for already he has had dealings with him in the hiring of the ship. So he learns from him that certainly no such party as he seeks is on the road, and therefore rides off to the Ermin Street to stay us from going south.



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But now we had time for a long start; and so he follows the Roman road when he reaches it all that day and part of next, and we hear no more of him at that time. There are many parties travelling on that way, and he follows one after another.

Now Arngeir knew at once that somewhat had happened when he heard from Griffin that the most notable man of those whom he sought was named Curan, and therefore he turned back at once and waited for us. And when we came in sight of the long roof of the house that Grim, our father, had built, standing among the clustering cottages of our fishers, with the masts of a trading ship or two showing above it in the haven, he was there on the road to greet us, having watched anxiously for our coming from the beacon tower that we had made.

Maybe we were two miles out of Grimsby at this time, for one can see far along the level marsh tracks from our tower; and Withelm and Mord and I rode on to him as soon as we saw him, that we might tell him all that had happened, and we rode slowly and talked for half a mile or so.

Then Withelm waited and brought Havelok to us, staying himself with the princess, that he might tell her the wondrous story of her husband; for we thought that it would be easier for him than for our brother maybe. Havelok was not one to speak freely of himself.

And when Goldberga had heard all, she was silent for a long way, and then wept a little, but at last told Withelm that all this had been foretold to her in her dream.

“Yet I am glad,” she said, “that I did not know this for certain, else had my Havelok thought that I did but wed him for his birth. Tell him, brother, that it was not so; say that I knew him as the husband Heaven sent for me when first I saw him.”

Now Havelok listened to Arngeir as he told him the well-kept secret, and now and again asked a question.

And when all was told he said, “Now have the dreams passed, and the light is come. I mind all plainly from the first.”

And he told all that had happened after Hodulf caught him, from the murder of his sisters to the time when I helped my father to take him from the sack. Only he never remembered the death of his mother or the storm, or how we came to Grimsby. Maybe it is rather a wonder that after all those hard things gone through he should recall anything, for he was nearly dying when we came ashore, as I have told.

“But I am Grim’s son,” he said, “for all this, and never shall I forget it. By right of life saved, and by right of upbringing, am I his, and by right of brotherhood to his sons.



Gunnar, who was my father, would have me say this, if I am like him, as Mord tells me I am.”

Then he looked at us in brotherly wise, as if we would maybe not allow that claim now; but there needed naught to be said between us when he met our eyes. He was Grim’s son indeed to us, and we his younger brothers for all the days that were to come.



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“One thing there is that makes me glad,” he said, “and that is because I may now be held worthy of this sweet bride of mine so strangely given, as indeed I fear that I am not. Men will say that she has done no wrong in wedding me; and for all that Alsi may say, it will be believed that she knew well whom she was wedding. There will be no blame to her.”

That seemed to be all his thought of the matter now, and it was like him. Then he went back to his princess, and we spurred on to Grimsby, and set all to work, that the greeting might be all that we could make it.

And so, when those two rode into our garth, and the gates were closed after them, we reined our horses round them, and drew our swords, and cried the ancient greeting with one mighty shout:

“Skoal to Havelok Gunnarsson—Skoal to Goldberga, Havelok’s wife! Skoal! Yours we are, and for you we will die! Skoal!”

CHAPTER XVIII. JARL SIGURD OF DENMARK.

Now one would like to tell of quiet days at Grimsby; but they were not to be. Three days after Havelok’s homecoming we were on the “swan’s path,” and heading for Denmark, with the soft south wind of high summer speeding us on the way. And I will tell how that came about, for else it may seem strange that Havelok did not see to the rights of his wife first of all.

That was his first thought, in truth, and we brothers planned many ways of getting to work for her, for it was certain that Alsi would be on his guard. And on the next day came a man from Lincoln to seek Berthun, with news. That good friend had done what none of us had been able to manage, for he had told the merchant, his friend, to bide in the hall and hear what went on, and then to let him know all else that seemed needful that we should hear. Now he had learned all from the words of Griffin and Alsi, who took no care in their speech, thinking that none in the hall knew the Welsh tongue that they used.

It being the business of a merchant to know that of every place where he trades, and he travelling widely, there was no difficulty to him, and mightily he enjoyed the sport. Then he sent off straightway to us; and now it was plain that we were in danger—not at once, maybe, but ere long. Griffin would hear sooner or later that his quarry was in Grimsby after all. So we went to our good old friend, Witlaf of Stallingborough, and told him all.

“Why,” he said, “I will have no Welsh outsiders harrying my friends. Light up your beacon if he comes, and shut your gates in his face, and I and the housecarls will take



him in the rear, and he will not wait here long. I have not had a fight for these twenty years or so, and it does me good to think of one.”

So we thought that there was little fear of the Welshman.

When I came back from this errand, however, I chose to pass the mound where my father slept, and on it, hand in hand, sat Havelok and Goldberga—for it was a quiet place, and none came near it often. It was good to see them thus in that place, and happy they seemed together.



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Goldberga called me when I came near, and I sat down beside them as she bade me.

“Here we have been talking of what we shall do now, for it seems that to both of us are many things to hand,” she said. “Good it would be if we could set them aside; but we were born to them, and we cannot let them be. And, most of all, here in this place we may not forget the duty that Grim would remind us of. Havelok must go to Denmark and win back his kingdom from Hodulf first of all.”

“We have thought that East Anglia was to be won first from Alsi,” I said.

“So says Havelok; but I do not think so. For, indeed, I am but the wife, and the things of the husband come first of all. Now, this is what I would say. Sail to Denmark before Hodulf knows what is coming, and there will be less trouble.”

“I am slow at seeing things,” said Havelok; “but the same might be said of your kingdom.”

“Alsi is ready, and Hodulf is not,” she answered, laughing; “any one can see that.

“Is it not so, brother?”

So it was; and I thought that she was right.

“Let us ask the brothers,” I said, “for here are many things to be thought of; and, first of all, where to get men.”

That was the greatest trouble to our minds, but none at all to hers.

“Get them in Denmark,” she said, when we were all together in the great room of the house that evening. “Let us go as merchant folk, and find Sigurd, or his son if he is dead. If I am not much mistaken, all the land will rise for the son of Gunnar so soon as it is known that he has come again.”

“Sigurd is yet alive,” Arngeir said; “and more than that, he is waiting. For he promised Grim that he would be ready, and I heard the promise. I think that this plan is good, and can well be managed. Here is the ship that Griffin was to have taken today, and he is not here. Gold enough I have, for Grim hoarded against this time.”

Then he showed us the store that, through long years, my father had brought together to take the place of that of Sigurd’s which had been lost; and it was no small one. And so we planned at once; and in the end we three brothers were to go with Havelok and Goldberga, leaving Mord to get to Ragnar and tell him that Goldberga was following the fortunes of her husband, and would return to see to her own if all went well. Berthun would go with him, and Arngeir would bide at home, for we needed one to whom messages might come; and while none would know us now in Denmark, either Arngeir



or Mord might be seen, and men would tell Hodulf that the men of Grim had come home, and so perhaps spoil all. Word might go to Denmark from Griffin even yet.

We had little thought of any sorry ending to our plans, for the dreams that had come so true so far cheered us. And so, with the evening tide of the next day, we sailed in the same ship that had been hired for Griffin.

But first Havelok spent a long hour on my father's mound alone, thinking of all that he owed to him who rested there. And to him came Goldberga softly, presently, lest he should be lonely in that place. And there she spoke to him of her own faith, saying that already he owed much to it. For he was making his vows to the Asir for success.



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“Shall you pray yet again to the Asir, my husband?” she asked.

“Why should I? I have vowed my vows, and there is an end. If they heed them, all is well; and if not, the Norns hinder.”

“There is One whom the Norns hinder not at all,” she said gently, and so told him how that her prayers would go up every day.

Fain was she that he also prayed in that wise to her God, that naught might be apart in their minds.

Then he said, “I have heard this from David and Withelm also, and it is good. Teach me to vow to your God, sweet wife, and I will do so; and you shall teach me to pray as you pray.”

So it came to pass that Havelok in the after days was more than ready to help the Christian teachers when they came to him; for that was how the vow that he made ran, that he would do so if he was king, and had the power.

Now there is nothing to tell of our voyage, for one could not wish for a better passage, if the ship was slow. Indeed, she was so slow that a smaller vessel that left Tetney haven on the next day reached the same port that we were bound for on the night that we came to our old home. And that we learned soon after she had come.

Into Sigurd’s haven we sailed on the morning tide, and strange it seemed to me to see the well-known place unchanged as we neared it. My father’s house was there, and Arngeir’s, and the great hall of the jarl towered over all, as I remembered it. Men were building a ship in the long shed where ours had been built, and where the queen had hidden; and the fishing boats lay on the hard as on the day when Havelok had come to us. The little grove was yet behind our house, and it seemed strange when I remembered that the old stones of its altar were far beyond the seas. I wondered if Thor yet stood under his great ash tree; and then I saw one change, for that tree was gone, and in its place stood a watchtower, stone built, and broad and high, for haven beacon.

On the high fore deck stood Havelok, and his arm was round Goldberga as we ran in, but they were silent. The land held overmuch of coming wonder for them to put into words, as I think.

Presently the boats came off to us in the old way, and here and there I seemed to know the faces of the men, but I was not sure. It was but the remembrance of the old Danish cast of face, maybe. I could put no names to any of them. And as we were warped alongside the wharf, there rode down to see who we were Sigurd the jarl himself, seeming unchanged, although twelve years had gone over him. He was younger than



my father, I think, and was at that age when a man changes too slowly for a boy to notice aught but that the one he left as a man he thought old is so yet. He was just the noble-looking warrior that I had always wondered at and admired.



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We had arranged in this way: Havelok was to be the merchant, and we his partners in the venture, trading with the goods in the ship as our own. That the owner, who was also ship master, had agreed to willingly enough, as we promised to make good any loss that might be from our want of skill in bargaining. One may say that we bought the cargo, which was not a great one, on our own risk, therefore, hiring the vessel to wait our needs, in case we found it better to fly or to land elsewhere presently. Then Havelok was to ask the jarl's leave to trade in the land, and so find a chance to speak with him in private. After that the goods might be an excuse for going far and wide through the villages to let men know who had come, without rousing Hodulf's fears.

And as we thought of all this on the voyage, Goldberga remembered that it was likely that Sigurd would know again the ring that had been the queen's, and she said that it had better be shown him at once, that he might begin to suspect who his guest was. For we knew that he was true to the son of Gunnar, if none else might still be so.

This seemed good to us all; and, indeed, everything seemed to be well planned, though we knew that there are always some happenings that have been overlooked. We thought we had provided against these by keeping the ship as our own to wait for us, however, and it will be seen how it all worked out in the end.

Now Havelok went ashore as soon as the ship was moored; and the moment that he touched land he made a sign on his breast, and I think that it was not that of the hammer of Thor, for Goldberga watched him with bright eyes, and she seemed content as she did so. He went at once to where the jarl sat on his horse waiting him, and greetings passed. I was so used to seeing men stare at my brother that I thought little of the long look that Sigurd gave him; but presently it seemed that he was mightily taken with this newcomer, for he came on board the ship, that he might speak more with him and us.

"Presently," he said, "you must come and dine with me at my hall; for the lady whom I saw as you came in will be weary, and a meal on shore after a long voyage is ever pleasant. Now what is your errand here?"

"Trading, jarl," answered Havelok.

"I thought you somewhat over warlike-looking for a merchant," said Sigurd; "what is your merchandise?"

"Lincoln cloth, and bar iron, and such like; and with it all one thing that is worth showing to you, jarl, for I will sell it to none but yourself."

Now we went aft slowly, and presently Havelok and the jarl were alone by the steering oar, by design on our part.



“This seems to be somewhat special,” said Sigurd. “What is it?”

Havelok took the ring from his pouch, and set it in the jarl’s hand without a word; and long Sigurd looked at it. I saw the red on his cheek deepen as he did so, but he said never a word for a long time. And next he looked at Havelok, and the eyes of these two met.



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"This is beyond price," said the jarl slowly. "Not my whole town would buy this. It is such as a queen might wear and be proud of."

"Should I show it to Hodulf the king, therefore?" asked Havelok, with his eyes on those of the jarl.

"Let no man see it until I know if I can buy it," answered Sigurd. "Trust it to my keeping, if you will, for I would have it valued maybe."

"It is my wife's, and you must ask her that."

Then Havelok called Goldberga from her cabin under the after deck, and the jarl greeted her in most courtly wise.

"I will trust it with you, Jarl Sigurd," she said, when he asked her if he might keep the ring for a time. "Yet it is a great trust, as you know, and it will be well to show the ring to none but men who are true."

"It is to true men that I would show it," he answered, with that look that had passed between him and Havelok already; and I was sure that he knew now pretty certainly who we were. Yet he could not say more at this time, for the many men who waited for Havelok must be told somewhat of his coming first.

Now men were gathering on the wharf to see the newcomers, and so the jarl spoke openly for all to hear.

"Come up to my hall, all of you, and take a meal ashore with me; for good is the first food on dry land after days at sea and the fare of the ship."

So he went across the gangway, and to his horse, and rode away quickly, calling back to us, "Hasten, for we wait for you. And I will find you lodgings in the town for the time that you bide with us."

Now at first that seemed somewhat hazardous, for we had meant to stay in the ship, lest we should have to fly for any reason suddenly. But it seemed that we had no choice but to do as he bade us, and we could not doubt him in any way. We should go armed, of course, as in a strange place; and, after all, unless Hodulf heard of us, and wanted to see us, he was not to be feared as yet. So I fell to wondering where our lodgings would be, and if the old families still dwelt in the houses that I had known, and then who had ours. Many such thoughts will crowd into the mind of one who sees his old land again after many years, and finds naught changed, to the eye at least.

Men have told me that, as we came into the hall presently, they thought us the most goodly company that had ever crossed its threshold; and that is likely, for at our head were Havelok and Goldberga. Raven was a mighty warrior to look on as he came next,



grave and silent, with far-seeing grey eyes that were full of watching, as it were, from his long seafaring, and yet had the seaman's ready smile in them. And Withelm was the pattern of a well-made youth who has his strength yet to gather, and already knows how to make the best use of that he has. There were none but thought that he was the most handsome of the three sons of Grim. And last came I, and I am big enough, at least, to stand at Havelok's back; and for the rest, one remembers what Eglaf said of me. But I do not think that any noticed us with those twain to look at, unless they scanned our arms, which were more after the English sort than the Danish, so far as mail and helms are concerned, and therefore might seem strange.



