

RETHINKING THE SAGA OF THE PEOPLE OF SVARFADARDAL:  
Or The Mysterious Death of a Goði

By

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## DEDICATION

To my husband Dr. Richard Seklecki—My Heart’s Desire.

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## ABSTRACT

From the Icelandic *Svarfaðardalur* translates to “unruly valley.” The Saga of the People of Svarfadardal proves to be all of this while touching on issues of political power, loyalty and honor. The complexities of the saga have traditionally posed problems that restricted an understanding of the text while barring shape to the characters. The saga leads its audience through events that when interpreted, can vary through individual viewpoint and experience, putting audience analysis at the core of Svarfdæla. From its scattered, inconsistent beginnings, the study presented here shows the path taken by each character through to the saga’s finish. Each character is permitted a consistency to their persona, allowing their interaction with one another coherency. In the end, Yngvild Fair-cheek and her infamous words take on a valid and realistic purpose, releasing her of her cold-hearted image.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Svarfdæla saga is generally regarded as burdened with issues that range from missing sections of manuscript, to disjointed storyline, and unexplainable or unreasonable violence. Even for an Icelandic family saga,<sup>1</sup> the brutality demonstrated overpowers any potentially consistent storyline. The saga's lack of success among scholars of Old Norse-Icelandic literature has been notable,<sup>2</sup> attributed in the past primarily as examples of individual character behavior or situation. Svarfdæla has been viewed as lacking in a logical chain of events and characters of substance. It needed coherent themes with purpose and motivation, allowing its inner workings to come to life. The saga text itself appeared unruly, unmanageable, or possibly just

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<sup>1</sup> Andersson & Miller, 1989, 3. Svarfdæla saga has generally been grouped as one of the Sagas of Icelanders, or *Íslendingasögur*. They tell stories about leading Icelandic figures and families from the time of the Island's colonization around 900 to the middle of the eleventh century, or in terms of English chronology, from the time of King Alfred to a few years before the Norman Conquest.

<sup>2</sup> Fredrik J. Heinemann, *Svarfdæla saga: The Norwegians versus the Swedes*, 'Saga and the Norwegian Experience' (1997) 237-47.

poorly written, lending it to misunderstanding with an unfair portion of misguided criticism.

The original version of *Svarfdæla saga*, translated to English by Fredrik J. Heinemann, is based on text in the *Íslenszk fornrit* series, IX and is the basis for this work. The original manuscript, no longer extant, leaves a flawed 17<sup>th</sup> century paper manuscript as the foundation for contemporary versions. Written in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the saga itself takes place between 875 and 980 CFE.

*Svarfdæla saga* may very well have been a controversial work from its beginning. The radically different contemporary readings could echo some original purpose in its design. If this work's intent was to rouse debate, its complex qualities serve it well. Literature's core principles and rules for constructing phrases and sentences in natural languages is part of understanding the conditions under which discourse is formed and how it is received—or the communication between an author and reader. For the process of this communication to work, interpretation by the reader relies on basic story structure along with story meaning. The author of the story can indicate meaning, guiding them with various means, but it is mostly left up to the audience to 'pull out' the story's content. The author knows that the

story's audience will interpret it according to their own experience, playing on knowledge of the audience's world.<sup>3</sup> In the case of saga prose where the vestiges of oral tradition exist,<sup>4</sup> the dramatic interaction between audience and author may lose crucial subtleness as it makes its way through the conversion to written form, constructing the text with a less connected quality. This premise can easily be attributed to Svarfdæla's situation where continuity is sometimes reliant on the smallest detail.

#### FOCUS

The focus of this thesis is to present a clearer working perception of the saga's framework along with critical review. The saga's story-line, working themes and goals are highlighted and exposed to the extent that hopefully, it leads to deeper exploration and further perceptions. In this work, issues plaguing the interpretation and understanding will become more lucid; less chaotic and random. This contribution represents a rethinking of Svarfdæla saga while taking stock of where the saga's reception now stands. It also suggests new connections and new synthesis.

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading, see Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literacy Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, Translated by Randi C. Eldevik. Odense University Press, 2002, 35-37.

<sup>4</sup> Carol J. Clover, "Scene in saga composition" in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 89, 1974, 57-83.



## CRITICISM

Regarding Svarfdæla saga, scholarly activity has been characterized by varying critical approaches and methodology. One direction is the interpretation of the saga as a work of metaphoric and sexually symbolic meaning, focusing on questions of misogyny and the female condition in medieval society,<sup>5</sup> while another is a satirical representation of Icelandic medieval society.<sup>6</sup> Other critical perspectives place primary emphasis on questions of rhetorical organization, narrative structure, and literary genre of Svarfdæla saga.<sup>7</sup> Placed in the regional and family feud classification of the Family sagas,<sup>8</sup> Svarfdæla incorporates some characteristics of these approaches. Previous interpretations have been based on the saga's inability to project a streamlined and functioning narrative. This misinterpretation has

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<sup>5</sup> One premise is the gash on Skidi's lip as metaphorically linked to female genitalia. This and other statements can be found in; Helga Kress, "Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature." *Cold Council, Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, Anderson and Swanson, eds. 2002; and Robin Waugh, "Misogyny, women's language, and love-language: Yngvild fagkrinn in 'Svarfdæla saga.'" *Scandinavian Studies*, 70, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Fredrik J. Heinemann, *Svarfdæla saga: The Norwegians versus the Swedes*, 'Saga and the Norwegian Experience' (1997) 237-47. Heinemann's observation of Klaufi's demise with humor helped make the connection to Karl and Klaufi's previous deception on Ásgeir Red-cloak, also performed with an animal hide and trickery.

<sup>7</sup> According to William Paton Ker, in *Epic and Romance: Essays on medieval literature*, 1897, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1908, 235, *Svarfdæla* has the basic saga structure whereas Theodore Andersson is of the opinion the *saga* is too incomplete to permit structural analysis, 1967, vi.

<sup>8</sup> Vésteinn Ólason, "The Middle Ages: Old Icelandic Poetry," 2006, 126, writes that "*Íslendinga saga* is divided into two main groups; district and family feud sagas... and individuals with a biographical structure," with Svarfdæla placed in district and family feud.

left *Svarfdæla saga* open to condemnation for its heavy-handed brutality, lack of coherency, and inconsistent characterizations; leading to a critical re-evaluation.

In *Svarfdæla saga: The Norwegians versus the Swedes* (1998), Heinemann comments on the complexity and issues of *Svarfdæla saga*. Heinemann cites three core questions that have been problematic for scholars, which need to be addressed in order to “save” the saga. Additional conflicts and questions surface within the text which will be discussed, but these three issues will take a larger focus.

The significant manuscript gap separating events in mainland Scandinavia with those in Iceland is the foremost challenging flaw. This gap comes at the end of the first part<sup>9</sup> of *Svarfdæla saga* and obscures critical details that may leave the remaining sections in Iceland undermined.<sup>10</sup> There is also the enduring brutality against Yngvild Fair-cheek during the saga’s final section that creates significant concern. Some actions throughout

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<sup>9</sup> *Svarfdæla saga* can easily be divided into either two or four parts. If separated in two parts, as done in this work, the *fornaldarsaga* that occurs in Norway and Sweden would involve the first half, with the final half detailing the happenings in Iceland. The best solution for the saga when divided into four parts outlines the four generations of father and son. See Heinemann (1998).

<sup>10</sup> While the events contained in this major gap can be supposed to some degree— such as Thorstein Thorsteinsson being the son of Thorstein Thorgnyrsson—there may be other subtle and great connections that could reshape events and personalities based on lost manuscript text.

Svarfdæla saga have been met with confusion and controversy, but none so much as the treatment of Yngvild Fair-cheek. Another concern is the lengthy dragging of Skidi by Karl the Red behind his horse (179).

Separate, disconnected writing styles in the first and second half have added to an acceptance of the saga's defective nature,<sup>11</sup> although the *fornaldarsögur* style of the first half has presaged some Icelandic family sagas.<sup>12</sup> This dual style may be the intent and purpose of Svarfdæla saga, rather than an intrinsic flaw, as links through names, events and characteristics between Norway strongly connect the aesthetic divergence of the straightforward violence set in Iceland.<sup>13</sup> Important ideological positions

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<sup>11</sup> See Heinemann's introduction, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> As noted by Margaret Clunies Ross in *The Cambridge Introduction to The Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*, University Press: Cambridge, 2010, 76, the *fornaldarsögur* is the prehistory of the settlement of Iceland and the conversion to Christianity. "Iceland is never the setting for this sub-genre, with its protagonists born in Norway with Icelandic descendants, some of whom are mentioned in *Landnámabók*," 76, as is the case with Svarfdæla saga and the family of Thorstein Thorsteinsson.

<sup>13</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, 2006, defines *Fornaldarsögur*, or Legendary Sagas as, "sagas of Scandinavian and German heroes of the past...and continues with some of the Sagas of Icelanders may originally have been intended as historiography, while others are clearly an interpretation of the past, and it is not at all clear if they should be classified as history or fiction" (75), while Margaret Clunies Ross provides a more distinct description as it applies to Svarfdæla; "Both the personae of the *fornaldarsaga* part and the geographical setting in which they move must have signaled to the medieval audience that the action of this saga sub-genre was removed from the world of the everyday, at least in part, but not so fully removed that its subject-matter could not be meaningful to them" (77-78); and "In many respects, the world of the *fornaldarsaga* is close to that of the Scandinavian folktale, both in the cultural assumptions that underlie its themes and motifs, in many of its narrative patterns and in the matter-of-fact way in which its themes are deployed. Some *fornaldarsögur*...also show

involving perceived morality and moral tone in the Icelandic family sagas, directly relate to the character analysis of *Svarfdæla saga* as well as the interpretation by audience and scholar.

Categorized into two points of view, the romantic and humanistic, this concept is broadly summarized by Vilhjálmur Árnason. The romantic viewpoint emphasizes the quality of the hero and his pride of reputation while on the other hand; the humanistic viewpoint emphasizes the didactic content of the saga. Its implication is that heroic individualism is futile and that social and moral cohesion can only be achieved by adopting Christian mores.<sup>14</sup> Árnason explains further that this viewpoint of the saga may be interpreted either way by the scholar, or audience, but not necessarily by the saga author. While the importance of interpretation focuses on the period of the writing rather than the period the saga is said to occur, an analysis without prejudice on the words and deeds of saga characters is necessary. This reference materializes when applied to *Svarfdæla saga*,<sup>15</sup> especially when

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similarities to folktales in terms of characterization, in that their protagonists move victoriously through one adventure after another in picaresque fashion" (79).

<sup>14</sup> Vilhjálmur Árnason, "Morality and social structure in the Icelandic sagas," *Journal of English and Germanic philology*, 90, 1991, 157-74.

<sup>15</sup> William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: feud, law, and society in saga Iceland*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1990, 8. "Referring to saga society: It is not about the saga; it is about the society in which the sagas were produced."

Vilhjálmur says, “The text has depth and dimensions of meanings that go far beyond the conscious intention of their authors, and characters are merely one thread in the web of the text and need to be interpreted in the light of its context as a whole.”<sup>16</sup>

It is the interpretation of this work, and not necessarily of the saga author, that characteristics of both the humanistic and romantic can be found in *Svarfdæla*, and within both distinct narratives. The hero of the *fornaldarsaga*, Thorstein Thorgnyrsson, after searching for greater honor at the risk of all else, will in the end refuse just this. Overcoming his desire for personal honor, Thorstein’s actions will be based on what he has decided is best for all concerned. Contrasting the *romantic* goal where the hero “takes all” with a hint of happily—ever—after, regardless of his suitability for the job. There is a bounty of the humanistic in Iceland where morality and mores, whether perceived as Christian or pre-Christian, are easily adjusted. Success becomes cruelly paramount as with the treatment of the aristocratic Yngvild. She becomes a *position* to be used and brought down to a lesser level, rather than attributed to,<sup>17</sup> with her situation and purpose changing to suit

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<sup>16</sup> Vilhjálmur Árnason, 1991, 162.

<sup>17</sup> Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1996,198.

the men who control her life. It is in Yngvild, however, where the *romantic* endures in Iceland. Parallel to Thorgnyr Thorgnyrsson in the saga's first half, Yngvild Fair-cheek's steadfast devotion is such that only years of abuse and slavery could break its illusion.

One purpose of this study is an endeavor to reconstruct a framework for a different kind of reception of Svarfdæla saga; while restricting the challenging subject matter and lost manuscript text from punishing the *saga's* fabric. Previously unexplainable events in the storyline, especially surrounding Yngvild, will be interpreted and resolved. Her brutal treatment is never lessened by this illumination, only more coherency is provided for these acts.

## CHAPTER II

### PURPOSE AND LITERATURE

*Landnámabók*<sup>18</sup> is a part of the written history for Iceland, listing some of its first settlers. When Iceland emerged as a nation in the world, it chose a social commonwealth in an effort to resist a hierarchical society. The basics of the constitution are described in *Íslendingabók*, or the marking of historical events in medieval Iceland, with reference to Iceland's legal code, *Grágás*.<sup>19</sup> A mixture of pre-Christian and Christian settlers is found in *Landnámabók*, although this text is not considered reliable, as its source is believed to originate from the oral traditions of Iceland.

Medieval Icelanders faced exceptional circumstances that were reflected in the type of society they chose for themselves. Political and social structures of Icelandic society were organized as a community that evolved

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<sup>18</sup> *Landnámabók*, Íslenszk fornrit edition, editor Jakob Benediktsson, (*Íslenszk fornrit 1*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenszka fornritafélag, 1968), from surviving text of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. *Landnámabók* describes the founding of land, first settlers, important events and family lineage from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>19</sup> *Grágás*. The Codex Regius of *Grágás*, Trans. By Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, Richard Perkins, University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg, Canada, vol. I & II, 1980.

from Scandinavia and the British Isles, not as its imitation. The nation remained decentralized in which no single person had the highest status. This placed great emphasis on the integrity of the human being.<sup>20</sup> The only official position was that of the *lawspeaker*,<sup>21</sup> with public debates conducted at the *Althingi* (Icelandic parliament), by chieftains with the title of *goði* (pl. *goðar*). The *goði's* power was not defined in law on a territorial basis, apart from the fact that three *goðar* belonged to each local assembly (*thing*), or political body held in each region of Iceland. *Goðar* competed for status and for followers (*thingmen*) among the farmers (*bændr*).<sup>22</sup> They are called *thing-farmers* because one of their duties is to accompany their *goði* to the *thing*. All *thing-farmers* were obliged to be associated with a *goði*, but also had the right to choose his *goði* himself and to make it known once a year at the *thing* if he had attached himself to a new one. The title *goði*, derived from the heathen word for god, suggests that the chieftains had at one time, a religious function

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<sup>20</sup> Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "Some methodological considerations in connection with the study of the sagas" *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson, Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992, 11-20.