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The old hall was not changed at all; and handsome it seemed after Alsi's, though it was not so large. There were more and better weapons on the walls, and carved work was everywhere, so that in the swirl and heat-flicker of the torches the beams, and door posts, and bench ends, and the pillars of the high seat seemed alive with knotted dragons that began, and ended, and writhed everywhere, wondrous to look on. Our English have not the long winter nights, and cruel frosts, and deep snow that make time for such work as this for the men of the household.

There fell a silence as we came in, and then Sigurd greeted us; and we were set on the high seat, and feasted royally. On right and left of our host sat Havelok and Goldberga, and the jarl's wife next to Havelok, and Biorn the Brown, the sheriff, next to our princess. This was a newcomer here since my days, but well we liked him.

There is nothing to tell of what happened at this feast, for Sigurd asked no questions of us but the most common ones of sea, and wind, and voyage, and never a word that would have been hard for Havelok to answer in this company, where men of Hodulf's might well be present. Withelm noticed this, and said that no doubt it was done purposely, and he thought much of it.

When we had ended with song and tale, and it was near time for rest, Sigurd bade Biorn, the sheriff, take us to his house for the night, telling him that he must answer for our safety, and specially that of the fair lady who had come from so far. And then he gave us a good guard of his housecarls to take us down the street, as if he feared some danger.

"Why, jarl," said Biorn, "our guests will have a bad night if they think that in our quiet place they need twenty men to see them to bed thus!"

"Nay, but the town is strange to the lady," answered Sigurd; "and who knows what she may fear in a foreign land!"

So Biorn laughed, and was content; and we bade farewell to the jarl, and went out. And then I found that it was to my father's house we were to go, for it had been given to Biorn.

Now, I was next to Goldberga as we came to the door, and there was a step into the house which we always had to warn strangers of when it was dark; and so, in the old way, without thinking for a moment, I said to her, "One step into the house, sister."

"Ho, Master Radbard, if that is you, you have sharp eyes in the dark," said Biorn at once; "I was just about to say that myself."

"I have some feeling in my toes," I answered; and that turned the matter, for they laughed.



And then, when we were inside, and the courtmen had gone clattering down the street homewards, Biorn took the great door bar from its old place and ran it into the sockets in the doorposts, as I had done so many times; and the runes that my father had cut on it when he made the house were still plain to be seen on it, with the notches I had made with the first knife that I ever had. More I will not say, but everywhere that my eyes fell were things that I knew, even to fishing gear, for it seemed that Biorn was somewhat of a fisher, like Grim himself.



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Then they put me and my brothers into our old loft, and Havelok and Goldberga had the room that had been my father's. As for Biorn, he would be in the great room, before the fire. There was only this one door to the house, and therefore he would guard that. His thralls were in the sheds, as ours used to be, so that we and he were alone in the house.

Now, as soon as we three had gone into our old place of rest, Raven went at once, as in the old days, to the little square window that was in the high-pitched gable, and looked out over the town and sea. We used to laugh at him for this, for he was never happy until he had seen, as we said, if all was yet there.

"There are yet lights in the jarl's hall," he said, "and there are one or two moving about down in the haven. I think that there is a vessel coming in."

"Come and lie down, brother," I said. "We are not in Grimsby, and you cannot go and take toll from her if there is."

He laughed, and came to his bed; but we talked of old days and of many things more for a long while before we slept. And most of all, we thought that Sigurd the jarl knew Havelok by the token of the ring and by that likeness to Gunnar which Mord had seen, and that our errand was almost told.

So we slept without thought of any danger; but the first hour of the night in that house was not so quiet to Goldberga, for presently she woke Havelok, and she was trembling.

"Husband," she said, "it is in my mind that we are in danger in this place; for I cannot sleep by reason of a dream that will come to me so soon as my eyes are closed."

"You are overtired with the voyage," Havelok told her gently; and then he asked her what the dream was.

"It seems that I see you attacked by a boar and many foxes, and hard pressed, and then that a bear and good hounds help you. Yet we have to flee to a great tree, and there is safety. Then come two lions, and they obey you."

"I think that is a dream that comes of waves, and the foam that has followed us, and the shrill wind in the rigging, and the humming of the sail, sweet wife; and the tree is the tall mast maybe, and the lions are the surges that you saw along this shore, where is no danger."

So she was content; and then all in the house slept.



CHAPTER XIX. THE LAST OF GRIFFIN OF WALES.

Maybe it was about an hour before midnight when the first waking came to any of us, and then it was Biorn himself who was roused by footsteps that stayed at the doorway itself, after coming across the garth, and then a voice that was strange to him which bade him open. At once he caught up his axe and went to the door, and asked quietly who was there.

“Open at once,” said the man who was without; “we must speak with you.”

“Go hence, I pray you, and wait for morning,” said the sheriff. “Here are guests of the jarl’s, and they must not be disturbed.”



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“Open, or we will open for ourselves,” was the answer. “We have no time to stay here talking.”

“That is no honest speech,” quoth Biorn. “Go hence, or give me your errand from without.”

“Open, fool, or we will have the door down.”

“There is an axe waiting for you if you do that. I rede you go hence in peace, or it may be worse for you in the end.”

I suppose it was in the mind of the sheriff that here were some friends of his who had been overlong at the ale bench in the hall that evening; but on this there was a little talk outside, and then the crash of a great stone that was hurled against the door; and at that he started back and got his mail shirt on him, for the door was strong enough to stand many such blows yet. It seemed that there was more than a drunken frolic on hand. Then came another stone against the door, and it shook; and at the same moment Havelok came from his chamber to see what was amiss, for the noise had waked him. He had thrown on the feasting gear that he had been wearing; but he had neither mail nor helm, though he had his axe in his hand.

“What is the noise?” he said anxiously, seeing that Biorn was arming.

The sheriff told him quickly, and again the door was battered.

“It is a pity that a good door should be spoilt,” said Havelok, “for down it is bound to come thus. Stand you there with the axe, and I will even save them the trouble of breaking in.”

“Nay,” said Biorn; “we know not how many are there, and it were better that you should arm first. There is time.”

“Why, they think that you are alone in the house, no doubt, and will run when they find out their mistake. They are common thieves from the forest, or outlaws. Stand you by to cut down the first man that dares to enter, if there happen to be one bold enough.”

He set his axe down, and went to the bar, and began to slide it back into the deep socket that would let it free, and the men outside stayed their blows as they heard it scraping. It was a very heavy bar of oak, some seven feet long, and over a palm square.

“Now!” cried Havelok, and caught the bar from its place.

He did not take the trouble to set it down and get his axe; but as the door opened a little he stood back balancing the great beam in his hands, as a boy would handle a



quarterstaff, ready for the rush of the thieves that he expected, and so he was in the way of Biorn more or less.

Now there was silence outside, and one saw that the door was free, and set his foot to it, and flung it open, for it went inwards. And then Havelok knew that there was a stern fight before him, for the moonlight showed the grim form of Griffin, the Welsh thane, fully armed and ready.

“Stand back, friend,” cried Biorn hastily, fearing for the unarmed man, and caring nothing that beyond the foremost was a group of some half dozen more warriors.



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But he spoke too late, for as Griffin stepped back a pace on seeing his enemy himself in the doorway, Havelok had gone a pace forward, and now was outside, where he had a clear swing of his unhandy weapon.

Now Griffin gathered himself together, and spoke some few words to his men in his own tongue; but my brother paid no heed to them, for he knew what the way of the Briton was likely to be. And he was not wrong, for without warning Griffin flew on him, sword point foremost, and left handed, for he might not use the right for many a long day yet.

Biorn shouted; but Havelok was ready, and the heavy bar caught and shivered the light sword, and then swung and hurled the thane back among his men with a rib broken. Havelok followed that up, falling on the men even as their leader was among their feet. Two he felled with downright strokes, and another shrank away in time to save himself from the like fate. Then a fourth got in under his guard, and wounded Havelok slightly in the left arm; and unless Biorn had been out and beside him by that time it would have gone hard with him, for both those who were left were on him, and another was hanging back for a chance to come.

There was shouting enough now, for the Briton does not fight in silence as do the northern men, and we had waked. First of all Raven ran down to the great room, half dazed with sleep, and blaming himself for all this trouble, for he had seen that a ship was coming in, and he might have thought it possible that it had brought Griffin and his men, whose tongue had told him at once what had happened.

Now he called to us to arm quickly, and sought for a weapon for himself; and in that familiar place he went to the old corner where the oars were wont to be set. There was one, for I have said that this Biorn was a fisher, and the place that was handy for us had been so for him. That was a homely weapon to Raven, and out into the moonlight he came with it, and swept a Welshman away from Havelok's side as he came. But now more men were coming—townsfolk who had been roused by the noise—and they knew nothing of the attackers, and so thought them friends of ours, who joined us in falling on their sheriff; and there was a wild confusion when Withelm and I came down armed.

But what we saw first was a dim, white figure in the doorway of the other room; and there stood Goldberga, wide eyed and trembling.

"My dream, my dream!" she said.

But of that we knew nothing; and we could but tell her to be of good courage, for we would win through yet, and so went out to the fight.

By this time Griffin was up again, and as I came from the door he was once more ready to fall on Havelok from behind. So I thought it best to stay him, and I shouted his name,

and he turned and made for me. But there was no skill in his coming, or he did not think me worth it, for the axe had the better, and there was an end of Griffin.



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Withelm saw at once that Havelok had no weapon but the bar, and he ran to him and held out his own axe.

“Thanks, brother. Mine is inside the door. Get it for me,” said he; but now he was laughing, and doing not much harm to anyone, and as I got behind his back I saw why this was.

There was only one of Griffin’s men left, and all the rest of the crowd of half-armed men were townsfolk. Havelok and Raven were keeping these back with sweeps of their long weapons, and behind them against the wall was the sheriff, swearing and shouting vainly to bid his people hold off and listen to him. And the noise was so great that they did but think that he was calling them to rescue him from these who had taken him prisoner. It seemed that the Welshman was keeping this up also; but neither he nor any of the men cared to risk any nearness to the sweep of bar and long oar in such hands. There were many broken heads in that crowd; but it was growing greater every minute, and those who were coming were well armed, having taken their time over it. They say that there were sixty men there at one time.

Now ran Withelm with the axe, and at that Havelok parted with the door bar, and ended the last Welshman at the same time, for he hurled it at him endwise, like a spear, and it took him full in the chest, and he went down to rise no more. And at that the townsmen ran in, and we were busy for a space, until once more they were in a howling circle round us. But they had wounded Havelok again; and Biorn was at his wit’s end, for he had had to take part in the fight this time. The men were mad with battle, and forgot who he was, as it seemed. And now some raised a cry for bows.

That was the worst thing that we had to fear, and Raven called to us, “Into the house, brothers, and keep them out of it till the jarl comes. He will hear, or be sent for.”

So we went back and got into the doorway, and we could not bar it at first. But Withelm hewed off the blade of Raven’s oar, and I went out and cleared the folk away for a space, and leapt back; and Havelok and I got the door shut quickly against them as they came back on it, and we barred it with the oar loom. That was but pine, however, and it would not last long.

Outside, the people were quiet for a little, wondering, no doubt, how to rescue Biorn. He wanted to go out to them, but it did not seem safe just yet. If they grew more reasonable it might be so.

Then, as we rested thus, Goldberga came quickly, for she saw that her husband was wounded, and she began to bind his hurts with a scarf she had. She was very pale, but she was not weeping, and her hands did not shake as she went to work.



“This is my dream,” she said. “Was that the voice of Griffin that I heard? It does not seem possible; but there is none other who speaks in the old tongue of Britain here, surely.”

“There is no more fear of him,” said Havelok, looking tenderly at her. “Your dream has come true so far, if he was in it. How did it end?”



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“We fled to a tree,” she said, smiling faintly.

Havelok smiled also, for this seemed dream stuff only to all of us— all of us but Withelm, that is, for at once he said, “This door will be down with a few blows. What of that tower of yours, Biorn? Might we not get there and wait till the jarl comes?”

At that Biorn almost shouted.

“That is a good thought, and we can get there easily. Well it will be, also, for the men are wild now, and there have been too many slain and hurt for them to listen to reason.”

“Bide you here,” said Withelm, “for it is we whom they seek. Then you can talk to them.”

But he would not do that, seeing that we had been put in his charge by the jarl.

“I go with you,” he said. “Now, if we climb out of the window that is in the back of the house we can get to the tower before they know we are gone.”

We went into that chamber where Havelok had once been when he was taken from the sack, and even as I unbarred the heavy shutter and took it down, the door began to shake with a fresh attack on it. The trees of the grove were two hundred yards from the house, maybe, and among them loomed high and black the watchtower I had seen from the sea. A wide path had been cut to it, and the moonlight shone straight down this to the door of the building.

Now Biorn went out first, and then he helped out Goldberga, and after her we made Havelok go; and we called to these three to get to the tower as Withelm came next, for every moment I looked to see our enemies—if they are to be called so when I hardly suppose they knew what they were fighting about—come round to fall on the back of the house.

Because of Goldberga they went; and Biorn opened the tower door, and she passed into the blackness of its entry, but the two men stayed outside for us. And we three were all out of the house when the first of the crowd bethought themselves, and made for the back, and saw us.

At once they raised a shout and a rush, and we did not think it worth while to wait for them, as they would get between us and the tower, which was open for us. So we ran, and they were, some twenty of them, hard at our heels as we reached the door, and half fell inside, for the winding stairway was close to the entry. I think that Biorn and Havelok had made their plans as they saw what was coming, for Havelok followed us and stood in the doorway, while Biorn was just outside with his axe ready.

“Hold hard, friends!” he called, as the men came up and halted before him; “what is all this?”



“Stand aside and let us get at them,” said the foremost, panting.

“Nay,” said Biorn; “what harm have they done?”

“Slain a dozen men and lamed twice as many more,” answered several voices; “have them forth straightway.”

“They were attacked, and defended themselves,” said the sheriff, “and it is no fault of theirs that they had to do their best. Get you home, and I will answer to the jarl for them. They are the jarl’s guests.”



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Then was a howl that was strange, and with it voices which seemed to let some light on the matter.

“They have slain the jarl’s guests.”

And then came forward a big black-bearded man whom I had seen in the crowd already, and he squared up to Biorn.

“Lies are no good, master sheriff, for we know that the outlanders who spoke the strange tongue must be the guests who came.”

“I am no liar,” answered Biorn. “Is there not one man here who saw the ship and her folk this afternoon?”

Now this man seemed not to want that question answered, for he shouted to the crowd not to waste time in wrangling, but to have out the murderers; and he took a step towards Biorn, bidding him side no more with the men, but let the folk deal with them.

“You overdo your business as sheriff!” he said.

It was Biorn who wasted no more time, for he saw that here was deeper trouble than a common riot. He lifted his axe.

“Come nearer at your peril,” he said.

Then the black-bearded man sprang at him, and axe met sword for a parry or two, flashing white in the moonlight. Then one weapon flashed red suddenly, and it was Biorn’s, and back into the tower he sprang as his foe fell, and Havelok flung the door to, and I barred it.

“Up,” said Biorn; and in the dark we stumbled from stair to stair, while the crowd howled and beat on the door below us. It was good to get out into the moonlight on the roof, where we could rest. I was glad that the tower was there instead of Thor, and also that it was strong. It was no great height, but wide, and the men below looked comfortably far off at all events.

“Here is a fine affair,” quoth Biorn, sitting himself down with his back against the high stone wall round the tower top. “It will take me all my time to set this right.”

“You have stood by us well, friend,” Havelok said, “and it is a pity that you have had to share our trouble so far as this. Who was the man who fell on you?”

“That is the trouble,” answered Biorn, “for there will be more noise over him than all the rest. He was Hodulf’s steward, the man who gathers the scatt, and therefore is not liked. And all men know that there was no love lost between him and me.”



“Hodulf’s man,” said I; “how long has he been here, and is he a Norseman?”

For I knew him. He was the man who had spoken to me at the boat side when we had to fly—one, therefore, who knew all of the secret of Havelok.

“Ay, one of the Norsemen who came here with the king at the first, and is almost the last left of that crew. I suppose that you have heard the story.”

We had, in a way that the honest sheriff did not guess, and I only nodded. But I thought that we had got rid of an enemy in him, and that Griffin had fallen in with him on landing, and known him, and taken him into his counsel about us. He would have gone down to see the vessel and collect the king’s dues from her and from us at the same time. He had not come into the town till late, as we heard afterwards.



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There was no time for asking more now, however, for the shouts of the men round the door ceased, and someone gave orders, as if there was a plan to be carried out. So I went and looked over on the side where the door was to see what was on hand.

It was about what one would have expected. They had got the trunk of a tree, and were going to batter the door in. But now we were all armed, for Raven had brought Havelok's gear with him when he fetched his own. He had thought also for Goldberga, and she was sitting in the corner of the tower walls wrapped in a great cloak that she had used at sea, with her eyes on her husband, unfearing, and as it seemed waiting for the end that her dream foretold.

I called the rest, and we looked down on the men. They saw us, and an arrow or two flew at us, badly aimed in the moonlight.

"Waste of good arrows," said Havelok; "but we must keep them from the door somehow."

"Would that the jarl would come," growled Biorn, "for I do not see how we are to do that."

"If they do break in," said I, "any one can hold a stairway like this against a crowd."

"I do not want to hurt more of these," answered Havelok, looking round him. And then his eyes lit up, and he laughed. "Why, we can keep them back easily enough, after all."

He went to the tower corner, and shouted to the men below. Four or five had the heavy log that they were to use as a ram, and they were just about to charge the door with it, and no timber planking can stand that sort of thing.

"Ho, men," he cried; "set that down, or some of you may get hurt."

They set up a roar of laughter at him as they heard, and then Havelok laid hold of the great square block of stone that was on the very corner of the wall, and tore it from its setting.

"Odin!" said Biorn, as he saw that, "where do they breed such men as this?"

"Here," answered Withelm, looking at the sheriff.

Now Havelok hove up the stone over his head, and a sort of gasp went up from the crowd below. One saw what was coming, and ran to drag back the men with the beam, and stopped short before he reached them in terror, crying to them to beware. But their heads were down, and they were starting into a run.

"Halt!" cried Havelok, but they did not stay. "Stand clear!" he shouted in the sailor's way.



And then he swung the stone and let it go, while those who watched fled back as if it was cast at them. Down it crashed on the attackers, felling the man whom it struck, and dashing the timber from the grasp of the others, so that one fell with it across his leg and lay howling, while the rest gathered themselves up and got away from under the tower as soon as they might.

Now no man dared to come forward, and that angered Havelok.

“Are you going to let these two bide there?” he said. “Pick the poor knaves from under the stone and timber, and see to them.”



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But they hung back yet, and he called them “nidring.”

Thereat two or three made a step forward, and one said, “Lord, let us do as you bid us, and harm us not.”

“You are safe,” he answered, and Biorn laughed and said that this was the most wholesome word that he had heard tonight.

“Lord, forsooth! Mighty little of that was there five minutes ago.”

But it was not the terrible stone throwing only that wrung this from them, as I think. They had seen Havelok in his arms, with the light of battle on his face in the broad moonlight, and knew him for a king among men.

They took the hurt men from under the tower, and then crowded together, watching us. And some man must needs loose an arrow at us, and it rang on my mail, and that let loose the crowd again. Soon we had to shelter under the battlement, but they were not able to lodge any arrows among us, for that is a bit of skill that needs daylight. Then they dared to get to the timber once more, and we saw them coming.

Havelok took his helm, and set it on his sword point, and raised it slowly above the wall, and that drew all the arrows in a moment. Then he leapt up, and tore the stone from the other corner; and again, but this time without warning, it fell on the men below, and that wrought more harm than before. But it stayed them for a time, though not so long, for now their blood was up, and the berserk spirit was waking in them. Already the third stone was poised in the mighty hands, and would have fallen, when there was a cry of, “The jarl! the jarl!” and along the path into the clearing galloped Sigurd himself, with his courtmen running behind him, and he called on the men to stay.

They dropped the beam at the command, and were silent. And Sigurd looked up at the tower, and saw who was there, and stayed with his face raised, motionless for a space. I minded how Mord had stared and cried out when first he saw Havelok, the son of Gunnar, in his war gear.

“Biorn! where is Biorn?” cried Sigurd, looking back on the crowd as if he thought he would be there.

“Here am I, jarl,” came the answer, and the sheriff looked out from beside Havelok.

“What is all this?”

“On my word, jarl, I cannot tell. Here have I been beset in my own house, and but for your guests some of us would have come off badly. There were outlanders who fell on us, and, as I think, stirred up the folk to carry on the business, telling them that we had slain ourselves, as one might say, for it was the cry that we had slain the jarl’s guests.”



“O fools, to take up the word of a chance stranger against that of your own sheriff!”
Sigurd cried, facing the people.

“Nay, but the steward said so likewise,” cried some.

“Hodulf’s steward?” said the jarl suddenly; “where is he?”

“Yonder. Biorn slew him.”

“He was leading this crowd,” said Biorn from above, “tried to force his way into the tower
past me, and would not be warned.”



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“What of the outlanders?”

“All slain. Seven Welshmen they were.”

Then I said plainly, remembering that the jarl would have known him, “Their leader was Griffin, who came with Hodulf at the first. What brought him here, think you, Sigurd the jarl?”

But Sigurd looked round on the people, and scanned them for a long time, and at last he said, in a hush that fell when he began to speak, “Men who mind the old days, look at the man whom you have sought to kill, and say if there is that about him which will tell you why Hodulf’s men have set you on him thus.”

Then the white faces turned with one accord to Havelok, as he stood resting the great cornerstone on the battlement before him, and there grew a whisper that became a word and that was almost a shout from the many voices that answered.

“Gunnar! Gunnar Kirkeban come again!”

Then was silence, and the jarl spoke to Havelok.

“Tell us your name, and whence you come.”

“Havelok Grimsson of Grimsby men call me,” he said.

And then men knew who he was indeed, for little by little the secret had been pieced together, if not told from the king’s place, in the years that had passed. And at that there rose and grew a murmur and a cry.

“Havelok, son of Gunnar! Havelok the king!”

Then said Sigurd in a great voice, “Who is for Hodulf of us all? Let no man go hence who is for him.”

And I saw two or three men cut down then and there, and after that there was a roar of voices that called for Havelok to lead them.

“Come down, lord,” said Sigurd, unhelming and looking up.

So we went from the tower, and round Havelok the men crowded, kissing his hand and asking pardon for what they had wrought in error; and Sigurd dismounted and knelt before him, holding forth his sword hilt in token of homage, that his king might touch it.

“Only Havelok son of Gunnar dares call himself son of Grim also, and in that word all the tale is told. But I have known you from the first by the token of the ring and by this



likeness. Yet I waited for you to speak, and for the time that should be best; and now that has come of itself, and I am glad.”

So said Sigurd, as we went from the tower to the hall, with the townsmen at our heels in a wondering crowd. There were many among them who would show the wounds that Havelok had given them with pride hereafter, as tokens that they had known him well.

Then we stayed on the steps of the hall door, and the jarl called out man by man, and the war arrow was put in their hands with the names of those men who waited for the coming of Havelok, that all through the night the message that should bring him a mighty host on the morrow should go far and wide.

And the gathering word was, “Come, for the horn of the king is sounding.”

Then Sigurd said, “Speak to the people, my king, and all is done.”



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So Havelok smiled, and lifted his voice, and spoke.

“Stand by me, friends, as steadfastly as you have fought against me, and I shall be well content. And see, here is the queen for whom you will fight also. There is not one of you but will play the man under her eyes.”

Not many words or crafty, but men saw his face, and heard that which was in the voice, and they needed no word of reward to come, but shouted as we had shouted when the bride came home to Grimsby, and I thought that with the shout the throne of Hodulf was rocking.

CHAPTER XX. THE OWNING OF THE HEIR.

Worn out we were with that long fight, and we all had some small wounds—not much worth speaking of; and when these were seen to, we slept. Only my brother Raven waked, and he sat through all the rest of the short night on the high place, with his sword across his knees, watching, for he blamed himself, overmuch as we all thought, for the happenings of the attack.

“Trouble not, brother, for we were in the keeping of Biorn, and he could not have dreamt that foes could follow us over seas. It was not for you to be on guard.”

These were Withelm’s words, but for once Raven did not heed them.

“Would Grim, our father, have slept with a lee shore under him, leaving a stranger to keep watch? That is not how he taught me my duty; and I have been careless, and I know it. I should have thought of Griffin when I saw the ship come in.”

So he had his way, and the last that I saw ere my eyes closed was his stern form guarding us; and when I woke he was yet there, motionless, with far-off eyes that noted the little movement that I made, and glanced at me to see that all was well.

In the grey of the morning the first of the chiefs to whom the arrow had sped began to come in; but the jarl would not have Havelok waked, for he was greatly troubled at the little wounds that had befallen this long-awaited guest. So the chiefs gathered very silently in the great hall, and sat waiting while the light broadened and shone, gleam by gleam, on their bright arms and anxious faces. It was not possible for those who had not yet seen Havelok to be all so sure that it was indeed he. They longed to see him, and to know him for the very son of Gunnar for themselves.

Presently there were maybe twenty chiefs in the hall—men who had fought beside Kirkeban, and men who had been boys with Havelok, and some who had known his grandfather—and the jarl thought that it was time that they had the surety that they

needed, for time went on, and there was certainty that Hodulf must hear of all this morning. One could not expect that no man would earn reward by warning him.

So Sigurd went softly to the place where Havelok lay in the little guest chamber that opened out of the inner room that was the jarl's own, and he slid the boards that closed it apart gently and looked in to wake him. But instead of doing that, he came back to the hall and beckoned the chiefs, and they rose and followed him silently. And when they went Raven went also, without a word, that he might be near his charge while these many strangers spoke with him.



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Now Sigurd stood at the spot where the little shifting of the sliding board made it possible to see within the chamber, and one by one the chiefs came and peered through the chink for a moment, and stood aside for the next. And it was wondrous to see how each man went and looked with doubt or wonder or just carelessly, and then turned away with a great light of joy on his face and a new life in the whole turn and sway of the body.

It was dark in the chamber, save for the dim spaces under the eaves that let in the sweet air from the sea to the sleepers. But from somewhere aloft, where the timbering of the upper walls toward the east had shrunk, so that there was a little hole that faced the newly-risen sun, came the long shaft of a sunbeam that pierced the darkness like a glorious spear, and lit on the mighty shoulder of Havelok that lay bare of covering, and on the white hand of Goldberga that was across it. And on the one they saw the crimson bent-armed cross that was the mark of the line whence he and his father had sprung, and on the other glowed and flashed the blood-red stone of the ring of Eley the queen. And round that circle of sunshine was light enough for the chiefs to see those two noble faces, and they were content.

“Gunnar’s son,” said one old chief: “but were he only the son of Grim, for those twain would I die.”

So the warriors crept back to the hall silently as they had come; and now they went out to their men and told them that all doubt had gone, and along the road that led to Hodulf’s town the jarl sent mounted men to watch for his coming. And always fresh men were pouring in, and among them went the chiefs who had seen Havelok, and told them the news.

Now it was not long before there was a gathering of all the chiefs in the hall of Sigurd, that they might break their fast, and then they saw Havelok as he led in the princess to meet them. He stood on the high place in his arms, and a shout of greeting went up; and when it was over, Sigurd asked him to tell all that had happened to him; and he did that in as few words as might be, for he was no great speaker, though what he did say was always to the point, and left little to be asked.

And when he had ended, there rose up a grey-headed old chief, and said, “Give this warrior the horn of Gunnar, that we may hear him wind it. I would not say that unless I were sure that he was the right man to have it.”

Now I stood beside Havelok, and while Sigurd went from the hall to some treasure chamber to get this that had been asked for, I said to him, “Mind you the day when we met Ragnar. and a call came into your dream? Wind that call now; for, if I am not wrong, it will be welcome to those who knew your father.”



“I mind the day but not the call. I have never remembered it since,” he said, and I was sorry.

Sigurd brought the horn, and it was a wondrous one, golden and heavy. It seemed to be a hunting horn, not very long, and little curved, but from end to end it was wrought with strange figures of men and beasts in rings that ran round it.



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“Have you seen this before?” asked Sigurd wistfully, and looking into Havelok’s face as he gave it into his hand.

One could feel that men waited his answer, and it came slowly.

“Ay, friend, I am sure that I have, but I cannot yet say when or where. I am sure that it is not the first time that I have had it in my hand.”

And as he said this, Havelok’s face flushed a little, and his brow wrinkled as if he tried to bring back the things of that which he had thought his dream for so long.

It would seem that in the years there had grown up a tale that this was a magic horn, which none but the very son of Gunnar could wind, and to the chiefs who saw Havelok now for the first time this was a test to prove him. But all knew that the words he spoke of it were proof enough, for a pretender would have said plainly that it had been Gunnar’s, and that he knew it. I think that Sigurd was wise in what he did next, for he set another horn in my brother’s hand, and asked him the same question; and at this Havelok looked for a moment and shook his head.

“I have not seen that one before, nor one like it. I am sure that I have seen this, or its fellow.”

At that the faces that watched brightened, for there was no doubt in the way that Havelok spoke; and then the old chief who had asked for the horn said, “That—’The horn of the king is sounding’—was the gathering word of the night that has brought us here, and long have we waited for it. Let Havelok wind his father’s horn, that we may hear it once again.”