<sup>21</sup> Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, Oxford University Press; Oxford, New York, 1984, 283. Duties restricted to oral recitation of the law and other ceremonial functions. Elected to three-year terms, the *lögsögumaðr* had the duty to recite one third of the law to the assembly every year.

<sup>22</sup> Jesse L. Byock, *Viking Age Iceland*, Penguin Books; London, 2001, 66.



as leaders before Christianity,<sup>23</sup> providing a deeper connection to the community.

Just as the farmer had to attach to a *goði*, free men and women, those who did not own land, were obliged to be members of a farm community. All could change their situation on moving day,<sup>24</sup> twice a year. In this way, the whole population, a part from slaves, became organized into a common social structure while allowing some autonomy. The chieftains, *goði* and *thing*-farmers were bound together in a relationship of loyalty, as were the farmer and his wife and their servants.

In this society of honor, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the individual's behavior. Although community pressure to do the correct thing or that which brings honor is always present, the course of action taken still remains with the individual. There becomes a breakdown, which may turn into conflict, if the members of society ignore the social contract and bonds of loyalty. Understanding this social structure even briefly becomes important when the community boundaries of honor arise in *Svarfdæla saga*, and are used and misused throughout the valley's struggle.

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<sup>23</sup> Gwyn Jones, 2001, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Byock, 2001, 136.

## REGARDING SVARFDÆLA SAGA

During King Haraldr Finehair's reign and according to the 13<sup>th</sup> century saga tradition, he resolved to conquer the whole of Norway, replacing the petty states and chieftains with his one monarchy. With a large portion of eastern Norway already under his control, he was able to restrict politically the activities of western Norway in their ways of commerce and viking raids. In a subsequent effort to suppress all acts of violence, many of Norway's viking traders had their livelihoods diminished. After Haraldr Finehair won the battle at *Havsfjord*,<sup>25</sup> many of the western Norwegians emigrated to the British Isles to in turn, make raids on their own homeland of Norway.<sup>26</sup> A broader scale of emigration from Norway and other parts of the north to consider, which continued throughout the Viking Age, saw motivation from other sources. One explanation for this northern diaspora may originate with the area's population growth leading to a shortage of land, along with Scandinavia's rising tradesmanship and their strong capability for naval exploration.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In Snorri Sturluson's epic *Heimskringla* (circle of the earth), written 300 years later, the battle of *Havsfjord* becomes the defining naval battle resulting in Norway's unity as one kingdom.

<sup>26</sup> *Íslendingabók*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Farms in the 'village' of Scandinavia underwent very slight alterations from the third to the sixth century. After the sixth century, archeological observations denote "a sort of dividing

Still, when regarding Svarfdæla saga along with many of the Sagas of Icelanders, their history takes part of the speculative settlement myth that many of its settlers fled west from an oppressive situation in Norway. However, the progenitor in Svarfdæla saga is neither unhappy nor mistreated, and described as an established farmer and agent of the king in Naumudal. None of the familiar disagreement or conflict that has pushed so many others toward immigration will interfere with his or his son's lives and livelihood. It will be the traditional search for honor that sends the next generations to seek out other lands, leaving behind family and farm.

*Landnámabók* describes the settling of Iceland for the most part as peaceful. The original settlers could take as much of the land as they wanted, and so they often claimed vast areas. Such is the case of Helgi the Lean<sup>28</sup> who settled most of the area of *Eyjafjörður* in north central Iceland. From *Landnámabók's* pages the history of Thorstein *svarfað*, the probable grandson of the Norwegian King's agent, emerges to unite Svarfdæla saga to the settlement myths of Iceland:

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line which has been termed the Migration period crisis." For a detail discussion, see *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch. The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2002, 10-25.

<sup>28</sup> Mentioned in *Landnámabók* and famous because he "believed in Christianity, and yet made vows to Thor for sea-voyages..." Gwyn Jones, 2001, 277.

## 219. Thorstein Svarfað

There was a man called Thorstein Svarfað, son of Rauð Rugga of Namdalen. He married Hild, daughter of Thrain Black-Troll. Thorstein went to Iceland and took possession of Svarfadardale with Helgi's approval. His children were Karl the Red of Karl's River and Gudrun, wife of Hafthor the Viking; and their children were Klaufi and Groa, who was married to Grís the Gay.

There was a man called Atli the Evil. He killed Hafthor and put Karl in shackles. Then Klaufi came up unexpectedly, killed Atli and set Karl free. Klaufi married Yngvild Fair-Cheek, daughter of Ásgeir Red-Cloak and sister of Olaf the Witch-Breaker and Thorleif. He slit the bag of dyeing moss they'd collected in his land. Then Thorleif made this verse: Boggvir cut//my short-haired bag, //and Olaf's belt//and cloak besides.//He'll never be safe//from the slayer's hand//as long as we live, //this man of mischief.

This led to events in Svarfdæla Saga.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of individuals found in this *Landnámabók* passage are mentioned in some manner in Svarfdæla saga, often under different circumstances and events. Sometimes they even portray different roles. The innovation, purpose or design that altered Svarfdæla saga away or towards this passage in *Landnámabók* to its final writing in a medieval manuscript is singular. This is reinforced through the singular, elaborate nature of the saga's storyline.

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<sup>29</sup> *Landnámabók*, 1968, 97-98.

## SAGA OUTLINE

For those less familiar with Svarfdæla saga, a brief summary of its plot will prove useful.

Thorolf and Thorstein live with their parents in Naumudal, Norway. One day Thorolf, the eldest and a well-regarded tradesman, persuades Thorstein to leave his misused life and accompany him on trading expeditions abroad. Soon growing bored with the mercantile routine, Thorstein leads them into viking and ultimately they engage in a battle with the fearsome Viking, Ljot the Pale. They are victorious but at the cost of Thorolf's life. Thorstein continues his travels to Sweden where he spends the winter at the ageing Jarl Herrod's castle. He finds that Herrod has been challenged by a "half-berserk" named Moldi (Ljot's brother), to either fight him in a duel or accept him as son-in-law. Thorstein takes up the challenge on the earl's behalf and kills Moldi in a duel. He then marries the earl's daughter, Ingibjorg, and is offered by Herrod the opportunity to rule after him, and stay in Sweden forever. Asking three years in which to decide, Thorstein chooses to return with his wife and son to Norway.<sup>30</sup> Events

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<sup>30</sup> The request of time by Thorstein Thorgnyrsson to Jarl Herrod to rule after him parallels Yngvild's request regarding her marriage bargain to Skidi. Thorstein requests three years to

befalling Thorstein and Ingibjorg fall victim to the manuscript gap but it is reasonably believed that a descendent of Thorstein's family arrives in Iceland. The saga text picks up at the end of a battle between the forces of Thorstein Thorsteinsson and a *goði* named Ljotolf.

Thorstein and his son, Karl the Red, win this battle and push Ljotolf east taking over the valley's chieftaincy formally belonging to Ljotolf and his grandfather, Bard the Strong. Soon a relative of Ljotolf's named Grís arrives in the valley and acts upon the following events. He arranges a friendship for Ljotolf with a prominent man in the valley through his daughter; he brings Thorstein's niece and nephew from Norway to Iceland; he will move to a farm close to Thorstein becoming part of his daily routine; and he will foster Thorstein's nephew, Klaufi. Karl the Red goes abroad in an attempt to win viking honor and is not heard of for many years. Thorstein's involvement with his chieftaincy is seen to wane as his presence in valley affairs slowly becomes less prominent.

Eight years pass without incident, until Klaufi kills his first man. He will rescue his cousin Karl the Red from a pirate Viking named Atli, and bring him safely home to Iceland. Hostilities grow in the valley between the

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make his decision to rule, and Yngvild requests five years in which to satisfy the debt owed Ljotolf.

cousins and Ljotolf in a bid for the valley's chieftaincy. A runaway slave named Skidi will arrive in Svarfdæla to stay with Ljotolf, and he is made foreman at *Hof*. Yngvild will become the concubine of Ljotolf, but Klaufi and Karl trick her father under duress of death to pledge her in marriage to Klaufi. A plan is devised to end Klaufi's life that involves Yngvild and her twin brothers, Olaf and Thorleif. After Klaufi's death, Karl the Red becomes obsessed with finding his killers and when Skidi refuses to divulge the twins' whereabouts, he is dragged behind Karl's horse through a field giving him serious injuries. Ljotolf arranges the marriage of Skidi to Yngvild as reward for his injuries and for protecting the twins against Karl. Although she agrees to marry his slave (Ljotolf agrees to free him), she requests a five year period of obligation to the arrangement. Four years later, Skidi and Ljotolf attack the socially and financially weakened Karl the Red after an attempt at mediation fails. Karl is killed along with his few remaining friends. The valley is quiet for twelve years after Karl the Red's death and under the sole control of Ljotolf.

Twelve years later, Karl the Red's youngest son, Karl Karlsson, will emerge when he breaks a wild horse bare handed during a local horse fight. Afterwards he has a confrontation and taunted by the eldest son of Skidi and

Yngvild over the death of his father. Karl Karlsson will throw off his disguise as *kolbíttr* to take on his new role as avenger. Attacking Skidi and Yngvild's farm, he executes their three sons, outlaws Skidi, takes control of their farm and livestock, and abducts Yngvild. After one year and no response from Ljotolf regarding his actions, Karl Karlsson decides to venture his honor abroad. Giving Ljotolf complete control of managing his assets during his absence, he gains permission to take Yngvild with him. Karl Karlsson sells Yngvild into slavery twice over a number of years before she recants her loyalty to Ljotolf. During the time of Yngvild's enslavement, Karl Karlsson will earn a reputation as a well-known Viking and merchant. After Yngvild breaks, Karl returns her to Skidi who is now fighting the Irish. The two men readily bond but Skidi rejects and blames Yngvild for the death of his father, Karl the Red. Taking her back to Svarfdæla, Yngvild is again rejected and blamed by Ljotolf for the death of Karl's father. Ljotolf has increased Karl's assets over the years, providing them solid ground for a lasting friendship.

In the saga's closing text, Ljotolf takes Yngvild under his care but other than this, the saga tells us it is not known what happened to her. Some say she committed suicide out of despair, while others say she married again. Karl Karlsson is forced to exhume and cremate his cousin Klaufi's body as his



ghost continues to cause grief in the valley to man and beast. Ljotolf is found dead in a hideous hole, slain with a short—sword. Karl Karlsson is said to marry Ljotolf's daughter, fathering many children. He will be forced to move north after Ljotolf's son, Ljot Ljotolfrsson takes over his father's chieftaincy and friction between the two men increases.

## CHAPTER III

### RETHINKING SVARFDÆLA SAGA—PART I

#### NORWAY AND SWEDEN

While loyalty, honor and greed are characterized throughout Svarfdæla saga, the threads of family function recur beneath, connecting generational stories with two completely different aesthetic styles. The family ideal as it reflects heroic adventurism in the saga's first half, idealizes the consistent nuclear family in a positive, yet satirical way. Within this dramatized adventure a *model* relationship between a father and son<sup>31</sup> is allowed to materialize along with the close, enduring and somewhat idealized bond formed between the brothers. This family reflects the values imagined for the medieval Icelander, possibly with tongue in cheek, but it provides a template for following generations, as well as the audience, to reflect upon.

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<sup>31</sup> For a description of the solidarity between father and son, stressing it as ingrained duty, see Heusler, Andreas. 1912. *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*. Leipzig: Duncker & Humboldt, 36.

Mirroring the historical reality of their cultures, *Svarfdæla* saga presents family honor and loyalty clashing with political desire in the second half, as a complicated and even lethal mixture during medieval Iceland. Conflict dominates honor, while the struggle for power generates community and secret antagonisms, driving families to ruin. The conflict between the families of Thorstein Thorsteinsson and Ljotolf the *goði* provide a source of political antagonism and tension that lead to random killings of innocent victims, and bloody battles with the loss of many men's lives. Out of bitter rivalry and hatred, an unstable society is created in the valley.

As the saga reveals the beginning, development and then downfall of Thorstein Thorgnyrsson's family, the validity of fidelity is understood and promoted by the saga. Ambiguity overtakes the family's later generations regarding such faithfulness, as individual behavior sabotages hoped-for outcomes. Past events echo the integrity and mutual dependability once established and valued by the family as they collide against the all too real limits of the current generation. Famous praise of glory from days gone by will create the inspiration for the saga audience to glimpse, albeit in vain, those desired human qualities once again.

## UNDIVIDED LOYALTY

*“The more wealth Thorolf brought home, the more his honour increased, but the longer Thorstein continued his behaviour, the more vexing he became to his father. Thorgnyr actually desired that Thorstein should not be referred to as his son.” (149)<sup>32</sup>*

At the onset Svarfdæla saga touches on a family dynamic that echoes throughout the saga; leadership. In this beginning passage, Thorgnyr instructs his son in the social and familial pitfalls that come with his negative behavior. Thorstein has grown to be caustic while his older brother, Thorolf, has become a well-known and well-liked merchant. But when Thorolf invites Thorstein to join him in his business, he pledges his devotion and all he has if only his younger brother would get off the hearth floor and come with him.<sup>33</sup> Thorolf remains committed to his brother’s honor. Even against their father’s approval he is faithful, protecting him during the battle with Ljot the Pale that ends his own life.

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<sup>32</sup> The original version of Svarfdæla saga, translated to English by Fredrik J. Heinemann, is based on text in the *Íslensk fornrit* series, IX, and the version used in this work. All page references after quotes refer to this version.

<sup>33</sup> *Thorolf entered the fire-hall where Thorstein lay lengthwise between the benches. Thorolf walked along, thinking that a log was lying in his way, but suddenly he tripped over Thorstein and pitched into the pile of ashes on the other side of him. Thorstein burst out laughing, at which Thorolf spoke: “What a miserable upbringing we have given you if you can only laugh at our mishaps.” “And it is mean spirited of you,” said Thorstein, “to whine about tripping over my feet, while I have never mentioned that you do as you please with our possessions, as if they were yours alone. I want you to know that I think you are squandering our assets and buying your reputation and popularity with them.” Thorolf said, “You can be sure that I would give my share for you to get up off the floor and leave this house.” (150)*

Thorstein Thorgnyrsson's accomplishment as a well-known Viking and leader of men is due in part to the tandem effort of his father's discipline and his brother's devotion. Throughout his life, Thorstein receives the benefit of strong support and guidance from those closest to him; his father, brother, and later, from the aging Herrod. It could be that Thorstein's ascent from *kolbíttr*<sup>34</sup> to the heroic model is only a current day intrusion however, when placing Thorstein's life circumstances next to those of future generations in Iceland, the comparison could hold some social significance to the saga audience.