Then Havelok set it to his lips, and at once the call that he had remembered came back to him, and clear and sweet and full of longing its strange notes rang under the arched roof, unfaltering until the last; and then over him came the full remembrance of all that it had been to him, and he turned away from the many eyes and sank on the high seat, and set his head in his arms on the table, that men might not see that he needs must weep; and Goldberga stepped a little before him, and set her hand on his, for I think that she knew the loneliness that came on him.

Yet he was not alone in his sorrow, for down in the hall were men to whom the lost call brought back the memory of a bright young king riding to his home, and calling the son whom he loved with the call that he had made for him alone; and they saw the fair child running from the hall, and the mother following more slowly with smiles of welcome; and they saw the grim courtmen, who looked on and were glad; and they minded how they had lifted the boy to the war saddle; and their eyes grew hot with tears also, and they had no need to be ashamed.



And as men stood motionless, with the last notes of the wild horn yet ringing in their ears, there drifted a shadow across the days, and, lo! beside Havelok, with his hand on his shoulder, stood the form of Gunnar the king for a long moment, bright as any one of us who lived, in the morning sunlight, and his face was full of joy and of hope and promise for the time to come. And then he passed, but as he faded from us his hand was on the hand of Goldberga that clasped her husband's, as though he would wed them afresh there on the high place of his friend's hall.



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Now there went a sigh of wonder among the chiefs, and Havelok looked up as if he followed the going of one whom he would not lose, and I know that he saw Gunnar after he was unseen to us.

“Surely,” he said, “surely that was my father who was here?”

And Sigurd answered, “With your own call you called him, and he was here.”

But now the last lurking doubt was gone, and there was no more delay, for the chiefs crowded with shouts of joy to the high place, and they knelt to Havelok and hailed him as king then and there; and so they led him to the great door of the hall, and the mightiest of them raised him high on a wide shield before all the freemen who waited on the green that is round the jarl’s house, and they cried, “Skoal to Havelok the king!”

And there was in answer the most stirring shout that a man may hear— the shout of a host that hail the one for whom they are content to die.

That was the first day of the reign of Havelok the king; and now there were two kings in the land, and one was loved as few have been loved, and the other was hated. And one was weak in men, as yet, while the other was strong.

Now Sigurd bade all those who were present gather in solemn Thing, that they might make Havelok king indeed; and that was a gathering of all the best in our quarter of the land, so that all would uphold what they had done. And when they were gathered in the great hall in due order, the doors were set wide open, and outside the freemen who followed the chiefs sat in silence to see what they might and hear.

Then swore Havelok to keep the ancient laws and customs, and to do even-handed justice to all men, and to be bound by all else that a good king should hold by. Sometimes these oaths are not kept as well as they might be, but I was certain that here was one who would keep them.

Thereafter Sigurd brought forth a crown that he had had made hastily by his craftsmen from two gold arm rings, and they set it on Havelok’s head, and hailed him as king indeed; and one by one the chiefs came and swore all fealty to him, beginning with Sigurd, and ending with a boy of some seventeen winters, who looked at the king he bent before as though he was Thor himself.

Then they would have had Havelok forth to the people at once; but he bade them hearken for a moment, and said, taking Goldberga by the hand, “Were it not for this my wife, I do not think that I had been here today, and without her I am nothing. Now I am king by your word, and I think that I might bid you take her as queen. But I had rather that she was made queen by your word also, that whither I live or fall in the strife that is to come, you may fight for her.”



At that there was a murmur of praise, and all agreed that she should be crowned at once. So Havelok set the crown on her head while the chiefs in one voice swore to uphold her through good and ill, as though she were Havelok himself.

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Then said Havelok, "Now have you taken her for queen for her own sake, and I will tell you a thing that has not been heard here as yet. On this throne sits the queen of two lands, and there shall come a day when you and I shall set your lady on that other throne which is hers by right. King's daughter she is, for Ethelwald of the East Angles was her father, and out of her right has she been kept by Alsi of Lindsey, her evil kinsman."

At that men were glad, for great is the magic of kingly descent. And thereupon that old warrior who had bidden Havelok sound the horn said, "We have heard of Ethelwald the good king, and of this Alsi moreover, and we know men who have seen both, and also Orwenna, the mother of our own queen here. I followed your father across the seas in the old days, and I seem to hear his voice again as you speak to us. And I saw him— ay, I saw him yonder even now, and I am content. When the time comes that for the sake of Goldberga you will gather a host and cross the 'swan's path,' I will not hold back, if you will have me."

There was spoken the mind of all that company, and they were not backward to say so. For in the heart of the Dane is ever the love of the sea, and of the clash of arms on a far-off strand that comes after battle with wind and wave.

Very bravely did Goldberga thank the chiefs for their love to her husband and herself in a few words that were all that were needed to bind the hearers to her, so well and truly were they chosen. And she said that if the Anglian land was to be won it was for Havelok and not for herself altogether, and she added, "Here we have spoken as if already Hodulf was overthrown, and it is good that we are in such brave heart. Yet this has been foretold to me, and I am sure that there will be no mishap."

Then Sigurd said, "What gift do we give our queen, now that she has come among us?"

But Goldberga replied, "If it is the custom that one shall be given, I will mind you of the promise hereafter, when Anglia is won, and you and I are Havelok's upholders on that throne. There is one thing that I will ask then, that a wrong may be righted."

"Nay, but we will give you some gift now, and then you shall ask what you will also."

"You have given me more than I dared hope," she said, "even the brave hearts and hands that have hailed us here. I can ask no more. Only promise to give me one boon when I need it, and I am happy."

Then they said, "What you will, and when you will, Goldberga, the queen. There is naught that you will ask amiss."



Now they showed Havelok to the warriors as crowned king, and I need not tell how he was greeted. And after that we all went back into the hall to speak of the way in which we were to meet Hodulf.

Havelok would have a message sent to him, bidding him give up the land in peace.

“It may be that thus we shall save the sadness of fighting our own people, though, indeed, they love the playground of Hodulf. He is an outlander, and perhaps he may think well to make terms with us.”



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Some said that it was of no use, but then Havelok answered that even so it was good to send a challenge to him.

“For the sake of peace we will do this, though I would rather meet him in open fight, for I have my father to avenge.”

Now I rose up and said, “Let me go and speak with him, taking Withelm as my counsellor. For I know all the story, and that will make him sure that he has the right man to fight against. I will speak with him in open hall, and more than he shall learn how he thought to slay Havelok.”

All thought that this was good, and I was to go at once. It was but a few hours' ride, as has been said, to his town, and the matter was as well done with.

So they gave me a guard of twenty of the jarl's courtmen, and in half an hour I was riding northward on my errand. And to say the truth I did not know if it was certain that I should come back, for Hodulf was hardly to be trusted.

I did wait to break my fast, and that was all, for I had no mind to spend the night on the road back from the talk that I should have had; but though I wasted so little time, the people were already beginning to prepare for rejoicing in their own way with games of all sorts and with feasting in the open. I saw, as we rode down the street, the piles of firewood that were to roast oxen whole, and near them were the butts that held ale for all comers. There were men who set up the marks for the archers, and others who staked out the rings for the wrestling and sword play. And as we left the town we met two men who led a great brown bear by a ring in his nose, for the baiting. I was sorry for the poor beast, but the men called him “Hodulf,” already, and I thought that a good sign in its way.

Another good sign, and that one which could not be mistaken, was to see the warriors coming in by twos and threes as the news reached them. They were dotted along the roads from all quarters, and across the heaths we saw the flash of the arms of more.

And ever as they met us they hailed us with, “What cheer, comrades? Is the news true? Is Havelok come to his own?” and the like, and they would hurry on, rejoicing in the answer that they had.

But I will say that presently, when we passed a stretch of wild moor where we saw no man, the same was going on towards the town of Hodulf; for if the news came to a village, some would be for the king that was, and other and older men for the king that might be. Yet all asked that question; and more than once, when they heard the reply, there would be a halt and a talk, and then the men would turn and cast in their lot with the son of Gunnar, hastening to him with more eager steps than had taken them to Hodulf.

CHAPTER XXI. THE TOKEN OF SACK AND ANCHOR.



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It seemed only the other day that I had passed over the well-known ways, and I showed Withelm the hollow where Grim had met with the king and taken his precious burden from him. Then we passed along the wild shore, and the linnets were singing and the whinchats were calling as ever, and the old mounds of the heroes of the bygone were awesome to me now as long ago, when I looked at them standing lonesome along the shore with only the wash of the waves to disturb them. And so we came to the town at high noon, and already there was the bustle of a gathering host in the place, for the news had fled before us.

They had built a new and greater hall in place of that which had been burned; and there sat Hodulf with his chiefs, wondering and planning, and maybe waiting for more certain news of what had happened. Not long would they wait for that now.

We rode to the door, and one came to meet us with words of welcome, thinking that we were men who came to the levy that was gathering; but his words stayed when I asked to be taken to the presence of Hodulf, as I came with a message from Havelok Gunnarsson the king.

The man, chamberlain or steward, or whatever he was, stared at me, and said in a low voice, "It is true then?"

"True as I am Radbard Grimsson, who helped Havelok to fly from hence."

"Unwelcome will you be, for Hodulf is in no good mood," the man said. "I hardly think it safe for you to trust yourself with him."

"Then," said I, "open the door of the hall, and I will go in with my men, and see what he says."

"Well, that will be bad for me, but I have a mind to see Havelok."

So I told Withelm to come at my side, and bade half the courtmen follow us closely, and when they were inside to see that the door was not barred after us on any pretence. The rest would bide with the horses outside.

Then we loosed the peace strings of our weapons, and in we went, quietly and in order; and the chiefs turned to look at us, thinking us more of themselves. Hodulf sat on his place on the dais, and there were thirty-one others with him, sitting on the benches that were set along the walls. Withelm counted them.

Then the door was closed, and the man with whom I had spoken set his back against it, but it was not barred; and I went forward to the steps of the high place, and stood before Hodulf.

"Well, what now?" he said, seeing that I was a stranger.



“First of all, I ask for safe conduct from this hall as a messenger from king to king.”

“That you have, of course,” he answered. “What is your message?”

It did not seem that he thought of Havelok at all, but rather that I came from some king to whom he had sent. There were two living not so far off. I thought that there was no good in beating about the bush, for such an errand as mine had better he told boldly. So I spoke out for all to hear.



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“This is the word of Havelok, son of Gunnar the king, to Hodulf of Norway, who sits in his place. Home he has come to take his own, and now he would tell you that the time has come that he is able to rule the kingdom for himself.”

“And what if he has?” said Hodulf, without the least change of face, as if he had been expecting this, and nothing more or less.

But if he was quiet, the chiefs had heard my words in a very different way. Some had leaped up, and others bent forward, to hear the answer to my words the better. I heard one or two laugh; but there were some on whose faces seemed to be written doubt and anxiety. I think that some would have spoken, for Hodulf held up his hand for silence, and looked to me for answer.

“It will be well for you to give up the throne to him, making such terms as you may,” I said.

“That is a fair offer,” said Hodulf, quite unmoved, to all seeming, but looking at me in a way that told me how his anger was held back by main force, as it were; “but how am I to know that this one who sends so bold a message is the real Havelok? I am not a fool that I should give up my throne to the first who asks it. Doubtless you bring some token that you come from the very son of Gunnar.”

“It is right that you should ask one, and also that you should have one that there can be no mistaking,” I said. “This is it. By the token of the sack and the anchor I bid you know that Havelok sends me to you.”

At that the face of Hodulf became ashy grey beneath the tan of wind and sea, and I saw that his hand clutched the hilt of his sword so that the knuckles of his fingers grew white. He had never thought to hear of that deed again, and he knew that he had to deal with the one whom he had thought dead. Some of the young chiefs in the hall laughed at that token, but he flashed a glance at them which stayed the laugh on their lips.

“I know not what you mean,” he said, altogether staggered.

“It is right,” I said, “that if the token is not plain I should make it so. It is but fair also to the chiefs who are here.”

Then he stayed me. True it is that old sin makes new shame.

“I will take it as enough,” he said hastily. “I mind some old saying of the kind. Ay, that is it—a hidden king and a voyage across the sea. It is enough.”

“Not enough,” said a chief in the hall close to the high seat. “Let this warrior say what he means plainly.”



There were many who agreed to this, and I did not wait for Hodulf any longer. I told them who I was, and then showed them why that token was to be held enough for any man; and as I spoke, there were black looks toward the high seat among the older men. As for Hodulf, he sat with a forced smile, and seemed to listen indulgently, as to a well-made tale.

And after that the matter was out of my hands, for the same chief who had asked for the tale came and stood by my side, and he faced Hodulf and spoke.



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“For twelve years have I served you as king, and now I know that I have wasted the faith I gave you. What became of the sisters of Havelok? Answer me that, Hodulf, or I will go and ask their brother concerning whom you have lied to me.”

“Go and ask him,” answered Hodulf, biting his lips; “go and hear more lies. Who can know the son of Gunnar when he sees him?”

“That is answered out of your own mouth,” said the chief. “Is Sigurd a fool that he should hail the first man who asks him to do so?”

And from beside me Withelm answered also, “Maybe it is a pity that Griffin of Wales was slain last night in trying to kill Havelok. He knew him, and I have heard that he came here to warn Hodulf that his time was come.”

Hodulf’s face grew whiter when he heard that; but it was what he needed, as some sort of excuse to let loose his passion.

White and shaking with wrath and fear, he rose up and he cried, “Murdered is Griffin! Ho, warriors, let not these go forth!”

Whereon the old chief lifted his voice also, “Ho, Gunnar’s men! Ho, men who love the old line! To Grim’s son, ahoy!”

And he drew his sword, snapping the thongs that had bound it to the sheath, so manfully tugged he at them in his wrath, and there was a rush of men to us, and another to Hodulf.

Now I think that we might have slain him there, and after that have been slain ourselves, for the odds were against us, even though I had the courtmen; but that was Havelok’s deed to do, for the sake of father and sisters to be avenged, and so we only cut our way out of the hall to the door, which my men threw open at once. There were two of Hodulf’s men hurt only, for the most of them had run to the high place, and few were between us and our going. So we took five chiefs and their followers back with us, and that was worth the errand.

We thought that it would not be long now before Hodulf was on us; but the days passed, and there was no news of him, and all the while we grew stronger. I do not know if the same could be said of him, and it is doubtful if time made much difference to his forces. Those who followed him were the men who owed all to him, either as men raised to some sort of power when he first came, or else strangers whom he had brought in with him. Some of the younger chiefs of the old families held by him also, for they had known no other, and then there were old feuds with Gunnar that held back some from us; but these few took part with neither side.



So before a week was out we had a matter of six thousand men in and about the town; and it seemed that, with so good a force, it was as well to march on Hodulf as to wait for him. And that was good hearing for us all, for there was not a man who did not long to be up and doing, though to smite a blow for Havelok should be the last deed that he might do.

They made me captain of the courtmen who were Havelok's own, maybe because I had served with Alsi, and Withelm was captain of Goldberga's own guard. High honour was that for the sons of Grim, for there was not one in either of these companies but was of high birth; but then we were Havelok's brothers, and all seemed well content to serve under us. I wanted Raven to be in my place, but he said that he was no warrior on shore.



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“Just now I am Havelok’s watchdog, to be at his heels always. Presently, if he likes to give me a ship when we sail to England, that will suit me.”

So Havelok made him his standard bearer; and as that would keep him at the king’s side in the thickest fight, he was well pleased. Goldberga wrought the standard that he bore, with the help of Sigurd’s wife, and on it was the figure of Grim, sword and shield in hand, but with his helm at his feet, as showing that he had laid it by; and on either side of him stood Havelok and his wife, each with a crown above their heads, as though they waited for the coming time when they should be set there firmly by the bearing forward of this banner. Havelok bore his axe, holding out the ring to Goldberga with the other hand, while she had her sceptre in the left, and stretched the right hand to her husband. There were runes that told the names of these three, for that is needful in such work, as it passes the skill of woman to make a good likeness, nor do I think it would be lucky to do so if it could be compassed. Wondrous was the banner with gold and bright colours, and it was hung from a gilded spear, ashen hafted, and long, that it might be seen afar in battle.

Now on the day when Havelok set his men in order for the march on Hodulf word came that he was coming at last. It is likely that he knew we were on the point of marching, and would choose his own ground on which to wait for us. So we went to certain battle, as it seemed, and none were sorry for that. So in the bright sunshine of a cloudless morning Havelok and Goldberga rode down the line of the men, who would fight to the death for them, and those two were good to look on. Day and night Sigurd’s weapon smiths had wrought to make a mail shirt that should be worthy of a king, and I thought that they had wrought well. They had set a crown round the helm that they made for him, and Sigurd had given him a sword that had been his father’s at one time, golden hilted, and with runes on its blue blade. But Havelok would not part with the axe that Grim had given him, plain as it was, and that was his chosen weapon.

But for once I think that men looked more at her who rode at Havelok’s side than at him, goodly and kingly as he was in the war gear. For Goldberga had on a silver coat of chain mail, and a little gold circlet was round the silver helm that she wore, while at her saddle bow was an axe, on which were runes written in gold, and a sword light enough for her hand was in a gem-studded baldric from her shoulder. There was a chief who had given her these, and it was said that they had first of all belonged to one who had fought as a shield maiden at the great battle of Dunheidi, by the side of Hervoer, the sister of the mighty hero Angantyr. His forefather had won them at that time, and now they were worn by one who was surely like the Valkyries, for no fairer or more wondrous to look on in war gear could they be than our English queen.



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She would have gone even into the battle with Havelok, but that neither he nor we would suffer. She was to bide here in the town until we came back in triumph or defeat; and as men looked on her, they grew strong, that no tears might be for those bright eyes.

Now I left them before the march began, for I and the courtmen were to go forward and see where the foe was posted, and so bring word again. And we went some five miles before we saw the first sign of them. Then on a rise in the wild heath waited a few horsemen, who watched us for a little while, and then rode away from us and beyond it. We followed them, and when we came to where they had been, we saw that they had fallen back on a company of about the same strength as ours, save that there were more horsemen. I was the only mounted man of my little force, and that rather to save my strength than because I liked riding. I should certainly fight on foot, as would Havelok himself, in the old way. It is not good to trust to the four feet of a horse when one means business.

We bided where we were, waiting to see what these men did, and soon beyond them grew the long cloud of dust starred with shifting sparks that told us that the host of Hodulf was on foot and advancing. It seemed to me that here we had a good place to meet it, for the land went down in a long slope that was in our favour, and therefore I set a man on my horse, and sent him back with all speed to Havelok to bid him hasten. Our host was not so far behind me, and I could see both from this hill. We had full time to take position here before Hodulf's army was in reach.

Now it seemed that the foemen would see what they could also, and they began to move toward us. It was plain that we should have a small fight on our own account directly, for I did not mean to let them take our place. We moved, therefore, toward them, and at that the half-dozen horsemen made for us at a trot. Then I saw that their leader was Hodulf himself.

We were in a track that led across the hill, and here on the slope it was worn deep with ages of traffic between the two towns, and on either side the heather grew thick and high, so that the horsemen could not get round us. So Hodulf rode forward to where we barred the way, and told me to stand aside.

"What next?" I asked. "I may as well bid you go back, for I came here to stop you."

"Come over to me, and leave this half-crowned kinglet of yours. It shall be worth your while."

"Hard up for men must you be, Hodulf," said one of my courtmen, laughing.

At that he made a sign to his followers, for they came on us at the gallop, with levelled spears. We closed up, and hewed the spear points off, and then dealt with the horses

and men who foundered among us, and they struggled back, leaving three men and four horses in the roadway. It was bravely done, too, for there were only eight of them, and they did us no harm beyond a bruise or two. I wished that we had taken or slain Hodulf, however, for that might have made things easier in the end.



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Hodulf got back to his courtmen, and now they came on. At that moment over the hill behind us rode Havelok and Raven, and saw at once what was on hand. They had ridden on, but the host was hard after them.

“Send a man to bid the host halt,” Havelok said to me, “for we can end the matter here. Now shall I be hand to hand with Hodulf, even as I would wish.”

I sent a man back as he bade me, and he stayed the host half a mile beyond the hill, where they were not seen. Hodulf’s army was yet two miles away across the heath, and none had gone back to hasten it.

Now Havelok went forward, holding up his hand in token of parley, and his enemy rode from his men to meet him.

“There is much between us, Hodulf,” Havelok said, “and we have been together along this road before. Yet for the sake of the men who follow us it may be that we can make peace.”

“That is for me to say,” answered Hodulf, “for you have invaded my land, and are the peace breaker.”

“I might mind you of a blood feud between us two,” said Havelok, “but that is not the business of the host. For the sake of the land I will say this. Give up the throne that you have held for me, and you shall go hence with what treasure you have gathered, taking your Norsemen with you. There will be no shame in doing that, for I am able now to hold the land for myself.”

Hodulf laughed a short laugh.

“Fine talk that for the son of Grim the thrall, who drowned Havelok for me! ‘Nidring’ should I be if I gave up to you.”

“If things must go in that way, we will settle the matter here and now. Will you that we fight hand to hand while our men look on, or shall we go back to them and charge? I like the first plan best myself, as I would avenge my father and sisters, and also that insult of the way in which we passed this road together twelve years ago.”

So said Havelok, and his words fell like ice from his lips, and he was very still as he spoke, though the red flush crept into his cheek and his brows lowered.

And Hodulf did not answer at once. He looked at the towering young warrior before him, and maybe into his mind there crept the thought of the children whom he had slain, whom this one would avenge. Well he knew that the true Havelok was speaking with him, though he would not own it, and branded my father with the name of thrall for the sake of insult to his foster son.



At last he said, "We will go back to the men, for you have advantage in that bulk of yours."

"As you will," answered Havelok. "Twelve years ago that was on your side."

He reined round at once, and touched his horse with the spur without another glance at his enemy. And then we shouted, and Raven spurred forward with a great oath, for Hodulf plucked his sword from the scabbard, and with a new treachery in his heart, rode after our brother and was almost on him. The shout was just in time, for Havelok turned in his saddle as the blow was falling.



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Quick as light, he took it on the shaft of the spear he carried, and turned it, wheeling his horse short round at the same time. Lindsey training was there in that horsemanship of his. Hodulf's horse shot past as the blow failed, and then Raven seemed to be the next man to be dealt with.

But Havelok called to him to stand aside, for this was his own fight; and at that Hodulf had his horse in hand again, and was ready to meet his foe fairly.

And now Havelok had cast aside the spear, and taken the axe from the saddle bow; and these two met, unshielded, for neither had time to unsling the round buckler from his shoulder.

It was no long fight, for now Hodulf's men were coming up, and there need be no more thought of aught but ending one who was ready to smite a foul blow before us all shamelessly. Havelok spurred his horse, and the two met and closed for one moment. Then down went the Norseman with cleft helm, and the old wrongs were avenged, and there was but one king in the land.

Then Hodulf's men were on Havelok, but not before Raven was at his back, and over Hodulf there was a struggle in which Havelok was in peril for a short time before we closed round him. Well fought the courtmen of the fallen king, and well fought my men, and we bore them back, fighting every foot of ground, until there were only five of them left, and these five yielded in all honour, being outnumbered. Yet ours was a smaller band by half ere there was an end.

It had not lasted long, and still the host of Hodulf was so far off that they knew not so much as that there was any fighting. Then we went to the hilltop, and set the banner there, and our line came on and halted along the crest.

One hardly need say what wonder and rejoicing there was when it was known how Hodulf had met his end, and Sigurd and other chiefs went to where we had fought, and looked on him. And one took the helm, which had round it the stolen crown, and gave it to Havelok.

"Set it on the standard," he said, "for we may need that it shall be shown presently. As for Hodulf, bear him aside out of the path of the host, that we may lay him in mound when all is ended."

One cried that he did not deserve honour of any kind, and there were some who agreed to that openly. I will not say that I was not one of them, for I had seen the foul play, and heard the insult to Grim, my father.

But Havelok answered gravely, "He has been a king, and I have not heard that he was altogether a bad one. All else was between him and me, and that is paid for by his



death. Think only of the twelve years in which you have owned him as lord, and then you will know that it is right that he should be given the last honours. You had no feud as had I.”

Then they did as he bade them, and that gladly, for the words were king-like, and of good omen for the days to come. I saw Sigurd and the older chiefs glance at each other, and it was plain that they were well pleased.



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Now the host came on, and it was greater than ours; but when there was no sign of its leader the march wavered, and at last halted altogether. Whereon some chiefs rode to speak to us, and Havelok met them with his leaders. He had to speak first, for they could not well ask where Hodulf was. The helm was a token that told them much.

“I met your king even now,” he said, “and I offered him peace and honourable return to Norway with his property if he would give up the throne that is mine by right. Maybe I was wrong in thinking that he might do so, but he refused. There were certain matters between us two, besides that of the crown, which needed settling; and therefore, after that, I challenged him to fight on these points, that being needful before they were done with. So we fought, and our feud was ended. Hodulf is dead, and his courtmen would not live after him while there was a chance of avenging his fall. That was before the host came up. Now I offer peace and friendship to all, and I can blame none who have held to the king who has fallen. It was not to be expected that all would own me at once. Only those Norsemen who came with Hodulf or have come hither since must leave the land, and they shall go in honour, taking their goods with them. Their time is up; that is all.”

It was a long speech for Havelok, but in it was all that could be said. Long and closely did the chiefs look at him as he spoke, for none of them had seen him before. His words were not idly to be set aside either, and they spoke together in a low voice when he had ended.

“This is a matter for the whole host to settle,” one said at last. “We will speak to them, and give you an answer shortly.”

“Take one of Hodulf’s courtmen with you, that he may tell all of the fight,” Havelok said: “he need not come back.”

I gave the man his arms again, for he might as well have them if he stayed.

“Thanks, lord,” he said. “Here is one who will tell the truth for Havelok.”

Then our host sat down, and we watched the foemen as the news came to them. We could not hear, of course, for they were a quarter of a mile away, but if any tumult rose we should be warned in time. They were very still, however. There was a long talk, and then one chief came back to us.

“I am going to ask a strange thing,” he said, “but the men wish to see Havelok face to face.”

Now Sigurd said that this was too great a risk, and even Withelm agreed with him.

But Havelok answered, “The men are my own men, but they are not sure that I am the right king. It is plain that I am like my father, and therefore it is safe for me to go.”

“That,” said the chief, “is what we told them, and what they wish to see.”

“Then,” said Havelok, “I will come. Bid your men sit down, and bid the horsemen dismount, and I will ride to them with five others. Then can be no fear on either side.”



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“That will do well,” said Sigurd; and the chief went back, and at once the host sat down.

Then Havelok rode to them, and with him went we three and Sigurd and Biorn.

There was a murmur of wonder as he came, and it grew louder as he unhelmed and stayed before them.

And then one shouted, “Skoal to Havelok Gunnarsson!” and at once the shout was taken up along the line. And that shout grew until the chiefs joined in it, for it was the voice of the host, which cannot be gainsaid; and without more delay, one by one the leaders pressed forward and knelt on one knee to their king, and did homage to him. Only the Norsemen held back; and presently, when we were talking to the Danish chiefs in all friendly wise, they drew apart with their men, and formed up into a close-ranked body that looked dangerous.

“Surely they do not mean to fight!” said Withelm.

Then one of them shouted that he must speak to the king, and that seemed as if they owned him at least, so Havelok went to them.

“You have heard my terms,” he said, “and I think that they are all that you could ask. What is amiss?”

“Your terms are good enough,” the speaker said, “and we know that our time is come. But we must have surety that the people will not fall on us, for we are flying, as it were. And we want the body of our king. We would not have him buried any wise, as if he was a thrall.”

“He shall be given to you, and as for the rest none shall harm you. Moreover, for that saying about your king I will add this: that if there are any of you who hold lands to which there is no Danish heir, he shall take service with me if he will, and so keep them.”

So there was no man in all the host who was not content; and that was the second king-making of Havelok, as it were, for now there was no man against him. The hosts were disbanded then and there, and we went that day to Hodulf’s town, and took possession of all that had been in his hands. Then was rejoicing over all the land, for a king of the old line was on the throne once more, and his way was full of promise.

CHAPTER XXII. KING ALSI’S WELCOME.

Now there was one thing that was in the minds of all of us, and that was the winning of Goldberga’s kingdom for her; but that was a matter which was not to be thought of yet for a long while. Two years were we in Denmark, and well loved was Havelok by all,



whether one speaks of the other kings who owned him as Gunnar's heir at once, or the people over whom he and Goldberga reigned. But we sent messages to Arngeir and to Ragnar to say that all was well, and we heard from them in time how Alsi feared what was to come, and had rather make friends with the Anglians than offend them. So he had not given out anything that was against the princess, but had told all how she had wedded the heir of Denmark, and that she had given up her land to himself, and followed her husband across the sea. It was not hard for him to feign gladness in her well-doing; and Berthun counselled Ragnar to let things be thus, and yet prepare for her return.



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In my own heart was the wish to go back to England always, for there was my home; and I found that it was the same with my brothers, for there is that in the English land which makes all who touch it love it. And there was the mound that held my father, and there were the folk among whom we had been brought up in the town that we had made; and I longed to see once more the green marshes and the grey wolds of Lindsey, and the brown waves of the wide Humber rolling shorewards, line after line. I tired of the heaths and forests and peat mosses of this land of my birth. And if that was so to me, it was a yet deeper longing in the hearts of the brothers who hardly remembered this place; and after a while we spoke of it more often.