*Svarfdæla* saga utilizes the slave's status and situation in Icelandic society to effectively illustrate other treatment of individual circumstances. In comparing the upbringing and treatment of Klaufi during his young life, with that of the runaway slave, Skidi, it is difficult to disregard the saga's social message. Klaufi received ill-treatment by his foster-father while performing the duties of a slave, while the runaway slave Skidi is automatically afforded

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<sup>34</sup> Arnold, 2003, 195. The unpromising hero, the *kolbíttr*, who by this very description is understood to be an untapped well of extraordinary accomplishments. ...is to be found in a number of Old Norse narratives: cf. Sigurðr in *Völsunga saga*; Höttir in *Hrólfs saga kraka*; Grímr Eyjúlffsson in *Þorskfirðinga saga*; Oddr Arneirsson in *Landnámabók*; Starkaðr in *Gautreks saga*; Hörðr in *Harðar saga Grímkelssonar*; Grettir in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*; Glúmr in *Víga-Glúms saga*; Þorsteinn in *Svarfdæla saga*; and Ketill in *Ketils saga hængs*. The Old English analogy to the *kolbíttr* phenomenon is the hero Beowulf whose lack of early promise is briefly mentioned: cf. F. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Boston, 1950), II. 2183b-2189. Arnold, fn 20.

a higher level of respect by Ljotolf and the community. When adding the aristocratic Yngvild's being sold into slavery as a means to punish, humiliate and break her, slavery is displayed as an institution that is being used as a tool by those who are able to control and manipulate it. Its place in the social order is shown as ineffectual and especially harmful.

#### THE LAST WORD

*"Thorstein said, "It seems likely to me, brother that you will keep any promises you make, because your integrity is tried and true, but nevertheless I wish to impose one condition if we go trading together." "What is that?" asked Thorolf. "I will do almost anything you ask if you do as I wish." Thorstein said, "My request will seem strange to you. I wish always to have the last word whenever we disagree.""* (150)

Still considered a disagreeable and boorish thug by some,<sup>35</sup> the boldness of Thorstein to exact a promise from Thorolf should be questioned as the complete transformation of Thorstein is yet to come. Nevertheless, Thorolf's interest in improving his brother's honor is genuine, even if it lacks rational concern.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Thorstein casts aside Thorolf's offer of weaponry and clothing in cavalier fashion. His father is less quick to believe his transformation, waiting three years before making amends with his son (151).

<sup>36</sup> There is the comparison with *Egil's saga*, in the brother's relationship; the older brother helping the younger one by taking him abroad. However, Egil is not a *kolbitr*, possessing a superior and aggressive intellect at an early age. Egil's consideration for others does not develop as Thorstein's does, as he continues to act of his own will at the hazard of those around him. The brothers in *Svarfdæla saga* remain, for the most part, cohesive along the

This request of Thorstein's sets up a paradigm with which to view similar future events in the saga. With a spoken bond of loyalty and devotion between them, the brothers begin their career together on a level playing field. There is little confusion as to what they *state* their intent is; how they fulfill this bond remains to be seen. It is unknown the saga audience at this point if either of the brothers will keep their word. When the outcome becomes clear, surrounding circumstances impose variables that could leave differing interpretations.<sup>37</sup> By exacting this promise from Thorolf, Thorstein is asking his brother and the saga audience, "Will you trust me?" This request for trust places Thorstein in a role where an expected obligation exists toward those who accept. Is the saga asking, when taking a leadership role, what is the obligation to those they lead? Who would you give the "last word" to? A comparison between the first and second half of the saga exists regarding how community leaders handle their responsibilities. In the first part of the saga, Thorstein Thorgnyrsson reaches a desired level of aptitude in his abilities to guide others, while those in future generations appear to relish

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same path, although that path is what Thorstein desires. For literature regarding this, see Ármann Jakobsson (2008), 1-18.

<sup>37</sup> It could be argued that Thorolf's devotion for his brother kept him from keeping his promise, as he did not remain behind when they undertook Ljot the Pale as Thorstein requested. And while Thorstein did ask him not to go because of the danger, his request was not strong enough, ending it with "You decide." In the end, Thorstein neglected to take any additional measures to ensure his brother's safety when it could have saved his life.

in their own motivation. While they rush to think and act for their own profit, Thorstein Thorgnyrsson is open and learns from life's experiences in an effort to benefit those around him.

Guidance and leadership is used to either strengthen or weaken family and friend relationships in *Svarfdæla saga*. Success occurs, or the happy ending, in the *fornaldarsaga* part through positive use of leadership. The reverse is found from its misuse in Iceland. In Iceland, the playing field is never level with deceit and planned misunderstandings at the core of many relationships. Where there is not misunderstanding, there is apathy. As seen with the uncle-nephew relationship between Thorstein Thorsteinsson and Klaufi. Klaufi seeks advice from his uncle at a pivotal point in his life, when Thord the Wrestler challenges him to a match, only to receive a well-meant, yet hollow reply. Thorstein's bankrupt response may have played a crucial part in Klaufi's future deeds,<sup>38</sup> while portraying an example of the misuse of leadership in its apathetic form.

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<sup>38</sup> This premise could be taken further back to Thorstein fostering Klaufi with Gris, a relative of his rival chieftain. Thorstein may have used the situation for his own benefit in eliminating the burden of the children, or he did not understand the dangers facing the young Klaufi. Either one of these possibilities hold a certain amount of apathy on Thorstein's part.



Thorstein Thorsteinsson provides other examples of ineffectual leadership in the saga. Thorstein's active participation in his chieftaincy wanes considerably as he fails to direct or offer council to those relying upon him.<sup>39</sup> At Grís' wedding feast, his comment that Grís has suggested an inappropriate game is done with sarcasm, not by clearly and forcefully stating his position as chieftain. When he does provide rare guidance to his son Karl the Red, the comment's ambiguity can easily represent a double meaning. Nearing his death, Thorstein Thorsteinsson tells Karl the Red, "*I want to request you, my son, to be a staunch friend to those men in the district who are loyal to you*" (177). What is missing here are the many years of teaching his son to identify and cultivate the important social attributes of dependability and friendship. In another more nurtured or attentive relationship this would be sound advice, but in this instance it is at the mercy of interpretation. As found when Karl the Red drags Skidi behind his horse in a brutal attempt to find the twins of Ásgeir. It will be Ogmund (Karl's most loyal friend), who cuts Skidi loose, saying, "*We will remember what your father said when we abuse Skidi so, for he was your friend*" (179). Because the meaning of Thorstein's cautionary comment is unable to take root with any substance as both men

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<sup>39</sup> Another possibility is Thorstein's lack of leadership ability from the beginning. His capability of winning the chieftaincy does not extend to running it effectively.

are unaware of the value loyalty plays in their environment, they interpret Thorstein's words differently. While correct in thinking that Skidi is not his friend, Karl pays little heed to his father's advice and abuses him. On the other hand, Ogmund remembers and understands the word's correct intentions, but unsuspectingly views Skidi as a friend.

YOU NEED NOT SPARE ME ANYTHING

*"Ljot asked, "What are the terms of this deal?" "The terms are simple," Thorstein said, "You are to go ashore and take your weapons and clothes with you, but your men can keep only their shirts and breeches." Ljot said, "I do not think these terms are very fair, but what are the other terms?""* (154)

When Thorstein Thorgnyrsson declares a desire for the kind of honor received through single-handed battle, he turns to his father for advice. This is another indicator of the strong base the men's trust and dependency stand on, regardless of any previous conflicts between them. Thorgnyr does not agree with his son's decision, yet he provides him with the guidance he seeks.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *"We also have not yet sufficiently proved ourselves," said Thorstein, "in single combat or raiding and would like to test ourselves further. Father, I would like you to send us up against some viking where real fame can be earned, where tribute or death will befall me, so that afterwards I will be mentioned with respect." "It is most likely," said Thorgnyr, "that you will obtain what you are asking for, if you think it so important to die so soon. Now I will send you to the man whose defeat will bring you fame as long as the world lasts." "May your words come true," said Thorstein. "Send me to him as quickly as possible." (152). Note Thorstein interchanges the pronouns 'we' and 'me', 'us' and*

Thorstein's battle against the Viking Ljot the Pale unveils another stage in his heroic success as the confident and polished warrior, together with his growing sophistication and awareness of the world around him. When he engages the famous Viking at Gotland<sup>41</sup> in formulaic dialogue before engaging him in battle, this growth is being highlighted.<sup>42</sup> What may be lost in the surprise of the fierce and quick attack of the viking may be gained from behaving as a man of honor and chivalry. The exchange of lofty dialogue aside, this battle becomes significant in its power to project the carnage created and the cost of life. The vivid descriptions of the decks heavy with blood, intestines being held together with cloth, and a body severed in half, tells of the intensity and tragedy occurring here, more so than a factual accounting of events. Behind this intensity lies Thorstein's authority and greatness of heart. When Ljot the Pale offers to only send in an equal number of ships to the fray, Thorstein pithily replies, "*you need not spare me*

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'T throughout this passages, leaving little question that his brother is willing, it is he who wishes to gain this honor.

<sup>41</sup> Gotland is a crossroads to the Baltic where Kufic coins found revealed mostly mercantile roles existing on the island. Gwyn Jones, 1984, 242, states it is believed Sweden and Gotland coexisted well together in commerce which may point to Thorstein's desire to bury his brother outside of Gotland; due to its populated and industrious nature.

<sup>42</sup> By comparison, in Iceland, a less sophisticated battle ensues *when Karl the Red and Ljotolf the goði clash forces with no words spoken* (176).

*anything.*" (155)<sup>43</sup> and proves himself true. Thorstein's superior battle acumen displayed in detail in this passage will become a foremost characteristic of the family line for generations to come.<sup>44</sup> And while this proficiency will be a testament to their skill and strength, it will also become the family's foil.<sup>45</sup>

Another compelling aspect of this battle is Thorstein's seemingly innocent ability in overcoming the magic associated with Ljot the Pale. It is told that due to some force or magic, weapons cannot pierce the famous Viking's skin. On the final day of the battle, Thorstein and Thorolf board the *Iron Prow* to find Ljot the Pale and his men forming a phalanx of shields in defense. Thorstein drops his battle-axe to pick up a tree stump so he can *cut through* the heavy press of men.<sup>46</sup> By using this non-conventional or natural weapon, Thorstein may have unwittingly circumvented Ljot the Pale's

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<sup>43</sup> *"The other terms," said Thorstein, "are that we do battle." Ljot said, "How big is the force that allows you to make such hard terms?" "This is the force that I have," said Thorstein, "these ten ships." Ljot then smiled and said, "This is incredible. I'd rather do battle with you than to lose my possessions shamefully." "Then set all your ships against mine" said Thorstein. Ljot said, "I am unwilling to send more ships into battle than you do, because I have never done so before. I have always had fewer ships, but still gained the victory." Thorstein said, "You need not spare me anything." Ljot said, "Still, I shall not send more than an equal number, but if you must fight with the odds against you, then I will replace each of my captured ships, so long as they last." "As you choose," said Thorstein.*

<sup>44</sup> This line of men from Thorstein Thorgnyrsson, Thorstein Thorsteinsson, Karl the Red, Klaufi, and Karl Karlsson, all possess great and formidable battle skills.

<sup>45</sup> Realizing he cannot defeat Thorstein Thorsteinsson and Karl in Red on the battlefield, Ljotolf creates a negative social undercurrent in an effort to ruin their reputation and honor.

<sup>46</sup> *Then a hard battle on both sides began. Thorstein threw down his axe because it was too unwieldy in the press of men. He grabbed the stump of a log and fought with it. Thorolf, his brother, moved forward at his side and protected them both, for Thorstein had no other thought than to kill everyone in his way. (155)*

magical qualities. Graphically describing in this passage how Thorstein pins the Viking with such force that his head and shoulders fall overboard and his legs remaining on ship reinforces Ljot the Pale's ending as a coward, where Thorstein successfully overcomes magic while not using magic himself.

However, this hard won victory comes with equally hard and lasting affects for Thorstein. Thorolf is mortally wounded.<sup>47</sup> It is with grace that Thorolf prefers his fate to laying blame on his brother, telling Thorstein he would rather die like this and at his side, than live with the shame of not following his heart. Thorstein's dismay is immediate when saying, "*...I would have given a great deal for us never to have made this journey.*"(155). Small and simple as these words may sound; Thorolf's death becomes a defining point for Thorstein. Becoming more 'self-reflective,' he continues to lament his brother's death, first through his search to find a suitable burial site.

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<sup>47</sup> Thorstein becomes aware of his brother's wounds only after it is called to his attention, as a testament to Thorolf's incredible sacrifice through devotion, and to Thorstein's cavalier personality. *But as they neared the shore, Thorolf spoke: "I must call a halt, for I cannot go on any further." Thorstein said, "Are you wounded, brother?" "I cannot conceal it," said Thorolf, "for when Ljot threw his sword, he was aiming more at you, and I moved my shield so that I was unprotected. The sword struck me just below the ribs and pierced my gut, so that my intestines fell out. I tied my clothes around my waist, and I have been walking around like that ever since. Now my walking is at an end." ... Thorolf said, "There is no sense blaming anyone now, because no man can live beyond his day of doom, and it seems better to me to die with a good reputation than to live with the shame of not having followed you."* (155)

## REQUESTED EVERYTHING OF SIGNIFICANCE

*“Thorstein said, “I will gladly grant you this request, for I believe that it will increase our honour, and that good fortune will follow your name while it is borne in our family.” Thorolf said, “Now I think I have requested everything of significance.” Then Thorolf died.” (155-156)*

Thorolf’s request may be more farsighted and prophetic than first realized. Both brothers seem to agree that Thorolf’s name and nature are more conducive to the family’s future success.<sup>48</sup> The manuscript gap refuses any additional knowledge of how Thorolf Thorsteinsson grew to become in the saga, proving the two brothers right or wrong. Or, if there were any other children between Thorstein Thorgnyrsson and Ingibjorg Herrodsdottir, other than the probability of the Thorstein who arrives in Iceland and his sister Thorarna who resides in Norway. Was Thorolf Thorsteinsson able to bring increased honor and good fortune as the brothers prophesied, continuing the family good fortune in Norway or Sweden?<sup>49</sup> However, despite the emphasis Svarfdæla saga’s places on the legacy of one’s name, in the end prominence is

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<sup>48</sup> The saga allows the audience to decide which characteristics of Thorolf and Thorstein they prefer, with limited and few hints of its own opinion. Although Thorstein achieves great honor as Viking and leader, he will adopt many of the qualities and sensibilities of Thorolf, which may be beneficial to surviving future societies.