I do not know if we said much to others, but at last the younger chiefs began to wonder when the promised time when they should cross the "swan's path" for Goldberga should come. Maybe they tired of the long peace, as a Dane will. But when that talk began, Withelm knew that things were ripe, and he told Havelok. That was in the third spring of Havelok's kingship, when it grew near to the time when men fit out their ships.

"This is what I have looked for," he said; "and now we will delay no longer, for here am I king indeed, and there is none who will rise against me. Wonderful it is that men have hailed me thus. And now I will tell you, brother, that I long for England. If I might take my friends with me, I do not think that I should care if I never came here again. It is not my home; and here my Goldberga is not altogether happy, well as the folk love her."

Thereafter he called a great Thing^[12] of all the freemen in the land, and set the matter plainly before them, asking if they minded the words he spoke when they crowned the queen, and if they were still ready to follow him to the winning of her crown beyond the sea.

There was no doubt what the answer would be; and it was said at once that the sooner the ships were got ready the better.

"Then," said Havelok, "who shall mind this land while I am away? It may be long ere I come back."

Now there was a cry that I should be king while Havelok was away, forsooth! and a poor hand I should have made at the business. But I said that it was foolishness, and that, moreover, I would go with Havelok. And when they said that this was modesty on my part, I answered that I had seen several kings, and that there was but one who was worth thinking of, and that was my brother; therefore, I would go on serving him where I could see him.

"This is what Grim, my father, said to me long ago," I said—"I was to mind the old saying, 'Bare is back without brother behind it;' and, therefore, I must see Havelok safe through this."



“Why, brother,” says Havelok, laughing, “if that saying must be remembered—and I at least know it is true—it would make for leaving you behind me here to see all fair when my back was turned.”



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Then he saw that I was grieved, for I thought for the moment that he would bid me to stay, and so I should have to do so; but he took my part.

“I cannot be without my brothers,” he said. “If I had any word in the matter—which mainly concerns the folk to be ruled, as it seems to me (for I do not know of any man who would not uphold me)—I should say that Sigurd the jarl was the right man, for all know that he is a good ruler, nor will it be any new thing to submit to him.”

That pleased all, and the end of it was that Sigurd was chosen to hold the land for Havelok.

Then Sigurd sat on the steps of the high place at Havelok’s feet, and the king said, “I have no need to tell any man here who this is, and why I think him worthy of the highest honour, for all know him and his worth as well as I. Mainly by him was the thought of my return kept in the minds of men, so that when the time came all were ready to hail me, as you have done. Therefore, as by him I am king, so I make him king also for me. He shall rule all the land while I am away, and to him shall all men account as to me. And because it is right that his kingship should be certain, I give him all his jarldom as a kingdom from henceforth, only subject to me and my heirs as overlord. King therefore he is, and none can say that you are ruled by naught but a jarl.”

Then Havelok girt on the new king’s sword, and set his own crowned helm on his head for a moment; and all the Thing hailed him gladly, for he was the right man without doubt.

Then Sigurd did homage for his new honour; and after that he rose up, and grew red and uneasy, as if there was somewhat that he wished to say, and was half afraid to do so.

Thereat some friend in the hall said, “You take your kingship worse than did Radbard himself, as it seems. What is amiss?”

“Why, I wanted to go on the Viking path with Havelok, and now it seems that I cannot.”

Then one shouted, “I never heard of a land going wrong while its king was away risking his life to get property for his men. There is no man here who is going to rise against either you or Havelok. And it is only to send a message to our great overlord to say what we are about, and he will see that the land is in peace. Nor do I think that any king would harry Havelok’s land, for he is well loved by all his peers.”

Wherefore it seemed that Sigurd must go also, and we had to set Biorn as head man while Sigurd was away; but that would only be for a month or two. So all things were ordered well, and in a month we set sail with twenty ships, and in them a matter of fifteen hundred men.



At first we thought that we would make for Grimsby; but then it seemed best to land elsewhere, and more to the south, for we would have messages sent at once to Ragnar to call East Anglia to Havelok's banner, and Alsi would have less chance of cutting us off from him. So we sailed to Saltfleet haven, which lies some twenty-five miles southward from Grimsby. Raven piloted us in safely, and there were none to hinder our landing. The town was empty, indeed, when the ships came into the haven, for all had fled in haste, except a few thralls, for fear of the Vikings.



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Yet when we sent these thralls to say that Goldberga had come for her own, the people came back and made us welcome, for her story was in every mouth; and after that we fared well in Saltfleet, and men began to gather to us.

We sent to Arngeir and to Ragnar at once, and next day the Grimsby folk were with us, but long before any word could come to Norwich, Alsi had set about gathering a host against us.

But we had not come to fight him for Lindsey, and our errand was to bid him give up her own rights to Goldberga. One must be ready with the strong hand if one expects to find justice from such a man; and Havelok had thought it possible that if we came here first we should bring him to reason at once, whereas if we went to Norfolk there would be fighting with all the host of the Lindsey kingdom before long; while if he did fight here we might save Goldberga's land from that trouble, and maybe have fewer to deal with.

So a message was to be sent to Alsi at once, bidding him know that Goldberga had come to ask for her rights, and that he might give them to her in all honour. Arngeir was to take this, for it did not seem right that a Dane should do so, and he was one who would be listened to. I was to go with him, with my courtmen as guard; and we rode to Lincoln on the fourth day after our coming to Saltfleet. Good it was to ride over the old land again, and I thought that it had never looked more fair with the ripening harvest, for when last I had seen it there was none. The track of the famine was yet on all the villages, for fewer folk were in them than in the days before the pestilence and the dearth, but these had enough and to spare.

And when these poor folk heard from us that Curan and his princess had come again for what was hers, they took rusty weapons and flint-tipped arrows and stone hammers from the hiding places in the thatch of their hovels, and went across the marshlands to where the little hill of Saltfleet stands above its haven, that they might help the one whom they had loved as a fisher lad to become a mighty king.

So we came to Lincoln, and already there was a gathering of thanes and their men in the town, and they knew on what errand we had come well enough. But they were courteous, and we were given quarters in the town at once, that we might see Alsi with the first light in the morning.

I will not say that we had a quiet night there, for we did not trust Alsi; but we had no need to fear. In the morning Eglaf came to bid us to the palace to speak with the king.

"This is about what I expected, when I heard of the mistake that our king had made," he said, "and so far you are in luck. It is not everyone who is a fisher one day and captain of the courtmen next, as one might say. I like the look of your men, and I am going to take some of the credit of that to myself, for a man has to learn before he can command."

“I will not deny your share in the matter,” I answered, laughing, “for had it not been for my time with you I had been at sea altogether. Now, shall we have to fight you?”



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He shrugged his broad shoulders.

“Who knows what is in the mind of our king? I do not, and you know enough of him by this time to be certain that one cannot guess. He may be all smiles and rejoicing that his dear niece has come back safely, or just the other way. He has been very careful how he has dealt with the Norfolk thanes of late, and what that means I do not know.”

Then he asked what had become of Griffin, and I told him. I do not think that he was surprised, for some word of the matter had reached here by the news that chapmen bring from all parts.

Now there was no more time for talk, for we came to the hall; and we went in, Arngeir leading, and the rest of us following two by two. The hall was pretty full of thanes and their men, and it was just as I had last seen it. Alsi sat alone on his high seat, and there was no man with him on the dais. I thought that he looked thinner and anxious.

Arngeir went up the hall at once, and stood before the king, and greeted him in the English way, which seemed strange to me after the two years of Danish customs; and then Alsi bade him tell his errand.

“I have come from Goldberga of East Anglia, and from Havelok the Dane, her husband, to say that she has returned to her land, and would ask that you would give her the throne that you have held for her since the day that her father made you her guardian. It has been said that she might ask you to give account of your management of the realm to her; but that she does not wish to do, being sure that all will be rightly done in the matter, and she only asks to be set in the place that was her father’s.”

So said Arngeir, plainly, and I could see that the thanes thought the words good.

And Alsi answered, “Has this matter been put before the Witan of the East Angles?”

I suppose that he thought to hear Arngeir say that there had been no time for so doing at present, but my brother was readier than I should have been.

“Doubtless it has,” he said, “for that was your own promise to Goldberga on her marriage.”

At that Alsi flushed, and his brows wrinkled. He had said nothing to the Witan at all, but had waited in hopes that he should hear no more of his niece, telling the tale that we had heard.

“I have had no answer from them,” he said at last, for Arngeir was looking at him in a way that he could not meet. “It was her saying that she would do this for herself.”



“Then they do not refuse,” said Arngeir quietly, “nor did I think that they would do so. It only remains therefore, that you, King Alsi, should do your part. Then can the queen speak to the Witan, even as she said, concerning her husband.”

Now it must have been clear to the king that nothing short of a plain answer would be taken, and he sat and thought for a while. One could see that he was planning what to say, as if things had not gone as he expected. Maybe he hoped to put off the matter by talk of asking the Witan, and so to gain time, for we had certainly taken him unawares.



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At last he said, "How am I to know that you are here with full power to speak for Goldberga? For this is a weighty matter."

Arngeir held out his hand, and on it was the ring of Orwenna the queen, which Alsi had last seen here on the high place.

"There is the token, King Alsi, and it is one which you know well," he answered.

"Ay, I know it," answered the king with a grin that was not pleasant.

And then he said, "I will speak with my thanes, and give you word to carry back in an hour's time, now that I know you to be a true messenger."

"There should be no reason for waiting so long as that, nor do I think that the matter of the throne of East Anglia is a question for Lindsey thanes," answered Arngeir at once. "All this is between you and the princess."

Thereat one of the thanes rose up and said, "If a kingdom has been handed over to our king, it is not to be taken again without our having a good deal to say about it. I do not know, moreover, if we can have a foreigner over any part of our land."

"Goldberga never gave up her right to the kingdom," Arngeir answered, "as anyone who was here at the wedding would tell you. And as for Havelok, her husband, being a foreigner, it seems to me that a Jute who has been brought up here in Lindsey since he was seven winters old is less a foreigner than a Briton is to us."

None made any answer to that, and I could see that the king was growing angry at being met thus at every turn. But he began to smile in that way of his that I had learned to mistrust.

"That is not altogether courteous to either Goldberga or myself," he said, as if he would think the words a jest, seeing that he was half Welsh. "Give me time, I pray you, to think of this, as I have asked, and you shall go back with your answer."

There was no help for it, and we had to leave the hall in order that Alsi might say what he had to say to his thanes. And I said to Arngeir that it seemed that we should have to fight the matter out.

"Alsi risks losing both kingdoms if he does that," he answered, "for we shall take what we choose if we are the victors. The visions that have been thus right so far say that we shall be so."

"I shall be glad if we do come out on the right side," I said; "but I have not so much faith in these dream tellings as some. Nor do I think that it seems altogether fair to fight on a certainty."



“When it is a matter of punishing one who does not keep faith, I do not think that it matters much,” he answered, laughing. “I should like certainty that he would not get the best of the honest side in that case.”

We were outside on the wide green within the square of the Roman walls at this time, and now from within the hall came the sound of shouts and cheering which we heard plainly enough. But whether it meant that the thanes cheered Alsi because he would fight, rather than that they applauded his justice to his niece, was not to be known as yet. As for me, I thought that it was hardly likely to be the latter.



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Then came three thanes from the hail with the message, and it was this, "Alsi bids Havelok go back to his own land and bide content therewith."

"What word is there for Goldberga, then?" asked Arngeir.

"None. She has thrown in her lot with the Dane, and it is he with whom we will not deal."

Then said I, "How was it that she had to throw in her lot with Havelok? He was Alsi's own choice for her."

"That is not what we have heard," the spokesman answered. "Now it is best that you go hence, for you have the answer."

"This means fighting for Goldberga's rights," said Arngeir, "and I will tell you that Havelok will not be backward in the matter."

"In that case we shall meet again on the battlefield ere long," answered the thane. "I will not say that Havelok is in the wrong, and things might have been better settled. Farewell till then. The Norns will show who is right."

So we went, and I thought, as did Arngeir, that there was some little feeling among his men that Alsi was wrong.

Now Alsi set to work to gather forces in earnest, and he went to work in a way that was all his own: for, saying nothing about Goldberga, he sent to all his thanes with word that the Vikings had come in force and invaded the land, led by the son of Gunnar Kirkeban, whose ways were worse than those of his father, for he spared none, whereas Kirkeban harried but the Welsh Christian folk. He prayed them therefore to hasten, that this scourge might be driven back to the sea whence he came. And that brought men to him fast, for no Englishman can bear that an invader shall set foot on his shore, be he who he may. Few knew who the wife of Havelok was at that time, but I do not know that it would have made so much difference if they had. None thought that into England had come the fair princess who was so well loved.

Sorely troubled was Goldberga when she heard this answer, but it was all that the rest of us looked for. And the next question was how best to meet the false king.

In the end we did a thing that may seem to some to have been rash altogether, but it was our wish to compel Alsi to fight before his force was great enough to crush us. It might be long before Ragnar could raise a host and join us, for there was always a chance that he might have trouble in getting the Norfolk thanes to come to his standard for a march on Lindsey. If we had gone to Norfolk at once there would have been no fear of that kind, but the fighting might have been more bitter and longer drawn out.



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We sent the fleet southward into the Wash, that it might wait for us at the port of the Fosdyke, on what men call the Frieston shore; and then we left Saltfleet and marched across country to the wolds, and southward and westward along them, that we might draw Alsi from Lincoln. And all the way men joined us for the sake of Curan, whom they knew, and of Goldberga, of whom they had heard, so that in numbers at least our host was a great one. Ragged it might be, as one may say, with the wild marshmen, who had no sort of training and no chiefs to keep them in hand; but I knew that no host Alsi could get together had any such trained force in it as we had in the fifteen hundred Vikings, for they had seen many fights, and the ways of the sea teach men to hold together and to obey orders at once and without hesitating.

So we went until we came to Tetford, above Horncastle town; and there is a great camp on a hilltop, made by the British, no doubt, in the days when they fought with Rome. There we stayed, for Alsi was upon us. We saw the fires of his camp in the village and on the hillsides across the valley, but a mile or two from us that night; and it seemed that his host was greater than ours, as we thought it would be, but not so much so as to cause dread of the battle that was to come.

Now there were two men who came to us that night, and we thought that they had brought some message from Alsi at first. But all that they wanted was to join Havelok, and we were glad of them. They were those two seconds of Griffin's, Cadwal and the other, whose name was Idrys, and with them was David the priest, who had fled to us.