<sup>49</sup> Thorstein names his first son Thorolf as promised and the saga says, *He grew up there and was quickly mature and like his namesake, Thorolf.* (161)

given to those least expecting fame and honor, while denying those who strive to achieve it.

#### THE EARL'S CHALLENGE

*"Thorstein said, "What do they want from the earl?" The man said, "Moldi wants to become the earl's in-law by marrying his daughter, Ingibjorg, or else he will challenge him to a duel three nights after Yuletide. The earl must decide what he wants. He would decide in a trice if he were a young man, but he is past the dueling age.""*<sup>50</sup> (157)

Arriving in Sweden at the castle of the aging Jarl Herrod, Thorstein is recognized and greeted as a man of value. Invited to drink and talk with the earl,<sup>51</sup> Thorstein is told, *"I have heard you spoken of as an excellent man, and your exploits much praised. Be seated, and we will drink together today while you tell me the news. Sit opposite me on the high seat."* (156). Herrod finds it an honor for Thorstein to hold his brother's funeral in his hall, with the feast provided to all the great men attending lavish and fraught with gifts. From the young man who wasted his time by the hearth fire and a problem to those around

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<sup>50</sup> See Arnold, 2003, 228, fn74, regarding this episode bearing a resemblance to the Middle English tale of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Both stories include a challenge at an eminent royal court by a mysterious and 'otherworldly' stranger, with the respective heroes keeping an appointment for combat, and the taking up of a challenge on behalf of an aging ruler. See Arnold, 2003, 228, fn74. Additional similarities include a magical item (the green girdle in SGGK, and a special sword in Svarfdæla saga.), intended to protect the heroes.

<sup>51</sup> *Thorstein greeted him [Jarl Herrod]. He returned his greeting warmly and asked who he was. He said that his name was Thorstein and that he was the son of Thorgnyr from the north of Naumudal.* (156). Announcing himself as his father's son, with respect and honor for his family, Thorstein has made a name for himself.

him, he has grown into a man who gains honor through his concern for others in his life.

Invited to stay over the winter, Thorstein soon hears the news of the ill-intended visit of a half-*berserkr* named Moldi during the *yule* season. Moldi is the brother of Ljot the Pale, and like his brother he possesses magical qualities.<sup>52</sup> Having challenged the earl two previous *yules*, Moldi has made it clear that if the earl does not fight him this year, he will forcefully take his daughter in marriage. When Thorstein takes up Moldi's challenge on the earl's behalf, he moves from self-serving to a more altruistic approach to life as he proves his willingness to put the well-being of others before his own. Although Thorstein takes up the challenge after the earl promises his daughter in marriage to the one who "...gets rid of this man" (157),<sup>53</sup> the intent could be an effort to make the contest a fair one and open to all who wish to enter.

Moldi and his men arrive at the castle on *yule's* eve, as expected. After exchanging a series of insults, Moldi challenges Thorstein to duel within the

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<sup>52</sup> The magic he possesses could account for the unknown hold on the earl's men, leaving them weak and afraid of taking up Moldi's challenge. He also has the ability to blunt any weapon he gazes upon. "The male entry into female skills, such as the magician and the diviner, suggest a blurring of gender roles in Old Norse mentality, including deep-seated notions of masculinity and femininity." Jochens, 1996, 211.

<sup>53</sup> Thorstein suggests that the earl offer his daughter's hand in marriage as incentive for others to take up the challenge, denying his own desire in this area.



next three days. Thorstein insists they fight immediately and in this very place, but Moldi refuses, saying, "*I do not wish to violate the sanctity of the gods, and I am not keen on fighting now*" (158).<sup>54</sup> Whether Moldi is sincere about respecting the gods or he felt now was just not a good time for him, this tactic of putting the duel on one's own ground and in one's own time will be used again in the future by Ljotolf in Iceland. Ljotolf avoids battle often and when he does engage, it is rarely at his adversary's advantage. Even when his lack of action causes damage to his reputation.

During his preparation for the duel with Moldi, Thorstein receives and accepts guidance from the earl. Warning him of Moldi's magic, where he is able to blunt all weapons he lays eyes on, Jarl Herrod provides Thorstein with a special more worthy sword to overcome Moldi. Advising Thorstein to keep this sword sheathed until he is ready to use it with a plan to show the sword he took from Ljot the Pale first, then Moldi will be caught unaware giving Thorstein the advantage to strike. When the two meet, Moldi begins explaining his elaborate set of dueling rules until Thorstein insists they begin

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<sup>54</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*, Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 1996, notes this passage where he [Moldi] would not break the sacred peace of the Winter Festival, even though it is unknown if the author is projecting Christian sentiments back into a dimly known past.

the fight.<sup>55</sup> The manuscript is corrupt at this point in the passage obscuring the details of the duel; however the trust of the passage appears Thorstein did as the earl instructed, presenting the dead man's sword as distraction, and then presenting the earl's sword to end Moldi's life.

#### INGIBJORG HERRODSDOTTIR

The circumstances and approach to the marriage of Thorstein and Ingibjorg further advances Thorstein's achievement toward the *heroic* ideal. Ingibjorg is not initially consulted regarding her hand in marriage, but her wishes and opinion are considered before the marriage takes place. The saga uses time to distance Ingibjorg from becoming a means to an end. Initially, she is protected by her father and Thorstein from being overcome by a man whose purpose is to take advantage of her position. And although she becomes the incentive, or reward in order for her father to surmount this threat, a period of time is placed between the challenge being met and the final arrangement of her marriage. So much time passes that it appears the

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<sup>55</sup> ...Moldi said he would state the dueling rules, "...for I have challenged you. Each of us will place his cloak under his feet, and each of us must stand on his cloak, not moving the thickness of a finger, and the one that moves will bear a coward's name, while the man that wins will be called a valiant man wherever he goes. Whoever is wounded or defeated can release himself from the duel by paying three marks." ... "It is our custom," said Moldi, "that each man can have three shields to defend himself against the blows, but where is the sword that you intend to fight with?" Thorstein produces Ljot inn bleiki's sword. Moldi said, "Are you telling me of the death of Ljot, my brother, and that you are his killer?" Thorstein said, "It cannot be denied, and now you will want to avenge him and delay things no longer." Moldi said, "I think it a shame to kill such a valiant man."

earl is forced to approach Thorstein in order to settle the matter, who by rights has won her as bride. Thorstein does not refer to Ingibjorg as reward, but describes her as his "heart's desire."<sup>56</sup> After the matter of Thorstein's wishes is understood, in addition to this, the earl offers his realm to rule after him. Thorstein's request for three years in which to decide if he will accept the earl's offer to rule after him, his desire for Ingibjorg is separated further from what she can bring to him politically. When Thorstein decides against remaining in Sweden and after three years of marriage, Ingibjorg value does not diminish as it is she who is escorted by her father to their ship in a clear nod to her worth and nobility. *Then the earl had a ship for Norway loaded with the cargo that Thorstein wished to take with him, and he led his daughter out in great pomp and ceremony.* (161).

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<sup>56</sup> Indicating a certain amount of time has passed between the duel and this conversation, the passage begins: *Once when the earl and Thorstein were talking together, the earl asked what reward Thorstein desired for his brave deed, "with which you have increased our honour greatly." Thorstein said, "I would accept from you whatever you wish to offer, but it is scarcely to be expected that I obtain my heart's desire because of our differences in degrees." ... Thorstein said, "My reward is easy to choose, if it is up to me. This is Ingibjorg, your daughter..." The earl said, "I have known this for some time, **and it has taken longer than I thought.** I shall keep the promise that I made you, but I would like to say something which will benefit us both. I will raise your degree in that you will rule this realm after my day and never return to Norway." Thorstein said, "I will promise to remain here three years, but thereafter I will choose whether I accept the earldom, because by then I will know whether I will be able to rule the realm or not." This is a wise decision," said the earl, "and I will agree to this if Ingibjorg agrees." (160).*

Ingibjorg's position in life is reflective of Yngvild's in Iceland as both have aristocratic and political function for their families. However, by contrast, the saga makes a dynamic statement regarding the suitable treatment of women. Whereas Ingibjorg's treatment is based on honor and respect with great effort spent to separate her social status from the individual woman, Yngvild's value and treatment become the sum total of her familial and political attributes. Yngvild is asked in some instances concerning decisions made with her life but mostly her wishes and opinion became secondary to the agenda of others. After her exploitation, misuse and abandonment to years of enslavement on her own, Yngvild is returned to Iceland where her aristocratic and human level are verbally razed with the words spoken by her abuser: "*You may now marry her to anyone you like, because she will not seem too proud to anyone*" (159), while in effect laying blame for the behavior of others at her feet.<sup>57</sup> The two differing views of these two similar women originate from the men who have control in their lives. Neither women have shown valid cause to justify either treatment.

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<sup>57</sup> The figure of the revenging woman thus provided the authors of the sagas of Icelanders with an excuse for male failure to provide peace. Jochens, 1996, 203.

## MANUSCRIPT GAP

After Thorstein and Ingibjorg leave Sweden to sail back to Norway, they are lost in the manuscript gap with all remaining deeds and events surrounding them and their children vanishing. However, a strong premise remains that while this text is lost, Thorstein Thorgnyrsson probably lived out the remainder of his days in honor and peace.<sup>58</sup> It is also logical that the Thorstein Thorsteinsson, who arrives in Iceland at the beginning of the second half, is the son of the Norwegian Thorstein and the sister of Thorarna in Sweden. While *Landnámabók* claims another name for the father of Thorstein<sup>59</sup> the continuity of significant names and events along with character behavior within *Svarfdæla saga*, links the two distinct halves together.

Another possible relationship connection exists between Ljot the Pale and Ljotolf. Similarity in names aside, Ljot's family line continues in Sweden with Snækoll Ljotsson, the father of Klaufi and Sigrid.<sup>60</sup> Neither of Ljotolf's parents are mentioned in the available text, creating a impasse when considering his immediate origins. If this exclusion was the intent of the

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<sup>58</sup> Heinemann, 1998, 56-72.

<sup>59</sup> *Landnámabók* claims Thorstein *Svarfað* was the son of Rauð Rugga of Namdalen.

<sup>60</sup> Snækoll Ljotsson will father Klaufi and Sigrid with Thorarna, the sister of Thorstein Thorsteinsson only to abandoned her, or 'run her off.'

saga, speculation may have been intended for the saga audience to decide if the continuation of names in the family appears a logical conclusion as to this ancestry.

## CHAPTER IV

## RETHINKING SVARFDÆLA SAGA—PART II

## ICELAND ERUPTS

*“Thorstein the Tumultuous now took control of the valley between mountain and fjord on the other side of the river. He went to the mountains and erected a boundary stake at the uppermost edge and broke a comb and threw the pieces on the ground. Afterwards he had silver buried in three places, a half mark in each place, and that strip of land is called Kamb. Thorstein named witnesses, made the valley his legal domicile, and give it his name, calling it Svarfadardal.” (161)*

Svarfdæla saga begins its second half in Iceland with the description of the end of a major battle between two rival factions.<sup>61</sup> The text describes the conflict is decisively in favor of Thorstein and his son Karl the Red<sup>62</sup> as they push their rival Ljotolf the *goði*<sup>63</sup> and his few remaining men east across the

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<sup>61</sup> ...some of them were killed and others crippled. In all, seventeen men died. Since then the place has been called Stafsholt and the valley Deildardal. (161)

<sup>62</sup> In a roundtable discussion with Stefan Brink, Judith Jesch discusses the possible original purpose of the name Karl. Based on the use of Karl and Thane as personal names as well as titles, this discussion may have some bearing on Thorstein Thorsteinsson as he seeks out his own heritage in Iceland while naming his son Karl. For a complete reading see, *The Scandinavians from the Vendal period to the tenth century: an ethnographic perspective*, Judith Jesch, ed. NY: Boydell Press, 2002, 125.

<sup>63</sup> In the saga, Ljótólf is referred to as chieftain and *goði*, whereas Thorstein and Karl are only called chieftain. Sigurður Nordal explains the difference in nature of these two positions: “The power of the chieftains derived in part from the land which they or their fathers had settled—from the support of the men who had lived there. But this would not have sufficed to secure the position of the *goðar*, for the number of settlements far exceeded that of the *goðorð*; moreover, the power of the *goðar* consisted in authority over men, not territory.” Sigurður Nordal, *Icelandic Culture*, translation with notes by Vilhjálmur T. Bjarnar. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Library, 1990, 77.

river. What cannot be determined from the text is the nature of the conflict leading up to this pivotal battle; how long had the men been fighting, and how it began. Although when the saga describes where the loyalty in the valley lay, most of the local men sided with Thorstein as well as Karl the Red, with additional support from men from the north,<sup>64</sup> and so providing some clues.

An indication exists of Thorstein and Karl the Red's ability to enlist the majority of support in the valley including Hoskuld the *lawspeaker*, showing their standing as honorable men.<sup>65</sup> Jesse Byock interprets within the 'great village' environment of the Icelandic commonwealth, leaders gained prestige and standing through their reputation of being men of moderation (*hófsmenn*) and goodwill (*góðviljamenn*).<sup>66</sup> Part of a leader's function is to provide a legal arena in which to channel disagreements, aggressive and violent behavior,

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<sup>64</sup> Now we turn to those who supported Thorstein: Olaf from Olafs fjörd, Hedin from Hedins fjord – they were brothers along with Svarthofði, who drowned, and the rocks there are called Svarthofðasteinar, the spit of the land where the sail washed ashore Siglunes, and the bay where the mast washed up Siglufjörd. Hedin had a son named Svarthofði. Olaf had two sons, Thord and Vemund. All these men and many other men of note sided with Karl the Red. A man called Hoskuld, a lawspeaker, lived in the valley. ... He had a son called Ogmund. Both of them sided with Thorstein and Karl...(161)

<sup>65</sup> Andersson and Miller, 1989, 58. "The entire tale of support-gathering, so crucial to saga action, depends on honorable people attempting to acquire the capacity to overwhelm an opponent. It is his own honor that gives him the ability to enlist support; few rush to the aid the cause of a man without honor."

<sup>66</sup> Byock, 2001, 79.



making a moderate man one who represents fair judgment to others. As a chieftain's power rested on the consent of his followers and was answerable only to minimal guidelines set by law, public opinion became the chieftain's voluntary public contract.<sup>67</sup> This means the relationship between chieftain and *thing*-men can easily become fluid, depending on the actions and behavior of the individuals involved or the circumstances surrounding events. This fluidity plays an important role in the situations involving *Svarfdæla saga*, as loyalty and popularity shift frequently.

Regarding Ljotolf's *goði* and chieftaincy, as there is no mention of his parents or any role they may have played in valley politics, their absence could have been instrumental in the loss of his chieftaincy. Still a young man when his grandfather dies and without a parent to buffer the loss, Ljotolf may have been left inexperienced and at a disadvantage to the older, battle-hardened Thorstein. The popularity found in Thorstein and Karl the Red during this conflict could reflect Ljotolf's, as well as his grandfather's, lack of diplomatic and negotiation skills. And while other ambiguous variables can be involved with the loss or retention of a chieftaincy, such as conflicts over

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<sup>67</sup> Byock, 2001, 120.

financial matters, money, inheritance, land, or theft,<sup>68</sup> Ljotolf does not appear to enjoy the popularity attributed to Thorstein and Karl. It will take him years of fighting to regain control as chieftain, and not done through a positive reputation but with subversively hindering his opponents. Still, within these possibilities, there is an indication that Ljotolf had some control in the valley for an a period of time as the *saga* tells us,<sup>69</sup> “...they drove Ljotolf and his men out and took control of the whole valley on their side, for by this time Bjorn the Stout, Ljotolf’s grandfather, was dead.” (161). As this passage is written, it indicates the two events are connected but not as a result of an immediate cause and effect.

Bjorn the Stout and Ljotolf are not mentioned as original settlers in *Landnámabók*, but as referenced in Chapter II, Thorstein Thorsteinsson and members of his family are. As classes<sup>70</sup> in Iceland were not closed, chieftaincies were transferable by sale, gift, inheritance, or by simple

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<sup>68</sup> Byock, 1982, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Lacking time references and available text, it is impossible to project how long Thorstein and Karl were in the valley prior to this defining conflict with Ljotolf. As the text stands, there is some indication a more natural shift in loyalty occurred up to this point. There was approximately eight years of peace under the leadership of Thorstein after taking the chieftaincy, implying he was once well received.

<sup>70</sup> Guðrún Nordal, 1998, 46. In theory, there were only two formal classes in Iceland at this time; freemen and slaves. Indicating that economics as well as ability and fortune could drive an individual’s status up or down in society.

expropriation.<sup>71</sup> Thorstein received permission from Helgi the Lean to settle land in the fjórd, and possibly with the intent to obtain his own chieftaincy. Based upon this foundation, the text from *Landnámabók* may further indicate that the events in *Svarfdæla* saga regarding Thorstein Thorsteinsson overtaking Ljotolf and his grandfather's chieftaincy were through popularity, rather than usurpation.

#### THEY HAD ONCE BEEN AT ODDS

*“And whereas before Thorstein and Ljotolf had been at odds with each other, they now became friends and banded together with Nefglita, Bard the Grim from Hraun, Thorkel Skeggjason from Skeggjastadir, and Ogmund Hoskuldsson.<sup>72</sup> They built a boat which they kept in the river and fished off shore where others had fishing rights. The landowners protested to Hoskuld the law expert, asking his advice as to how they should proceed. He said that the landowners were each due a quarter of the catch. Thorstein and the others deposited this amount on shore without telling anyone, and ravens ate it so that the landowners got no more than before. Thorstein and his friends maintained that they had fulfilled the letter of the law that Hoskuld had pronounced.” (162)*

After gaining control of the valley, Thorstein swiftly and legally renames the valley unruly (*Svarfdæla*). This initial action outlines the careful attention Thorstein pays when it comes to matters of law<sup>73</sup> which becomes a vital component when assessing Thorstein's character and behavior. This

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<sup>71</sup> Andersson & Miller, 1999, 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Ogmund is the son of the *law speaker*, Hoskuld and remains Karl the Red's friend until the end.

<sup>73</sup> He also shows this careful attention when fostering his niece and nephew.

exacting legal nature will create a sharp contrast in the portrayal of Thorstein's accountability in other passages.

After the final conflict and battle between Thorstein and Ljotolf, they come together not only as friends, but also to collaborate on a fishing boat. At first blush, it appears that Ljotolf is a true moderate man (*hófsmaður*), as he would have to overlook the recent loss of his chieftaincy to make peace with Thorstein. Yet, upon a closer look, more can be seen behind this new friendship as Ljotolf begins a different kind of battle.

Reviewing this passage, there is little doubt these men have misused the rights of the landowners as they did not first gain permission. A reinforced sense of ill concern continues after it is perceived these friends persist in disrespect by leaving their payment of fish on the shore for the ravens. Lacking details from the text to point to any specific friend, the final blame naturally falls to Thorstein as he would be the one responsible for corrective action. This negative reflection on Thorstein's character creates a glaring contrast of a man who prudently takes great legal effort in one situation (re-naming the valley), to openly breaking it in another (landowner's rights). This contrast casts enough doubt on the more immediate interpretation that Thorstein himself placed the fish on the shore

or had knowledge it was being done, and points to another possible conclusion for what has occurred here. Thorstein cannot be excluded from this event any more than the rest of these friends, but it appears he is guiltier of gullibility than maliciousness. The text uses the phrases "*Thorstein and the others...Thorstein and his friends...*" (162), when referring to actions taken by the men, to imply the men acted together and with consensus and in the presence of Thorstein. However, it is not known if the fish were left on the shore by all the friends, by a few individuals, or only by one. The saga cannot or will not say exactly who did this, but is it reasonable to presume the boat is only used as a group—or could each man have fished at his own discretion? It would take only one incident of flaunting the landowner rights to reflect negatively on Thorstein and the group as a whole. However, more damage would be placed on Thorstein and his leadership.

Afterwards, animosity creeps between Thorstein and Ljotolf once again, with tensions increasing. Thorstein does not want a relative of Ljotolf to move to his side of the valley and there is nothing to indicate they had contact ever again. Also, if anyone could say to benefit from this incident, it would be Ljotolf. As unlikely as it would be for Ljotolf himself to leave the fish on shore for the ravens, as the saga will reveal in future passages, he

becomes very good at getting others to do his bidding.<sup>74</sup> Also at this time, the first signs of the power structure shifting in the valley are taking place.<sup>75</sup> This shift could indicate Thorstein's lack of ability to lead, or the result of a carefully laid plan on the part of Ljotolf that worked out rather well.

#### WHAT WORKED WELL ONCE

What worked well once is worth trying again.<sup>76</sup> Ljotolf engages in a second boat venture with Karl the Red. Together they build a sea-going vessel, calling it the *Icelander*. After the ship launches from the moor at *Hof*, Ljotolf's farm, Karl will sail abroad on her. A likely secondary intent may exist on the part of Ljotolf in co-building the *Icelander*, such as getting Karl out of the country for a number of years. During the many years of Karl's absence, Ljotolf is able to take advantage of the split in strength in Thorstein's chieftaincy. Grís may have played a shadowy part in Karl's travels abroad, by having some running knowledge of where he and what he is doing. There could even be speculation that Grís could have added to Karl's misadventures abroad, to place him in danger whenever possible.

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<sup>74</sup> Hrolf Shiny-nose was one of the friend, and Ljotolf's most staunch supporter.

<sup>75</sup> After their friendship ended, the *saga* says, "Most men had to look towards either Thorstein or Ljotolf for friendship" (161), indicating a movement of loyalty in the valley.

<sup>76</sup> Thorstein could have taken the opportunity to counsel his son against this collaboration based on his own experience with Ljotolf and the fishing boat. Still, even though their association ended negatively, Thorstein may not have been fully aware of what actually occurred, including the underhanded nature of Ljotolf's friendship.

Nonetheless, Karl will suffer severe political harm when he returns to Iceland several years later when Ljotolf uses the circumstances surrounding the *Icelander* against Karl's reputation at the Althingi.<sup>77</sup>

#### GRÍS RETURNS

*"Grís approached Thorstein who did not take him at first, but finally said he would not oppose Grís settling there if he behaved properly, "even though I am not keen on Ljotolf's kinsmen settling on this side of the river.""* (162)

Grís reveals himself as scheming, narcissistic, greedy and deceitful, as well as Ljotolf's spy. He is an *agent provocateur*. Thorstein's gullibility becomes more evident when he believes Grís is simply a troublemaker who can be managed. It is surmised that Grís originated from Iceland <sup>78</sup> and has returned with the purpose of serving three major functions in Ljotolf's battle for Svarfdæla.

He stays with his kinsman Ljotolf over the winter until he is able to gain permission to move to a farm close his relative's rivals, just south of Thorstein's farm *Grund*. Grís' choice of farm should have been viewed as skeptically by Ljotolf as it was by Thorstein, but Ljotolf remains quiet on the subject. This gives rise to the possibility that the choice was by design and

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<sup>77</sup> The shame brought on by Ljotolf's accusation of Karl not paying what he owes on the ship, flares Karl's animosity and hatred affecting the whole valley. See Chapter V.

<sup>78</sup> The *saga* says Grís *had previously been mentioned*, but it appears this text may have fallen into the manuscript gap.

collaboration, not merely happenstance. Grís will become so incorporated into the daily life at *Grund*, the fact he is Ljotolf's relative will become clouded at times. However he easily obtains first hand *intelligence* regarding Thorstein and Karl, while gaining the valuable ability to influence events at *Grund* as a friend.

By renewing his friendship with Ásgeir Red-cloak, *a powerful man of a great family* (161), Grís develops a position to create an alliance between Ásgeir's family and Ljotolf. In time, Ásgeir Red-cloak's daughter Yngvild Fair-cheek will become Ljotolf's concubine cementing this alliance.<sup>79</sup> Also, Ásgeir's twin sons, Olaf and Thorleif, will become staunch supporters of Ljotolf, playing a key role in the plot on Klaufi's life and the ending demise of Karl the Red.

Finally, Grís' trip to Sweden the following year results in bringing Thorstein's niece and nephew, Sigríð and Klaufi, to Iceland. As the illegitimate offspring of Thorstein's sister Thorarna and Ljot the Pale's son, Snækoll Ljotsson, a successful attempt to convey disrespect to Thorstein's chieftaincy and chaos to the valley is found.

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<sup>79</sup> Andersson & Miller, 1989, 21, Friendship was often a formal affair. Old Icelandic friendship (*vinfengi*) and friend (*vinr*) were used to describe a state of formal alliance between relative equals. For more research on this, see Jon Vidar Sigurdsson, 2007, 122-140. Kinship and Friendship in the Icelandic Free State Society. *Revue d'histoire Nordique*. 4(1).



## YOU WILL THINK ME GREEDY

*“Grís said, “How did you get into such a woeful state when you are of such good family?” She said, “I was taken by Snaekoll Ljotsson, and he fathered these children on me and then drove me away.”” (163)*

Held up in Niðarós on a return trip to Iceland, the saga describes how Grís is approached by a woman with two children asking him to take them to Iceland. Her name is Thorarna and she is the sister of Thorstein. Grís agrees but only after he obtains proof<sup>80</sup> of their relationship and four hundred ounces of *good* silver. Grís requests that Thorarna go along with the children, but she refuses. Once the children are on board Grís is no longer hindered, getting favorable winds to sail from Norway.

This passage appears to a situation of coincidence as Grís is in the right place at the right time. However, it actually speaks more of a pre-arranged meeting for a number of reasons. Thorarna’s actions are confident and determined as she arrives with the knowledge that someone is waiting for her. The fact that Thorarna knows who Grís is, where to find him and where he is going becomes evident from her dialogue. She does not verify or question him in any way, but comes prepared with the children, the

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<sup>80</sup> She provides a *rune* stick describing the nature of the children’s relationship with Thorstein the Tumultuous.

necessary *rune* stick and plenty of *good* silver in hand. If she was randomly approaching ships to take her children to Iceland, she would have employed a more direct and questioning dialogue but it is Grís who asks the significant questions.

Two lines allude to Thorarna's pre-knowledge of Grís and his waiting ship to Iceland. *A woman accompanied by two children approached Grís and asked him to take the children to Iceland. He said, "Why do the children want to go there?" "She said that the children's uncle lived in the district where he lived. His name is Thorstein the Tumultuous."* Thorarna already knows that Grís is from Iceland and lives in the same district as her brother. If she did not have this understanding when she approached Grís, she would have asked questions such as, "Who are you?" "Where do you live?" "Do you know my brother Thorstein?" Grís' point in asking questions is a way of ensuring who she is and exacting his price. It should be noted that her purpose for sending her children to her brother is not for a lack of money as she unflinchingly pays Grís' greedy request for silver.

#### THORSTEIN RECOGNIZED HIS WORDS

*"The next morning as they sat at table, Thorstein ordered the children to be brought before him, and he gave the girl such a slap that she burst into tears. He slapped the*

boy much harder, but he remained quiet. Grís said, "Now I think that you have truly acknowledged your kinship with the children."" (163)

Grís' humor is lost on Thorstein, but an understanding of the children's character is not. An awareness of the children's father could be behind his *test* in their temperament.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, his decision of legally *fostering* the children appears to be an honest one, based on his opinion of their character or his lack of desire to take the responsibility. This unwittingly entangles Grís into choosing one of the children to foster.<sup>82</sup> Grís choice of Klaufi may have been based on greed,<sup>83</sup> but also an opportunity presented itself to work Thorstein's nephew very hard,<sup>84</sup> which would gain him closer access to the family. In either case, the relationship between Grís and Klaufi will always remain an uneasy one.

#### KLAUFI, THE MAULER

*"Grís said, "I will give you a nickname, Klaufi, and call you Boggvir (the Mauler), and you shall have these gloves as your namegift." Thord was helped to a bench as*

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<sup>81</sup> Heinemann (1998) cites another test reminiscent of Signý's much more exacting test of the three sons, which only Sinfjotli passes, in Chapter 7 of *Völsunga saga*, fn 12.

<sup>82</sup> Another example of Thorstein's regard for the law; *Thorstein made the bargain between them public in the presence of witnesses and proclaimed Grís responsible for Klaufi in word and deed.* (163)

<sup>83</sup> Thorstein gave forty hundred ounces of silver for the support of Klaufi; twenty hundred was given for Sigrid (163).

<sup>84</sup> *Grís said he intended to make Klaufi work very hard. Thorstein said that was fine if he could manage it.* (163-4)

*people went outside. When Klaufi went outside, he said, "Someone who loses his gloves cannot be happy even if he gets another pair.""* (164)

Klaufi's reply to Grís appears obscure. But actually it reveals a great deal about his view of life. By age ten, Klaufi has found little respect with his life being nothing more than that of a slave. At this point, the *saga* has provided no physical or character description of Klaufi, so when he receives a wrestling challenge from a man named Thord the Wrestler<sup>85</sup> the question begs asking: why? Where is the reference for this challenge? How does Thord the Wrestler benefit from challenging a ten year old with no known history?<sup>86</sup>

All that is told of Thord the Wrestler is he stayed at *Hof* over the winter.<sup>87</sup> Two points arise from this passage, "*A man by the name of Thord the Wrestler was staying with Ljotolf. Since Klaufi's arrival nothing noteworthy had happened in the valley up to this point in the story. He was now ten years old.*"

(164). Because this challenge originates from Ljotolf's farm, and eight years

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<sup>85</sup> Thord's name suggests he not only has a certain skill level in wrestling, but that he is well known for his performance.