"We know that Havelok is one who is worth fighting for," they said, "for we have proved it already. We are not Alsi's men, and our fathers fought for his mother's Welsh kin against the English long ago. Let us fight for the rights of Goldberga, at least."

Havelok welcomed them in all friendliness, though he asked them if they had no grudge against him for the slaying of Griffin.

"As to that," they said, "after the duel we think that he deserved all that has befallen him. We were ashamed to be his seconds."

Now these two took in hand to lead the marshmen, and set to work with them at once, for they were ready to follow them as known thanes of the British. And that was something gained.

We slept on our arms that night, and all night long David woke and prayed for our success, and I think that his prayers were not lost.

CHAPTER XXIII. BY TETFORD STREAM.

In the early morning Alsi set his men in order in the valley, and seemed to wait for us to come down to him, for it was of no use to try to take the strong camp which sheltered



us. And so, after council held, we did not keep him waiting, but left the hill and marched on him. We had the camp to fall back on if things went the wrong way, and beyond that the road to the sea and the ships was open, with a chance of meeting Ragnar on the way, moreover.



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Very long and deep seemed the line as we neared it, and it was formed on the banks of a stream that runs down the valley, so that we must cross the water to attack. But the stream was shallow now with the August heat, and it was not much sunk between its banks.

When he saw that, Sigurd, who was a man of many fights, said that we had better send the marshmen round to fall on the wings of the foe, while we went straight for the centre of the line in the wedge formation that the Viking loves. For so we should have no trouble in crossing the stream, and should cut the force against us in two.

So the two Welsh thanes led their wild levies out on either side of us Danes, who were in the centre, and then we formed the wedge. Havelok himself would have gone first of all at its point: but that we would not suffer, for if he fell the battle was lost at its beginning.

“Nay,” he said, “for we fight for Goldberga.”

“And what would she say were we to set you foremost of us all?” asked Withelm. “Little love were there to either of you in that. You are the heart of the host, and one shields that although it gives strength to all the hands which obey it.”

So Withelm and Arngeir and I went foremost, and behind us came the courtmen, and in the midst of their shield wall was Havelok, with Raven and the banner at his side. After them, rank on rank and with close-locked shields, was such a force as had not been seen in Lindsey for many a long day. Alsi's men grew very silent as they saw us come on, until we reached, through a storm of arrows that could not stay us, the bank of the stream, and then they raised a war song that roared and thundered among the hills as though the tide was coming up the valley in one great wave. But we saved our breath until the first of us were on the banks of the stream, and then I shouted, and with a great shout of “Ahoy!” in answer, we charged through the stream and up the far bank, where Alsi's spearmen waited for us.

They crowded together as they saw how narrow our front was, and there was a hedge of steel before us three brothers; but the spear is not the weapon to use if one would check the onrush of the Northman's wedge, and shield and axe between them dashed and hewed a way to the men who got to their swords too late, and then we were in the midst of Alsi's line, with the gap that we had made widening behind us with each step that we took forward.

Now it was sheer hewing at the mass who crowded on us; and I mind how we seemed to fight in silence, although the battle cries were unceasing, and waxed ever louder; for it was as when one walks by the shore and thinks not at all of the noise of breakers that never ends. Now and then there was one shout that was new, and it seemed to be the

only voice. Most of all, the noise grew on the wings where the savage Welsh fell on their masters and ancient foes in wild tumult.



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We tried to cut our way to Alsi, for we could see him as he sat on his horse—the only mounted man in all the hosts; but we could not reach him. And presently the time came when we who were foremost must let fresh men take our places. Sigurd stepped to my side, and Withelm fell back, and another took the place of Arngeir, and then my turn came, and we went slowly from the front to where the hollow centre of the wedge gave us rest. Only a few arrows fell there now and then; but the time for using bows was past, seeing that we were hand to hand with all the Lindsey host. And then I saw that Sigurd had done what we had failed in, for he had reached the shield wall that was round the king himself. And for a moment I was savage that the chance came to him so soon after I had left the fighting line; but then I minded that Eglaf, my friend, would be there, and I was glad that I need not cross swords with him after all. I had thought of that happening before the fight began, but in the turmoil of hottest struggle I had forgotten it.

Now Sigurd was before the thick mass of the housecarls, and hand to hand with them; and then he was among them, and he leapt at the bridle of Alsi's horse and grasped it. I saw the king's sword flash down on his helm, and he reeled under the stroke, but without letting go of the rein. Then the housecarls made a rush, and bore back our men, and the horse reared suddenly. There was a wild shout, and the war saddle was empty; and again our men surged forward, so that I could not see what had happened.

But now our Welshmen had been beaten back from the wings—not easily, but for want of training—and they were forced back across the brook, and there held our bank well, giving way no step further. The water kept them in an even front, against their will, as it were; and Alsi's men charged them in vain, knee deep in the stream that ran red. But that let loose the men who had been held back from us; and now we were overborne by numbers, and we began to go back. That was the worst part of the whole fight, and the hardest hour of all the battle, as may be supposed, for the wedge grew closer, as it was forced together by sheer weight. None ever broke into it.

Presently our rear was on the water's edge, and it seemed likely that in crossing there might be a breaking of the line; and when he saw that, Havelok called to me, and he went to the front with the courtmen round him. It was good to hear the cheers of our men as they saw the dancing banner above the fight, and beneath it, in the bright sun, the gold-circled helm of their king. The Lindseymen drew back a foot's pace as they saw the giant who came on them, and I heard some call that this was Curan of Grimsby, as if in wonder. Then we had to fight hard, and Sigurd fell back past me, with a wound on his shoulder where Alsi's sword had glanced from the helm. No life had been left to Sigurd had a better hand wielded the weapon; but he was not badly hurt. I could not see Alsi anywhere, nor Eglaf.



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Steadily the numbers drove us back, though before Havelok was always a space into which men hardly dared to come. The wedge was pushed away from us, and we had to fall back with it, until we crossed the stream; and there Sigurd swung the massed men into line, and then came the first pause in the fight. The two hosts stood, with the narrow water between them, and glared on each other, silent now. And then the bowmen began to get to work from either side, until the arrows were all gone.

Now Havelok called to the foe, and they were silent while he spoke to them.

“Is Alsi yet alive?” he said; “for if not, I have no war with his men. If he is, let me speak with him.”

None answered for a while, and the men looked at each other as if they knew not if the man they were fighting for lived or not.

Then one came forward and said, “Alsi lives, and we have not done with you yet. Get you back to your home beyond the sea!”

And then they charged us again; but the water was a better front for us than it had been for them, and across it they could not win. We drove them back once and twice; and again came a time when both sides were wearied and must needs rest.

So it went on until night fell. We never stirred from that water’s edge, and the stream was choked with valiant English and hardy Danes; and yet the attacks came with the shout of “Out! out!” and the answer from us of “Havelok, ahoy!”

At last one who seemed a great chief came and cried a truce, for night was falling; and he said that if Havelok would claim no advantage therefrom, the men of Lindsey would get back from the field, and leave it free for us to take our fallen.

“But I must have your word that with the end of that task you go back to the place you now hold, that we may begin afresh, if it seems good to us, in the morning.”

Then said Havelok, “That is well spoken, and I cannot but agree. Who are you, however, for I must know that this is said with authority?”

“I am the Earl of Chester,” he answered. “Alsi has set the leading of the host in my hands, for he is hurt somewhat.”

“I did not think that Mercians would have troubled to fight to uphold Alsi of Lindsey in his ways with his niece,” Havelok said.

“What is that?” said the earl. “Hither came I for love of fighting, maybe, in the first place; and next to drive out certain Vikings. I know naught of the business of which you speak.”



“Then,” said I, “go and ask Eglaf, the captain of the housecarls, for he knows all about it. We are no raiding Danes, but those who fight for Goldberga of East Anglia.”

At that a hum of voices went down the English line, and this earl bit his lip in doubt.

“Well,” he said, “that is Alsi’s affair, and I will speak to him. We have had a good fight, and I will not say that either of us has the best of it. Shall it be as I have said?”



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“Ay,” answered Havelok; and the earl drew off his men for half a mile, and in the gathering dusk we crossed the brook, and went on our errand across the field. It was not hard to find our men, for they lay in a great wedge as we had fought. There had been no straggling from that array, and no break had been made in its lines. Alsi had lost more than we, for his men had beaten against that steel wall in vain, and the arms of the Northman are better than those of any other nation.

We took the wounded back to the camp, and there Goldberga and the wives of our English thanes tended them; and as we gathered up the slain the Lindsey men were among us at the same work, and we spoke to them as if naught was amiss between us, nor any fight to begin again in the morning. And then we learned how few knew what we had come for. It was with them as with the Earl of Chester. They had no knowledge of Goldberga’s homecoming, and least of all thought that at the back of the trouble were the wiles of Alsi. It was two years ago that Goldberga had gone, and her wedding had seemed to end her story. Now the men heard and wondered; and it is said that very many left Alsi that night and went home, angry with him for his falsehood.

Now when all was done we sought rest, and weary we were. I will say for myself that I did not feel like fighting next morning at all, for I was tired out, and the one or two wounds that I had were getting sorely stiff. Raven was much in the same case, and grumbled, sailor-wise, at the weight of the banner and aught else that came uppermost in his mind. Yet I knew that he would be the first to go forward again when the time came.

The host slept on their arms along the bank of the stream through the hot night, and the banner was pitched in their midst. Soon the moon rose, and only the footsteps of the sentries along our front went up and down, while across the water was the same silence; for both hosts were wearied out, and each had learned that the other were true men, and there was no mistrust on either side. When the light came once more we should fight to prove who were the best men at arms, and with no hatred between us.

Presently the mists crept up from the stream and wreathed the sleepers on either bank with white, swaying clouds, and I mind that the last thought I had before I closed my eyes was that my armour would be rusted by the clinging damp—as if it were not war-stained from helm to deerskin shoe already with stains that needed more cleansing than any rust.

Then I waked suddenly, for someone went past me, and I sat up to see who it might be. The moon was very bright and high now, but the figure that I saw wading in the white mist was shadowy, and I could not tell who it was. And then another and yet another figure came from the rear of our line, and passed among the sleeping ranks, and joined the first noiselessly; and after a little while many came, hurrying, and they formed up on the bank of the stream into the mighty wedge. And I feared greatly, for not one of the sleepers stirred as the warriors went among us, and I had looked on the faces of those

who passed me, and I knew that they were the dead whom I had seen the men gather even now and lay in their last rank beyond our line.



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Then I saw that on the far bank was gathered another host, and that was of Alsi's men, and among them I knew the forms of some who had fallen in the first onset when I led the charge.

I tried to put forth my hand to wake Withelm, but I could not stir, and when I would have spoken, I could frame no word, so that alone in all the host I saw the slain men fight their battle over again, step by step. The wedge of the Northmen won to the far shore as we had won—as they had won in life but a few hours ago—and into the line of foemen they cut their way, and on the far side of the stream they stayed and fought, as it had been in the battle. Yet though one could see that the men shouted and cried, there was no sound at all, and among the wildest turmoil walked the sentries of Alsi's host unconcerned and unknowing. And to me they seemed to be the ghosts, and the phantom strife that which was real.

Then I was ware of a stranger thing yet than all I had seen so far, for on the field were more than those whom I knew. There stood watching on either side of the battle two other ghostly hosts, taking no part in the struggle, but watching it as we had watched from our place when we fell back into the rear to rest, pointing and seeming to cheer strokes that were good and deeds that were valiant. And I knew that these were men who had fought and died on this same field in older days, for on one side were the white-clad Britons, and on the other the stern, dark-faced Romans, steel and bronze from head to foot.

So the battle went onward to where we had won and had been pressed back; and then, little by little, the hosts faded away, and with them went the watchers, and surely across the field went the quick gallop of no earthly steeds, the passing to Odin of the choosers of the slain, the Valkyries.

Then came across the brook to me one through the mist, and the sentries paid no heed to him, and he came to my side and spoke to me. It was Cadwal, the Welsh thane, and his breast was gashed so that I thought that he could not have lived.

"Ay, I am dead," he said, "as men count death, and yet I would have part in victory over Alsi, for the sake of Havelok and of Goldberga. Stay up my body on the morrow, that I may seem to fight at least, that I may bide in the ranks once more in the day of victory. Little victory have the British seen since Hengist came. Say that you will do this."

Then he looked wistfully at me, and I gave him some token of assent; and at that came back all the shadows of our men, and seemed to pray the same. And then was a stir of feet near me, and a shadow across the trampled grass, and instead of the dead the voice of Havelok spoke softly to me, and with him was Goldberga, clad in her mail. And I thought that they and I were slain also, and I cried to this one who seemed to be one of Odin's maidens that I too would fain be stayed up with Cadwal and the rest, that I might have part in victory.



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Then Goldberga stooped to me, and laid her soft hand on my forehead, and took off my helm, so that the air came to me, and thereat I woke altogether.

“Brother,” she said, “you are restless and sorely wounded, as it seems. It is not good that you should lie in this mist.”

At her voice the others woke, and for a while she talked with us in a low tone, cheering us. And presently she asked of that strange request that I had made to her.

I told her, for it was a message that should not be kept back, thus given; and when he heard it, Withelm sighed a little, and said, “Would that we had all those who have fallen. Yet if it is as they have asked our brother, our host will seem as strong as before we joined battle in the morning. Leave this to me, brother, for it may be done.”

Then he rose up and went softly to where Idrys, the friend of Cadwal, lay, and spoke long with him. It was true that Cadwal was slain, though I had not yet heard of it until he told me himself thus.

Then I slept heavily, while the others talked for a while. It is a hard place at a wedge tip when Englishmen are against one; and I am not much use in a council. Presently they would wake me if my word was wanted.

But it was not needed, for the sunlight woke me. There was a growing stir in our lines and across the water also, and I looked round. The mists were yet dense, for there was not enough breeze to stir the heavy folds of the banner, and Raven slept still with his arm round its staff. Havelok was not here now, and I thought that he had gone to the camp with Goldberga, and would be back shortly.

Then I saw that our rear rank was already formed up, as I thought, and that is not quite the order of things, as a rule, and it seemed far off from the stream. I thought that they should have asked me about this, for there were some of my courtmen in that line.

And then I saw that in the line was no movement, and no flash of arms, as when one man speaks to another, turning a little. And before that line stood the form of a chief who leant on his broad spear, motionless and seeming watchful. I knew him at once, and it was Cadwal, and those he commanded were the dead. That was even to me an awesome sight, for in the mists they seemed ready and waiting for the word that would never come to their ears, resting on the spears that they could use no more. It had been done by the marshmen in the dark hours of the morning, and from across the stream I saw Alsi's men staring at the new force that they thought had come to help us. There were men enough moving along our bank with food to us to prevent them seeing that this line stirred not at all.