<sup>86</sup> Not discounting that many *saga* characters have great physical maturity or wherewithal at this age, and while it will be learned that Klaufi has great size and strength, nothing has been indicated that his behavior, size, temperament or skill in wrestling would warrant this type of challenge at this time.

<sup>87</sup> Thord the Wrestler is so anonymous the *saga* does not tell who receives the compensation Grís must pay for his death. (164-165).

have passed without conflict in the valley,<sup>88</sup> could life in the valley have continued in peace under Thorstein's chieftaincy for more years to come if this incident had not been promoted?

Immediately Klaufi feels he has been insulted<sup>89</sup> when he reads the *rune* stick sent to him through his friend, Hood-Skeggi.<sup>90</sup> Putting it away for safekeeping, Klaufi sleeps on this insulting challenge, not taking action until the following day. Could this indicate he had the initial presence of mind to do the right thing? When he seeks out Grís to ask for an axe, Grís obliges him but only after giving him threats.<sup>91</sup> Klaufi now turns to his uncle Thorstein for advice. A hollow echo of the advice given a generation ago<sup>92</sup> between Thorstein's father and uncle, this brief reply to Klaufi misses its mark by eight years.<sup>93</sup> Thorstein does show his support by attending the match even though is held on his rival Ljotolf's farm, and yet his apathetic response indicates he

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<sup>88</sup> Klaufi came to Svarfdæla when he was two years old (164).

<sup>89</sup> *Klaufi said, "Although I am young, I do not like having to suffer this slave's insults."* (164).

<sup>90</sup> This passage could create a conflict in another part of the manuscript text. It appears Klaufi is able to read this stick without assistance, however when he is abroad with Grís he is unable to read the *runes* on an abandoned ship, forcing Grís to read it for him.

<sup>91</sup> What kind of threats Grís gave Klaufi is unknown. Klaufi carries this axe with him to the match and will use it to kill Thord. Grís' knowledge of this provided him with the opportunity to warn those involved, or even dissuade Klaufi from aggressive action but he does not.

<sup>92</sup> Dialogue between the two brothers often ended with "You decide," and with the gracious inference of leaving the final decision to the other one. It is also used toward Thorstein's adversaries with a more insolent or indifferent tone.

<sup>93</sup> After Thorstein fosters Klaufi with Grís, there is no textual evidence he maintained contact with him.

is oblivious to the social dangers facing young Klaufi. Or for that matter, what could lay ahead for his own chieftaincy. The intent of the question Klaufi puts to his uncle is not regarding his strength and ability, but what are the consequences of such a challenge? Is this a wise or even reasonable challenge to consider? The response given of “you decide” becomes clichéd and meaningless when used in a situation with no history between the men to give it support.<sup>94</sup>

Left to his own judgment and device, Klaufi walks into a challenge entirely at his disadvantage. Although physically capable of overcoming Thord, it will be the irreversible social consequences of his actions that put him in the most jeopardy. Thord insists he will only fight at *Hof*, putting Klaufi on unfamiliar ground. The attending crowd includes an old slave woman who incites Klaufi when she yells for the pair to “kiss and make up.”<sup>95</sup> This instigation results in Klaufi giving Thord a thrashing so hard there was concern Thord had been seriously hurt. Still, Klaufi is not satisfied with winning over Thord the Wrestler, he needs vindication. Klaufi’s words

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<sup>94</sup> In the case of Klaufi, Thorstein Thorgnyrsson does not have a personal history with him nor does he discuss the consequences of the challenge, *indicating* apathy or inappropriate leadership.

<sup>95</sup> It could be supposed that the majority of people attending this match are kin to or work for Ljotolf.

to Thorstein are that he ..."*made sure Thord doesn't challenge anyone else to wrestle.*"(164), and using the axe borrowed from Grís, he kills Thord by hitting him in the head. Klaufi reference to losing his gloves, or respect from the community could indicate a source of the angst fueling his vengeance may originate from a deeper source. Such as the mistreatment, abuse and neglect received from Grís and his apathetic kinsman over the years. Klaufi now begins down a path of infamous distinction and even though Grís is responsible for him in word and deed, he does little to curb Klaufi's behavior. Compounded with the rare interaction from Thorstein as uncle or chieftain, the community is left at the mercy of Klaufi's retribution and the increasing machinations coming from *Hof*.

BUT I HAVE NO MIND FOR IT

*"That summer Grís prepared his ship for a trip abroad. Klaufi asked, "Who is to look after the farm in the meantime?" Grís said, "I had you in mind for it." Klaufi said, "But I have no mind for it, because I want to go abroad with you."*" (165)

Grís will take Klaufi abroad, but not before he kills three more men in the valley. First, he kills a man named Hrani, who was taking advantage of one of his relatives.<sup>96</sup> Upon returning to *Steindyr*,<sup>97</sup> Klaufi sees a man named

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<sup>96</sup> *"Hrani was ruining the pastures and fields of Klaufi's relative by overgrazing them. Klaufi found him sitting in the field fully armed, then charged him head on until Hrani was killed".* (165).

Orn riding one of Grís' horses and so kills him. Orn was a close relative and farmhand of Hoskuld, the *law expert*. When he arrives home, Grís asks Klaufi why his clothing and axe are bloody. His reply, "*I want something to eat, and I'm not going to worry about that now*" (165), bolsters Klaufi's future reputation as the *saga's* murderous bully. Grís pays out eighteen hundred ounces of silver for both killings.

The next killing occurs after Grís orders Klaufi to go fishing.

*"Klaufi was now more difficult than before, and he kept Grís on tenterhooks. Still, Grís ordered him to go fishing in the river, and Hood-Skeggi went with him."* (165)<sup>98</sup>

While the *saga* says Grís remained anxious about Klaufi's homicidal behavior, he *still* orders<sup>99</sup> him to go fishing, placing him in a situation where he could be involved in another conflict. Once at the river Klaufi runs into Bjorn, a farmhand of Hrolf Shiny—nose.<sup>100</sup> Klaufi's insistence on having the whole river ends with the two men fighting and the death of Bjorn. Klaufi has

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<sup>97</sup> *Steindyr* is Grís' farm.

<sup>98</sup> Hood-Skeggi appears to have the reputation as the 'unwitting witness' throughout the *saga*. He delivers the offending *rune* stick to Klaufi; he accompanies Klaufi to the river where a conflict ensues; he travels with Yngvild to her father's home as witness to her actions prior to Klaufi's death; and he finds the distinguishing foot print of Olaf when the twins return to Svarfdæla against the settlement. Is it possible that Hood-Skeggi not only makes a good witness but also repeats everything he knows?

<sup>99</sup> The *saga* text does not state any other events where Grís *orders* Klaufi to do anything giving this event special emphasis.

<sup>100</sup> Hrolf Shiny—nose owns half- fishing rights with Grís and has consequently sent his man Bjorn on the same errand at the same time. Hrolf is a staunch friend of Ljótólf.



begun causing mayhem in earnest throughout a once peaceful valley, creating detriment to Thorstein's chieftaincy while strengthening Ljotolf's.<sup>101</sup>

When Grís and Klaufi go abroad, they continue up the coast of Norway at Grís' discretion until Klaufi becomes bored and takes over command.<sup>102</sup> Now sailing south, they run across two abandoned ships. Klaufi boards one and finding the ship's *runes*, he must force Grís under threat of death to tell him what it reads. The ship turns out to be the *Icelander*, and the *runes* state that the commander is Karl the Red. With his cousin in danger Klaufi charges to shore. He finds Karl and his men in fetters as they are being killed as sport by a rogue Viking named Atli.<sup>103</sup> Klaufi drops his axe to use a tree stump as a weapon.<sup>104</sup> Upon saving his cousin, the men take to viking for a few seasons before returning to Iceland. When Thorstein learns what had happened, he thanks Klaufi for saving his son, Karl the Red.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "It is an advantage for a chieftain to keep blood feuds under control." Thorstein and Karl are not able to maintain peace and even contribute to the valley's chaos. Byock, 2001, 35.

<sup>102</sup> "Klaufi expressed his displeasure, saying that they should sail south along the coast. Grís said that the fool was not going to decide "that I sail so far off course." Klaufi answered, "We will sail as I wish or you will not sail away from here alive." Klaufi took command..."(166).

<sup>103</sup> After killing Atli, Klaufi will take his sword which becomes Atli's Gift. He will use this sword until he himself is killed by it.

<sup>104</sup> Klaufi exhibits his grandfather Thorstein's *berserkr* trait and his using a tree stump instead of his battle axe to "clear the deck."

<sup>105</sup> The point of Thorstein's gratitude is possibly to express how Klaufi has now ingratiated himself into the family, and in turn highlights Thorstein's deep affection for his son. Whereas Klaufi was once considered a problem, this deed has now increased his honor with the family.

Grís' reticence in divulging what the *runes* said regarding Karl the Red and the *Icelander* can be looked upon skeptically. It is suggested in the saga text that when Grís went overseas, Thorstein was hoping for some news regarding his son, Karl. Grís would be in a position to gain knowledge of Karl's whereabouts and situation during these trips, and while Thorstein asks Grís, he never provides him with news. Grís does not even reply that he has not heard anything of Karl, if that were the case. What appears suspect is not the lack of Grís' knowledge, but the lack of his response. If there were a purpose for Grís' discretion and even interference into Karl's affairs, it may be to provide more time in Svarfdæla for Ljotolf to gain additional support.

## CHAPTER V

### SPRING ASSEMBLY

#### FORCED TO GIVE SELF-JUDGMENT

*“Then suddenly sixty men appeared to support Ljotolf, and he turned the tables on Thorgrim, charging him, at the advice of Hrolf Nefglita, with a hostile attack. They pressed Thorgrim so hard that he was forced to give Ljotolf self-judgment, yield up both the money and the slave, and return home empty-handed.” (167)*

Skidi arrives in Svarfdæla on the heels of Karl’s return and the *saga* tells he is a runaway slave in name only, *“Not because of his family or his nature.”* (167).<sup>106</sup> The only other description provided of Skidi is that he is *large and handsome*. He arrived at *Hof* to ask Ljotolf for safe haven as a favor to Uni, who is Ljotolf’s support in the north. However, a few passages further in the text foretell that Skidi is to be more than a hapless man of misfortune.

It is during Grís’ wedding feast at *Grund*, when a game the men play is to *“...speak about things worth repeating and to make oaths or to choose men to compare with oneself”* (168). Upon Grís’ turn he takes Skidi *“...as the man to be compared and swore the oath that he would sail into those harbours that Skidi chose*

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<sup>106</sup> *Grágás* Ia 44, pertains to different status of slaves, possibly expressed under Christian ideals, but basically there are two origins of slaves. Those born in bondage and those who are enslaved because of an offense committed. There was also a so-called ‘bondage resulting from debts’ where people become slaves of their own free will in order to work off a debt. *Íslendinga saga*. 350-354.

*every time he sailed from one land to another*"(169). This oath seems a curious one for Grís. Why would someone who has the ability to travel abroad every year, envy another that has traveled broadly? Grís could know more about Skidi and his history than is being made known by the saga's text. For Grís to relish the places Skidi's has been and the things he's done, a broader brush is needed to paint the picture of how Skidi came to be a slave. This also points to Skidi's arrival to Svarfdæla and onto Ljotolf's door as a more complex matter than a favor.

Another link to Skidi is how his description is placed in close proximity to Klaufi's outrageous description.<sup>107</sup> The positioning of the two descriptions in the saga creates a striking and vivid contrast between the two men. Klaufi will prove himself a wanton, ruthless killer and abductor of women, leaving little to glean of his portrait of ugliness, both inside and out.<sup>108</sup> However, Skidi's simple description of *large and handsome* appears just after Klaufi's, pulling his image even more to the positive opposite. While Skidi could never be a match for Klaufi's misbehavior in the saga, the text's

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<sup>107</sup> Both men are described next to each other on page 167, paragraphs 4 and 5.

<sup>108</sup> "Now it is time to describe Klaufi's appearance. He was nearly eight feet tall, and he had long, thick arms, large cheek bones, and a powerful grip, protruding eyes, a flat forehead, a very ugly mouth, a small nose, a long neck, a large chin, one bushy eyebrow stretching across his forehead, sharp features, and high cheek bones. He had very black hair and eyebrows. His mouth hung open, with his two front teeth sticking out, and his whole face was wrinkled and puckered." (169)

presentation of this comparison *allows* the audience to view Skidi in a more favorable light. When juxtaposed with Klaufi, he has to shine.

Skidi is immediately made the foreman at *Hof*, indicating a certain level of knowledge and trust in his abilities from Ljotolf.<sup>109</sup> It is possible Ljotolf is providing Skidi with more status in the community, allowing him the advantage of attending meetings and negotiations. Although he is a slave, Skidi is afforded the immediate respect of a freeman.<sup>110</sup>

When Skidi's owner Thorgrim the Gray, arrives at *Hof* requesting his slave and payment for the work he had done over the winter, Ljotolf complies without argument. However, as soon as Hrolf Shiny—nose arrives with many men,<sup>111</sup> hitting Thorgrim hit quick and hard, forcing him to give Ljotolf self-judgment. In what could appear as an outrageous act of aggression, Ljotolf takes back his payment and the slave, leaving Thorgrim empty handed. This action causes Ljotolf problems in the future as Thorgrim will oppose Ljotolf when he seeks out support in the north. The harsh treatment of Thorgrim indicates Ljotolf's growing support in the valley, while revealing

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<sup>109</sup> Notes about being a foreman Ruth Mazo Karras, "Servitude and sexuality" *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson, Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992.

<sup>110</sup> Another contrast to Klaufi who is a freeman but treated as a slave.

<sup>111</sup> Thorgrim arrives with thirty men looking for Skidi. Hrolf Shiny—nose arrives and overtakes him with sixty men.

a sinister side to his character. Once forcefully pushed out of the valley with only a few *thing*-men, Ljotolf is now able to enlist a large group of men within a short time and he is taking advantage of the numbers.

#### HOW LJOTOLF CEDED HIS PART OF THE ICELANDER

*“At the end of the winter when men were at the Spring Assembly at Hoskuldstaðir, they spoke a lot about Karl’s return. Grís went to speak to Ljotolf, his kinsman,<sup>112</sup> and said, “This is perhaps a good opportunity to speak with Karl the Red about a just payment for the ship, for now there are many good men present.” Skidi was present and said, “Be sure, Grís, that you do not suggest something that will make everyone unhappier than they were before.”” (167)*

After his return home from many perilous years abroad, everyone at the Spring Assembly is talking about Karl the Red. Caught off guard by Grís’ insinuating remark regarding money owed to Ljotolf, Karl says nothing. However, his reddening face can almost be visualized as he must have bristled under the inference. Grís’ intent in bringing up this sensitive topic in front of the *many good men* of the valley is to humiliate and catching him unawares Karl would be less able to properly defend himself. When Skidi immediately admonishes Grís, it could sound as if he cautioning him but it also reinforces that whatever is being implied, it has negative implications for

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<sup>112</sup> By restating Ljotolf as Grís’ kinsman, there is an implication the relationship may have become confused by the audience with a needed reminder.

Karl.<sup>113</sup> Ljotolf remains silent during this dialogue, allowing Skidi and Grís to extend the damaging allegation. Whether or not a debt actually exists between Karl and Ljotolf, Karl will bear the inference of guilt until he publically challenges this position.<sup>114</sup> Only afterwards, with few or no witnesses present does Ljotolf himself address Karl, requesting money for the *Icelander*. The only response from the angry Karl comes when he tells Ljotolf that he has *no claim here, for you requested me to set its value* (167). However, it would appear too late, the damage has already been done. As Karl's reputation and honor diminishes, Ljotolf's honor increases. Honor was at stake in virtually every social interaction, remaining at the heart of discord and dispute.<sup>115</sup>

Karl's reaction to the exchange at the Spring Assembly is immediate, severe and long-lasting but it never forms into a promising strategy to outmaneuver his adversaries. The saga tells that this was the end of the matter of the *Icelander*, which is correct as neither of the men legally pursue a

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<sup>113</sup> This verbal technique will be used again by Ljotolf in further dealings with Karl. Most notably during the mediation arranged between them, where Skidi and Yngvild are present to speak against a successful mediation. See chapter VI.

<sup>114</sup> The validity of this debt cannot be found in the *saga's* text. The only passage regarding the *Icelander* is in chapter 12 with, "*Now it will be told how Ljotolf ceded to Karl his half of their jointly owned ship*". The passage continues on how the ship was built and where it was launched with no additional mention of the ship's ownership or value. (164)

<sup>115</sup> William Ian Miller, 1990, 29.

claim. However, Karl and Klaufi will continue to react in ways that could be seen as instinctive for them, nonetheless damaging their reputations further. Karl indignantly demands support and a farm from Grís for Klaufi, relieving him of any further responsibility. The cousins unsuccessfully attempt a physical or violent reaction from Ljotolf in the hopes of getting him on the battlefield, while Ljotolf subversively and successfully piques them to act irrational. The plan of the cousins can be seen when Klaufi kills two herdsmen for driving their sheep too close to one of his grazing ewes. Karl and Klaufi challenge Ljotolf to react, but he does not.<sup>116</sup> Ljotolf handles the situation surreptitiously and by way of his growing political strength, he places unseen pressure on Karl to move Klaufi to *Klaufabrekka*,<sup>117</sup> another farm further south and further away from *Hof*. Ljotolf never again engages Karl directly in conversation.<sup>118</sup> The two factions are now openly hostile, forcing

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<sup>116</sup> After Klaufi kills the man and his son, he goes to the fold where he meets Karl. They are sitting on the fence when Ljotolf asks them if they had seen the men. *Klaufi said, "I saw them a while ago when they were driving the sheep, but go and see yourself where each of them has got to."* (168)

<sup>117</sup> "...and thereafter it became necessary for Klaufi to leave Melaland." (168)

<sup>118</sup> He places himself publically and psychologically above Karl by allowing Grís, Skidi and ultimately Yngvild to speak on his behalf. Remaining silent, Ljotolf becomes the persona of the moderate man against the unstable, violent, and uncontrollable Karl and Klaufi.



them to seek necessary support from Kolbein and Uni in the north.<sup>119</sup> They are both expected to ride north in the following spring.

#### LJOTOLF WAS NOT A PART OF THIS PLAN

*“Klaufi answered without hesitation, “Won’t that be a case of a fine woman being given to a bad man? Still, I will give my blessing if her kinsmen go along with it.” Grís spoke: “You will come to my wedding feast if they agree to marry her to me?” “Certainly I will come,” Klaufi said, and then the bargain was struck, but Ljotolf was not a party to this plan.” (168)*

One important purpose of this passage is the saga’s claim that Ljotolf was not a party to Grís’ decision to marry Sigrid, Klaufi’s sister. As the lines of allegiance blur, even change over the years, there may be difficulty in remembering where loyalties lie, which may be the case with Grís. It is a sensitive move to marry into the family of one’s adversary; however, Grís seems able to take it in his stride. Ljotolf, on the other hand, has no doubt where he stands and it is clear Grís is acting on his own behalf, not in continued accord with Ljotolf’s overarching plan.

Back at Grís’ wedding feast, at the game being played by the men, Karl compares himself with Ljotolf the *goði*, swearing he will charge him with

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<sup>119</sup> Karl supports the brothers, Kolbein and Hjalti; Ljotolf supports Uni.

cowardice within three years. After Grís and Ogmund<sup>120</sup> take their turn, Klaufi compares himself with Yngvild's younger brother, Olaf Ásgeirsson, swearing he will get into the same bed as Yngvild Fair-cheek without Ljotolf's permission. Grís responds quickly to Klaufi's oath saying his words speak inappropriately of Yngvild. He rallies the men present to the idea of riding up to Ásgeir's farm at *Brekka* in an attempt to marry Klaufi to Yngvild, and so placing Yngvild alongside his new bride on the wedding bench. Grís' motives possess a strong element of provocation for both factions as they struggle for Yngvild.

I DON'T MIND IF OTHERS CLEAR A PATH IN THE SNOW

*"Then Thorstein the Tumultuous asked Karl, his son, why he had left the journey so late. Karl said he did not mind if others cleared a path in the snow through the mountains for him." (170)*

The time has come for Karl and Ljotolf to make their way to the north and request support from Kolbein and Uni as promised. Gaining support from the north is necessary for the endurance and strength of both their chieftaincies. Ljotolf leaves on time taking the sons of Ásgeir with him, while

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<sup>120</sup> Ogmund does not compare himself to anyone, only wishing to sail further away than he has been. The location is unknown, but the sentiment seems to be a desire to travel to another place.

Karl puts the journey off so he and Klaufi can conspire against Ásgeir Red-cloak in pledging Yngvild in marriage.

The trick used is to feign Klaufi's death from a tumble off a horse. Lying prone across his saddle and covered with a horsehide, Klaufi is led by Karl to where Ásgeir is tending sheep. Engaging Ásgeir in conversation, Karl tells him Klaufi has *fallen*. Believing Klaufi to be dead, Ásgeir responds by saying this is not a great loss to the community as he has done many terrible things in the valley. Karl reacts angrily to Ásgeir's words then threatens him with death unless he betroths Yngvild to the dead Klaufi. Afraid and reluctant Ásgeir nonetheless takes the lifeless hand of Klaufi and agrees to the marriage. Immediately breaking out in verse, Klaufi throws off the horse hide and reveals the trick. Ásgeir protests to the trick but Karl and Klaufi retrieve Yngvild all the same. As the cousins are taking Yngvild to Klaufi's farm, Ljotolf is seen coming back from the Althingi with his men. They taunt him about Yngvild, but he pretends not to hear and rides home.

Ljotolf's reluctance to confront Karl and Klaufi, even with twice the force at his disposal, may hinge on two reasons. First, the struggle he had faced in obtaining the needed support for his chieftaincy may have cautioned him against any more conflict. It is not known if it was expected, but he had

been opposed by Thorgrim the Grey, Skidi's previous owner. If Karl the Red had been present as promised, Ljotolf may have been faced with fighting both of the men. However, in light of his victory, his need for Yngvild as a political connection may have lessened to the degree it would no longer outweigh the damage a confrontation would incur.

Another consequence of Karl's absence from the north can be seen with the death of Hjalti. As the brothers Kolbein and Hjalti were relying on support from Karl the Red, they would have also have lost valuable political support. This blow could be responsible for Hjalti hastening into a boat and crashing to his death against the rocks.<sup>121</sup>

However, with an existing expectation in the valley that Ljotolf will make an attempt to retrieve Yngvild, Karl remains at Klaufi's farm for a period of time. When Ljotolf fails to move as expected against the cousins, the saga tells that many people believe Ljotolf to be terrified of Karl. Ljotolf appears to disregard this public impression as it benefits his goal to appear a moderate man, but it also may have to do with common sense. Ljotolf must realize that his ability in armed combat against the Karl and Klaufi will always be to his disadvantage, even when he possesses a greater number of

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<sup>121</sup> The brother's death is noted as example of suicide as described by Alexander Murray in *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 569.

men. This willingness to suffer the coward's reputation allows Ljotolf to control when and where he fights, and only when he feels it necessary. More damage is done to Karl's honor and reputation by subversively agitating the pair, than meeting them head on in battle.

In the following months Karl's support and popularity in the valley continue to diminish as a result of his and Klaufi's behavior, as he takes the lead in hostility toward Ljotolf. During a sheep roundup, Klaufi instigates a battle with drovers by continually blocking their access to the common fold.<sup>122</sup> This battle results in the loss of many men's lives, and Klaufi is overcome with a *berserkr* fit with grave intentions of killing Ljotolf. Karl arrives in time to stop him, however, telling him to give Ljotolf self-judgment for damages done. An angry Klaufi refuses, saying they could have ruled the valley if Ljotolf were dead. While Karl seems to understand how precarious his social standing is now, Klaufi appears an even more menacing threat to Ljotolf's safety.

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<sup>122</sup> Klaufi will use this fighting technique after he is dead, blocking the escape of Ljotolf and his men forcing them to continue fighting Karl.

## MAY HE WHO DARES USE IT

*“Yngvild came to meet him and began to caress him, and the berserk fit subsided so that Klaufi could not manage his burden that he had so long carried. He slumped in the doorway when she welcomed him. His sword slipped out of its scabbard, and she took it and threw it into the snow tunnel, saying “May he who dares use it.”” (172)*

Soon after Klaufi’s attempt on Ljotolf’s life, a plan comes together for his demise. This plan has previously presented itself as the sole creation of Yngvild, and lay at her feet as a single-minded attempt to be rid of her husband. The direct involvement of others does not readily show itself with the exception of her brothers who actually kill Klaufi, but with a closer analysis of the text other clues emerges.

The plot itself is mimicked after the trick on Yngvild’s father. When Yngvild incites Klaufi to retrieve a slaughtered ox wrapped in its own hide from her brothers, he is overcome by a *berserkr* fit. Walking all the way to *Brekka* in heavy snow without stopping at *Grund*, Klaufi picks up what he believes is the slaughtered ox—but is actually Olaf and Thorleif wrapped in its hide. *“Klaufi picks it up intending to take it outside, but he got hung up in the door-frame. He took everything with him as he left the farm – door, frame, and the bound ox-hide – shaking off the frame and the door as he made his way home.” (173).* Still in a *berserkr* fit, Klaufi arrives home where Yngvild caresses him, causing

him to lose his strength and slump to the floor. She then throws Klaufi's sword, Atli's Gift, to her brothers who, having been carried the full distance, are refreshed and waiting outside. Klaufi however, is exhausted and subdued from his efforts and Yngvild's caresses, giving the twins the ability to run him through with his own sword, killing him instantly.<sup>123</sup>

The involvement of others in this plan can be seen when the twins return home where their father Ásgeir asks them, somewhat off the cuff, what they have been doing.<sup>124</sup> Regardless if Ásgeir has failed to notice his front door and frame torn from its hinges, the question's purpose is an inquiry into how their encounter with Klaufi went. Also, the twins had advised their mother the day before through verse that they planned to do away with Klaufi, owing their vengeance to his aggravating habit of cutting their herb sacks and creating mischief. Pleased to hear the news of their success, Ásgeir sends his sons to Ljotolf for protection. Ljotolf's reaction is also positive with his words reinforcing this as a collective plan as he tells the boys to go to

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<sup>123</sup> It is believed Klaufi dies instantly but he attempts to climb in bed with Yngvild after the twins leave. They are called back and must cut off Klaufi's head and place it next to his feet before he finally dies.

<sup>124</sup> The plan's overall start could have actually begun when the brother's visit their sister and Klaufi slashes their herb sacks. But most surely when Yngvild asks permission to visit her brothers in turn at *Brekka*, taking Klaufi's long-time friend and witness, Hood-Skeggi along does the plan become a conspiracy. The only purpose for Hood-Skeggi's presence would be the necessity to vouch for Yngvild's story regarding the slaughtered ox.

Grís', "for we are all involved in this together" (173). As they arrive at *Steindyr*, Grís insists that Sigrid be told before allowing the twins to hide there. Sigrid agrees, telling the men she will not be the first to divulge their hiding place, but requests that she hold Atli's Gift.<sup>125</sup>

The thread and purpose to this passage is the continuity it provides in taking the saga audience from the act itself to the involvement of Ásgeir, Ljotolf, and finally to Grís, to allow each one's association and reaction to become known. How the twins are hidden and handled should also be considered in the course of this common plan. Hiding them for their safety against the wrath of Karl until the matter can be taken up by the community would be a logical step; however, this aim is never expressed or implied by those involved. It does not appear that Ljotolf ever plans to do the right thing regarding Klaufi's death. Even after the twins return to Iceland once outlawed, Ljotolf continues to hide and protect them instead of forcing them to fulfill the community's decision as chieftain.

#### FOX LOOSE IN A FLOCK OF SHEEP

The night after Klaufi's death his ghost sits on the house at *Grund* singing verse, telling Karl and his men where his killers are. Leading the men

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<sup>125</sup> The men oblige Sigrid, not realizing they are giving her proof and confirmation regarding Klaufi's murder.



to *Steindyr* with his severed head in hand, he knocks on Grís' door saying, "*Here it is, it's here, how travel nearer?*" (174). Grís is found sitting in front of a large piece of cooked meat at the table when Karl tells him the news of Klaufi's death.<sup>126</sup> Grís' reply does not ring with much surprise, bringing the men close to blows.<sup>127</sup> Karl and his men are content to sit and wait but the twins, who saw Karl arrive from their hiding place, become fearful that Grís will betray Ljotolf. To warn the approaching Ljotolf, Thorolf begins citing verse, telling Karl they are Klaufi's killers and their whereabouts.