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There was a scald who came with us from Denmark, and now with the full rising of the sun he took his harp and went along the stream bank singing the song of Dunheidi fight and so sweet was his voice, and so strong, that even Alsi's men gathered to hearken to him. His name was Heidrek, and he has set all that he saw with Havelok into a saga; but we, here, mostly remember the brave waking that he gave us that morning. It was wonderful how the bright song cheered us. One saw that the stiffened limbs shook themselves into liveness once more, and the listless faces brightened, and into the hearts that were heavy came new hope, and that was the song's work.

Now men began to jest with their foes across the stream, and those who had Danish loaves threw them across in exchange for English, that they might have somewhat to talk of. Ours were rye, and theirs of barley; but it was not a fair change after ours had been so long a voyage.

It was not long before our war horns sounded for the mustering, and men ran to their arms. The Lindsey host drew back from the talk with our men at the same time, and, without waiting for word from their leaders, began to get in line along the stream, where they had been when we halted last night. But we had no thought of falling on them until we had had some parley with the king or the Earl of Chester. And now it was plain that with the grim rearguard behind us we outnumbered the men of Alsi who were left.

Now came from the village in rear of the foe a little company, in the midst of which was one horseman, and that was the king himself. His arm was slung to his breast, and he sat his horse weakly, so that it was true enough that he had been hurt. With him were the earl and Eglaf, and the housecarls, and I sent one to fetch Havelok quickly, that there might be no delay in the words that were to be said.

Alsi rode to the water's edge and looked out over our host, and his white face became whiter, and his thin lips twitched as he saw that our line was no weaker than it had seemed when first he saw it. He spoke to the earl, and he too counted the odds before him, and he smiled a little to himself. He had not much to say to Alsi.

Then broke out a thunderous cheer from all our men, for with Havelok and Sigurd at her horse's rein, and with Withelm's courtmen of her own guard behind her, came Goldberga the queen to speak with the man who had broken his trust. She had on her mail, as on the day when we ended Hodulf; and she rode to the centre of our line, and there stayed, with a flush on her cheek that the wild shouts of our men had called there.

Then I heard the name of "Goldberga, Goldberga!" run down the English line, and I saw Alsi shrink back into himself, as it were; and then some Lincoln men close to him began to grow restless, and all at once they lifted their helms and cheered also, and that cheer was taken up by all the host, as it seemed, until the ring of hills seemed alive with voices. And with that Alsi half turned his horse to fly.



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Yet his men did not mean to leave him. It was but the hailing of the lady whom they knew, and her coming thus was more than the simple warriors had wit or mind to fathom. But now Goldberga held up her hand, and the cries ceased, and silence came. Then she lifted her voice, clear as a silver bell, and said, "It seems strange to me that English folk should be fighting against me and my husband's men who have brought me home. I would know the meaning of this, King Alsi, for it would seem that your oath to my father is badly kept. Maybe I have thought that the people would not have me in his place; but their voice does not ring in those shouts, for which I thank them with all my heart, as if they hated me. Now, therefore, I myself ask that my guardian will give up to me that which is my own."

We held our peace, but a hum of talk went all through the English ranks. The Earl of Chester sat down on the bank, and set his sword across his knees, and began to tie the peace strings round the hilt, in token that he was going to fight no more. Now and then he looked at Goldberga, and smiled at her earnest face. But Alsi made no sign of answer.

Then the queen spoke again to him.

"There must be some reason why you have thus set a host in arms against me," she said, "and what that may be I would know."

Then, as Alsi answered not at all, the earl spoke frankly.

"We were told that we had to drive out the Vikings, and I must say that they do not go easily. But it was not told us that they came here to right a wrong, else had I not fought."

Many called out in the same words, and then sat down as the earl had done.

And at last Alsi spoke for himself.

"We do not fight against you, my niece, but against the Danes. We cannot have them in the country."

"They do not mean to bide here, but they will not go before my throne is given to me. Never came a foreign host into a land in more friendly wise than this of mine."

At that Alsi's face seemed to clear, and his forced smile came to him. He looked round on the thanes who were nearest him, and coughed, and then answered, "Here has been some mistake, my niece, and it has cost many good lives. If it is even as you say, get you to your land of Anglia, and there shall be peace. I myself will send word to Ragnar that he shall hail you as queen."

Then up spoke a new voice, and it was one that I knew well.



“No need to do that, lord king,” said Berthun the cook. “Here have I come posthaste, and riding day and night, to say that Ragnar is but a day’s march from here, that he and all Norfolk may see that their queen comes to her own.”

Then Alsi’s face grew ashy pale, and without another word he swung his horse round and went his way. I saw him reel in the saddle before he had gone far, and Eglaf set his arm round him and stayed him up. After him Goldberga looked wistfully, for she was forgiving, and had fain that he had spoken one word of sorrow. But none else heeded him, for now the thanes, led by the earl himself, came thronging across the water, that they might ask forgiveness for even seeming to withstand Goldberga. And on both sides the men set down their arms, and began to pile mighty fires, that the peace made should not want its handfasting feast.



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For the fair princess had won her own, and there was naught but gladness.

CHAPTER XXIV. PEACE, AND FAREWELL.

Now there was feasting enough, and somewhere they found at a thane's house a great tent, and they set that up, so that Havelok and Goldberga might have their own court round them, as it were. Gladly did Berthun rid himself of war gear and take to his old trade again. I suppose that the little Tetford valley had never heard the like sounds of rejoicing before.

Near midnight a man came to me and said that a message had come to me from the other side, and I rose from the board and went out, to find Eglaf waiting for me in the moonlight. He was armed, and his face was wan and tired.

"Come apart, friend," he said; "I have a message from the king."

"To me?"

"No, to Havelok. But you must hear it first, and then tell him as you will."

We walked away from the tent and across the hillside for some way, and then he said without more words, "This is the message that Alsi sends to Havelok, whose name was Curan. 'Forgive the things that are past, for many there are that need forgiving. I have no heir, and it is for myself that I have schemed amiss. In Lincoln town lies a great treasure, of which Eglaf and I alone know. Give it, I pray you, to your Danes, that they may harm the land not at all, and so shall I ward off some of the evil that might come through me even yet. I think that, after me, you shall be king.'"

"That is wise of Alsi; but is there no word for Goldberga?"

"Ay, but not by my mouth. I fetched David the priest two hours ago, and he bears those messages."

"Is there yet more to say?" I asked, for it seemed to me that there was.

"There is," he answered. "Alsi is dead."

So there was an end of all his schemings, and I will say no more of them. It was Eglaf's thought that it was not so much his hurts that had killed the king, but a broken heart because of this failure. For the second time now I knew that it is true that "old sin makes new shame."

Now how we told Havelok this, and how Goldberga was somewhat comforted by the words that David the priest brought her from her uncle, there is no need to say. But



when the news was known in all the host of Lindsey, there was a great gathering of all in the wide meadow, and we sat in the camp and wondered what end should be to the talk. Ragnar had come; but his host was now no great one, for we had sent word to him of the peace, and there was a great welcome for him and his men.

The Lindsey thanes did not talk long, and presently some half dozen of the best of them came to us, and said that with one accord the gathering would ask that Havelok and Goldberga should reign over them.

“We will answer for all in the land,” they said. “If there are other thanes who should have had a word in the matter, they are not here because, knowing more than we, they would not fight for Alsi in this quarrel. If there is any other man to be thought of, he cannot go against the word of the host.”



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"I have my kingdom in Denmark," said Havelok, "and my wife has hers in Anglia. How should we take this? See, here is Ragnar of Norwich; he is worthy to be king, if any. Here, too, is the Earl of Chester, who led you. It will be well to set these two names before the host."

"The host will have none but Havelok and Goldberga," they said.

So the long-ago visions came to pass, and in a few days more we were feasting in the old hall at Lincoln. But before we left the valley of the battle we laid in mound in all honour those who had fallen. Seven great mounds we made, at which men wonder and will wonder while they stand at Tetford. For well fought the Danes of Goldberga, and well fought the Lindseymen on that day. Yet I think that those who would fain have lived to see the victory had their share in it, as they stood in their grim and silent ranks behind us.

Then was a new crowning of those two, and messages to the overlord of Lindsey, sent by the thanes, to say that all was settled on the old lines of peaceful tribute to be paid; and then, when word and presents came back from him, Goldberga rose up on the high place where she had been so strangely wedded, and looked down at the joyous faces of her nobles at the long tables.

"When I was crowned in Denmark," she said, "there was a promise made me, that when this day came to me in Norfolk I might ask one boon of all who upheld me. I do not know if I may ask it here and now, for the promise was made by my husband's people. Yet it is a matter that is dear to my heart that I shall seek from you all, if I may."

Then all the hall rang with voices that bade her ask what she would; and she bowed and flushed red, and hesitated a little. Then she took heart and spoke.

"It is but this," she said. "Let the poor Christian folk bide in peace; and if teachers come from the south or from the north presently who will speak of that faith, bear with them, I pray you, for they work no harm indeed."

Almost was she weeping as she said this, and her white hands were clasped tightly before her. But she looked bravely at the thanes, and waited for the answer, though I think that she feared what it would be.

But an old thane rose up in his place, smiling, and he answered, "If you had commanded us this, my queen, it would have been done. The Christian folk, if there are any, shall have no hurt. I think that we had forgotten the old days of trouble with them. Yet I hear that in Kent the new faith, as it seems to us, is being taught, and that the king looks on it with favour. It may be that here it will come also. For your sake I will listen if a teacher comes to me."



The thanes thought little of this boon, and they all answered that it was freely granted. But they said that it was no boon to give, and bade her ask somewhat that was better.

“Why then,” she said, “if I must ask more, think no more of me as queen save as that I am the wife of the king. Havelok is your ruler in good sooth.”



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That pleased them all well, and they laughed and wished that all had wives who had no mind to rule.

“Here is word that is going home to my wife,” said one to his neighbour. “If the queen sets the fashion of obedience, it behoves all good wives to follow her leading.”

“Maybe I would let some other than yourself tell the lady that,” answered the other thane with a great laugh, for he knew that household and its ruler.

So Goldberga had her will, and then began the long years of peace and happiness to the kingdoms of which all men know. Wherefore I think that my story is done. What I have told is halting maybe, and rough, but it is true. And Goldberga, my sister, says that it is good. Which is all the praise that I need.

So far went Radbard, my friend, and then he would tell no more. So it is left to me, Wislac the priest, who have written for him, to finish. He says that everyone knows the rest, and so they do just now. But in the years to come, when this story is read, men will want to know more. So it is fit that I should end the story, telling things that I myself know to be true also.

Sigurd's host went back in the autumn, rich with the treasure of Alsi the king; and from that time forward no Danish host ever sought our shores. Wars enough have been in England here, but they have not harmed us. No host has been suffered to cross the borders of Lindsey or East Anglia, save in peace, and in the wars of Penda of Mercia Havelok has taken no part. Yet he has had to fight to hold his own more than once, but always with victory, for always the prayers of the few Christians have been with him.

They set Earl Ragnar to hold the southern kingdom for Havelok and his wife; and presently, when he was left a widower, he wedded the youngest daughter of Grim, Havelok's foster father. Eglaf was captain of the Lincoln courtmen or housecarls, whichever the right name may be among those who speak of them. One name is Danish and the other English, but they mean the same. As for my good friend Radbard, he was high sheriff before long, and that he is yet. He wedded Ragnar's sister the year that Havelok was crowned in Norwich, which was the next year after the crowning at Lincoln.

Raven went back to the sea, and he will now be in Denmark or else on the Viking path with Sigurd, for that is what he best loves. Arngeir bides at Grimsby, high in honour with all, and the port and town grow greater and more prosperous year by year. Wise was



Grim when he chose to stay in the place where he had chanced to come, if it were not more than chance that brought him. I suppose that for all time the ships that are from Grimsby will be free from all dues in the ports that are Havelok's in the Danish land. Witlaf, the good old thane, bides in his place yet, and he rejoices ever that he had a hand in bringing Havelok up. Nor does our king forget that.



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Indeed, I think that he forgets naught but ill done toward him. Never is a man who has done one little thing for him overlooked, if he is met by our king after many years, and that is a royal gift indeed.

I would that all married folk were as are this royal couple of ours. Never are they happy apart, and never has a word gone awry between them. If one speaks of Havelok, one must needs think of Goldberga; and if one says a word of the queen, one means the king also. Happy in their people and in their wondrous fair children are they, and that is all that can be wished for them.

There was one thing wanting for long years, that I and Withelm ever longed for for Havelok—a thing for which Goldberga prayed ever. I came to them from Queen Bertha in Kent, when good old David died; and at that time Havelok was not a Christian, but surely the most Christian heathen that ever was. I knew that he must come into the faith at some time; and I, at least, could not find it in my heart to blame him altogether for holding to the Asir whom his fathers worshipped. It was in sheer honesty and singleness of heart that he did so, and I had never skill enough to show him the right. But Withelm, who has long been a priest of the faith, and shall surely be our bishop ere long, had more to do with his conversion than any other.

Yet it did not come until the days when Paulinus came from York and preached with the fire of the missionary to us all. And then we saw the mighty warrior go down to the water in the white robe of the catechumen, and come therefrom with his face shining with a new and wondrous light.

Then he founded a monastery at Grimsby, that there the men of the marsh, who had been kind to him in the old days, might find teachers in all that was good; and there it will surely be after many a long year, until there is need for its work no more, if such a time ever comes.

So the land grows Christian fast, and good will be its folk if they follow the way of king and queen and their brothers.

Now have I finished also, and this is farewell. Look you, husbands and wives, that you may be said to be like Havelok and Goldberga; and see, brothers, that you mind the words that Grim spoke to his sons, and which they heeded so well—

“Bare is back without brother behind it.” And that is a true word, though it was a heathen who spoke it.

The end.

1 I have to thank the Mayor of Grimsby for most kindly furnishing me with an impression of this ancient seal.



2 Now Nishni-Novgorod, from time immemorial the great meetingplace of north and south, east and west.

3 The garth was the fenced and stockaded enclosure round a northern homestead.

4 The seax was the heavy, curved dagger carried by men of all ranks.

5 The northern sea god and goddess.

6 Men drowned at sea were thought to go to the halls of Pan and Aegir. Ran is represented as fishing for heroes in time of storm.

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7 The Norns were the Fates of the northern mythology.

8 The “Witanagemot,” the representative assembly for the kingdom, whence our Parliament sprang.

9 The greatest term of reproach for a coward.

10 The gold ring kept in the Temple of the Asir, on which all oaths must be sworn.

11 The sanctuary of the Asir. Thorsway and Withern in Lincolnshire both preserve the name in the last and first syllable respectively, both meaning “Thor’s sanctuary.”

12 The northern equivalent of the Saxon “Folkmote,” or general assembly of the people.