As soon as Karl realizes Grís has hidden Klaufi's killers, Sigríð throws him Atli's Gift and he finding "*Grís outside oiling swords, Karl ran outside and cut him in two with the sword, saying, "That's how we men from Grund butcher piglets, never more than two halves."*"<sup>128</sup> Ljotolf and his men can be seen on their way as the saga says, "*Ljotolf the Goði had arrived, and no greetings were exchanged. The men ran at each other and a pitched battle ensued.*" Klaufi's ghost re-appears saying, "*I intend to bring many to their graves this night.*" "*Then Klaufi waded into the battle, wildly swinging his bloody head back and forth on both*

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<sup>126</sup> Has Grís cooked a large piece of meat for the purpose of feeding others? Either the twins or Ljotolf's soon- to- arrive troops?

<sup>127</sup> "*We prefer to talk about what happened.*" Grís said, "*No news has come our way, but perhaps you can tell us some?*" Karl said, "*I can indeed. I think Klaufi is dead.*" "*What can be more fitting than to express our regret?*" said Grís. (174) Grís does not feign surprise or inquire into the nature of his death.

<sup>128</sup> This is a pun referring to Grís' name which means piglet. (173, n 1)

sides until Ljotolf's troops began to scatter. It was as if a fox were loose in a flock of sheep." (176).

Even in death, Klaufi will continue his attempt on Ljotolf's life.<sup>129</sup> During the passion of battle, prophecies begin to surface as Ogmund Hoskuldsson tells Karl to take care as his shoes have come off in the snow, "...and I will stand in front of you while you put them on," (176)<sup>130</sup> to which Karl replies in verse to predict his own demise.<sup>131</sup> Klaufi's ghost continues in the fray using his disconnected head as a club. Ljotolf and his troops attempt desperately to retreat from Karl's onslaught, but each attempt finds Klaufi the ghost at every exit, blocking their retreat and forcing them to face Karl and his troops once more. Exhausted, Ljotolf yells for Skidi to come to their aid. With a lit torch, Skidi is able to drive Klaufi away while separating the few remaining fighting men. Ljotolf flees to an outbuilding along with the twins of Ásgeir, while Skidi stands guard outside.<sup>132</sup> Karl attempts to persuade

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<sup>129</sup> As the battle began, Klaufi spoke this verse: 15. *The din rang out dark upon the dale, our game friends grew glutted of blood. Attack, attack, onward Karl's men, let us lay him, Ljotolf the Goði, in his grave, in his grave.*(177)

<sup>130</sup> Devoted to Karl, Ogmund remains with him until they both are killed by Ljotolf and Skidi.

<sup>131</sup> Aware of what lie ahead, Karl prophesizes doom but that he will weather it as a warrior. This is possibly in response to Ogmund's sentimental plea of loyalty. 14. *I see the storm on Klaufi's Hill, sorcery's work, the hale: disturbance distracts us, deflects away from fear, as weather turns tepid, trouble is on the move. I will stand steadfastly, secure though it rains blood.*(176)

<sup>132</sup> Bravery in the face of death is a dominant element to be considered in the sagas. King Sverrir articulates his view of this: "In every battle you take part then it will happen that you

Ljotolf to come out and fight him as the odds are even, but Ljotolf once again refuses. After this, the valley remained quiet over the winter with a settlement regarding Klaufi's death being reached in the spring by the prominent men of the valley.

Although he successfully overcame Ljotolf's troops, this battle signifies the end for Karl. His support in the valley has waned to a desperate level while he continues on an unswerving path towards his death. All the power Karl could muster was conjured during this battle in a final effort to overcome Ljotolf. His cousin returns as ghost and his father enters the fray as a shape-shifter, but this does not prove to be enough as Ljotolf's once lost chieftaincy is almost regained. Karl the Red is left on his own with Thorstein death in the following spring. Karl proves that he simply lacks the wherewithal to lead himself and others out of this situation.<sup>133</sup>

Many prominent men arranged a negotiation in an effort to end the feud between the two chieftains after Thorstein's funeral. The outcome of

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either die or get away. For that reason be brave because everything is predestined. A man who is not fated cannot be killed, and a fated man cannot be defended. It is worst to die while fleeing." Guðrún Nordal, 1998, 183-184. The actions seen here of Ljotolf parallel Ljot the Pale's act of cowardice when trying to escape during battle.

<sup>133</sup> "He advised his son in many things and told him to give up the farm at Grund and move to Upsir: "I want to request you, my son, to be a staunch friend to those men in the district who are loyal to you." (177).

this negotiation reveals how the dynamics of the valley have changed, along with the altered political atmosphere. The compensation for Klaufi's death does not come from Ásgeir, the father of the brothers who kill him but from Ljotolf, pointing to his responsibility in the matter. The saga tells us that Ljotolf was very much reluctant to settle, with all final aspects of the case settled in favor of Karl. And yet, after the meeting, Skidi approaches Karl about giving pastureland to Ásgeir, "*because that which he owns is too far.*" (178). Karl agrees to provide this in what may be an effort to make peace, even though it clearly off-sets the compensation he received for Klaufi. It should be noted that it is Skidi who approaches Karl about this matter, sending the message that Ljotolf has placed himself socially above the situation and Karl.

#### LJOTOLF PRETENDED NOT TO KNOW

When the twins unexpectedly return to Iceland, Karl and Ogmund track them to *Hof* and question Skidi who was outside working.<sup>134</sup> Refusing to tell them where the twins had been hid, Karl drags Skidi through a field of

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<sup>134</sup> Karl and Ogmund follow the tracks of the twins after the ship they sailed abroad on wrecked. They were alerted to their arrival when Sigrid and Hood-Skeggi recognized one of the brother's unusual footprints in the snow. At *Hof*, they find a *red tunic* soaked with salt water hanging on a beam to dry. Based on this, Karl is quite sure the twins are close by.

tree stumps.<sup>135</sup> Ljotolf with many of his men arrive drawing Karl away from *Hof* to an islet across from *Grund* where they clash until the battle loses its strength.<sup>136</sup> As Skidi receives serious injury from protecting the twins in his encounter with Karl, he will ask for Yngvild in marriage as reward for his deed.

The next night, with a seemingly random and pensive purpose, Karl and his men travel up a mountain and kill a man named Geiri. The saga tells that Ljotolf pretends not to know what happened,<sup>137</sup> denying the act credence. The result of this action proves more damaging to Karl's reputation than he seems capable of repairing. For the next three years, the two chieftains will not have conflict, and yet Karl's popularity diminishes as he begins having difficulty with the farmers.<sup>138</sup> In what appears a final attempt to salvage his chieftaincy, Karl invites Gunnar, a friend from Vik to arrange mediation

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<sup>135</sup> *"Skidi was badly injured, and he bled from every pore. His jaw was broken, his lip was badly gashed, and he was missing two teeth."* (179)

<sup>136</sup> Ljotolf is clever in pulling Karl away from *Hof* and closer to *Grund* to fight. However once again his forces are not a match for Karl's, even with greater numbers. When one of his men puts Ljotolf on his horse implying he can fight no longer and he leaves, the battle appears to lose its impetus with the men leaving to go home.

<sup>137</sup> *"Karl had Geiri taken and killed, and the place is called Geiravellir. Then Karl rode home to Upsir. Ljotolf pretended that he did not know what had happened, and now both of them remained quiet for three years."* (180).

<sup>138</sup> Difficulty with the farmers is a loss of support and so income for Karl. The loss of honor signaled that the individual was incapable of defending himself or his property. Byock, 1989, 15.

between him and Ljotolf.<sup>139</sup> In the following months, Gunnar works hard to arrange a meeting between the two men, making frequent visits to *Hof*. When the mediation is finally arranged, the saga tells that Karl, Ljotolf, Gunnar, Skidi and Yngvild attend.<sup>140</sup> Yngvild and Skidi's presence serve a purpose similar to that of Grís and Skidi during the Spring Assembly, as they allude to a negative possibility that changes the course of negotiation.

If operating under the premise that Skidi killed Karl the Red due to Yngvild's goading, one question should be kept in mind regarding Skidi's status at the time. When Karl the Red injured him, Skidi was a slave. The legal right to avenge this treatment would fall to his owner, Ljotolf. Even after Skidi is freed and given land, the vengeance taken would have to be of equal value. According to the law of the time, any action taken or payment received for injury or death of the slave would fall to his or her owner. An interpretation by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen says a major difference between the man who is free and a slave, is the freedom from being

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<sup>139</sup> Gunnar initially attempts to stay with Ljotolf to better persuade him. But, understanding this intent, Ljotolf does not return from the assembly, forcing Gunnar to stay with Karl.

<sup>140</sup> Skidi has attended assemblies and negotiations with Ljotolf prior to this meeting; however, this is the first time Yngvild attends.

violated.<sup>141</sup> With this right of inviolability, or integrity, went the duty to take vengeance. In a society of the Icelandic Free State, this duty was a principle of law and dependent on the common social norms that the individual strives to comply with. While not stated directly, even though Skidi was freed after his injury, he would not have had the legal duty to seek vengeance as the value of his injury would not equal Karl's value as a freeman.

This becomes more interesting if the position could be taken that Skidi's slave status is understood and considered by the saga. When the inference is put forward that Yngvild is asking for vengeance, it would have to originate from Ljotolf, Skidi's master at the time. Because there was no social fall-out from Skidi killing Karl, whatever the intent the community appears to understand how his death came about and finds it acceptable. Also, there appears no evidence to support the premise that Ljotolf or Skidi were prepared to take vengeance on behalf of Yngvild, other than what they themselves say to Karl Karlsson at the end of the saga. There is text, however, that point away from this premise, such as Yngvild's lack of

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<sup>141</sup> Clarifying, "This was not a matter of freedom in the modern sense, as defined, for example, in terms of human rights." Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. *Social Institutions and belief systems of medieval Iceland (c.870-1400) and their relations to literary production*, translated by Margaret Clunies Ross. Old Icelandic Literature and Society, edited by Margret Clunies Ross. University Press: Cambridge, 2000, 22.

protection by Ljotolf against the actions of his rivals, and her ultimate position as scapegoat.



## CHAPTER VI

### REGARDING YNGVILD FAIR-CHEEK:

#### OR WHY WE LOVE TO HATE HER

Whether the saga text intentionally typecasts Yngvild in the role of the selfish, beautiful, and vengeful woman or not, she is initially viewed this way. Her appearance and image belie her actions, leaving little to the imagination of the observer. Like so many other characters in Svarfdæla saga, Yngvild takes on the role initially expected of her based on how others have chosen to view her. To obtain a clearer, more vivid image of this woman, the saga insists that the audience search for it. In the end and after much exploration, Yngvild is simply there; just like the rest of the characters that inhabit the saga. Neither perfect nor corrupt, but human and real.

In the beginning Yngvild is born into an aristocratic family of Iceland. She is the daughter of Ásgeir Red-cloak and Thorhild. She will take care of her younger twin brothers, Olaf and Thorleif, while she herself is quite young. The saga provides to its audience a brief and succinct understanding of Yngvild's parentage. Ásgeir "*...lived at Brekka and was a powerful man of a*

great family. His wife, Thorhild was wise and well-liked, and had a mind of her own." (162). Two things should be considered when reviewing this passage. Yngvild is descendent of a local and powerful family, and she inherited her mother's amiable personality and strength of mind.

Since there is no mention of Thorhild's physical appearance, it will be regarded as a trait the saga does not wish the audience to consider for either woman. On the other hand, the character description provided of Yngvild's mother gives the saga audience an example of what her strong mind and personality are capable of; when she gives birth while tending livestock. Thorhild gives birth *twice* while out in the field then continues her work, bringing the twins home at the end of the day. She does this without comment or complaint, only handing them over to her daughter Yngvild to care for.<sup>142</sup> This silent strength and determination appear in her daughter's character and will remain strong throughout her life. Clearly both women are capable of doing the difficult things in life as well as the easy.

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<sup>142</sup> When Yngvild is handed her twin brothers by her mother, she finds a mark on one and blurts out the words, "*This wound symbolizes the mark of a spear*" which conjures speculation regarding its meaning. Heinemann (1998) likens Yngvild's words to a prediction that comes true in *Dorleifs Þattr Jarlsskalds*, chapter 7, fn 13. In addition, there should be significance placed on her words regarding her brothers' part in Klaufi's death in Svarfdæla saga.

Yngvild is mentioned next during Grís' wedding feast, many years later; *"The wedding feast was at Grund, but not many people came. At the time the friendship between Ljotolf and Ásgeir Red-cloak was at its peak, because Yngvild Fair-cheek was Ljotolf's mistress, and no one was invited from Brekka."*<sup>143</sup> (168). Although the consequences surrounding this friendship are mentioned almost in passing, initially giving it a slight disadvantage, its occurrence has clearly changed the political framework within the valley. At the end of Thorstein and Ljotolf's final battle years ago, it was Thorstein who was able to name his many friends in the valley while Ljotolf's were few. Now, through Yngvild and her aristocratic roots, Ljotolf has made a powerful friend (*vinátta*) in her father, showing her most coveted asset to be her family.

Also, as mentioned previously, during Grís' wedding feast, Klaufi mentions Yngvild when taking an oath to get into bed with her, *"without the permission of Ljótólf"* (168). In this same passage, the saga informs that the feud between the men has *"become openly hostile."* (168). Putting these two passages together, the open hostility with the oath to bed Yngvild, Klaufi's more obvious intent of lustful desire could alter to a desire to overcoming Ljotolf politically. Klaufi is not readily perceived as one who possesses great

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<sup>143</sup> The text regarding Yngvild and Ljotolf is mentioned almost in passing and among narrative of the wedding feast at *Grund*, giving the entry a slight disadvantage.

political aspiration, so his oath takes on a licentious quality rather than social ambition. However, other factors that become apparent as the saga unfolds, such as the lack of any mention of Klaufi's previous interest in Yngvild, his shared hatred with Karl for Ljotolf along with his stated intent to kill Ljotolf so he and Karl can rule the valley, and any existing axes to grind with the community, illustrates Klaufi enjoying more dimensions to his character than that of malicious oaf.

Once Klaufi states this oath, Grís suggests that they ride immediately to acquire Yngvild in marriage for Klaufi and out from under Ljotolf. As the force of Grís' wedding party ride up to *Brekka* to approach Yngvild and her father about marriage to Klaufi, Grís continues to prime the situation even further. As the men are traveling back to *Grund*, Grís sends a runner to Ljotolf telling of Karl and Klaufi's plans for Yngvild.<sup>144</sup> This action sends Ljotolf and his men in a race to *Brekka* in an effort to shield her. Then, as Karl is made aware of Ljotolf's movements, he and his men ride back up to *Brekka* in what turns out to be a farcical moment in their efforts to get to Yngvild first. Once they all meet at *Brekka*, Klaufi hears Hrolf Shiny-nose and Yngvild laughing behind a locked door, which prompts him to passionate

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<sup>144</sup> It was hardly a plan of Karl and Klaufi's as it was Grís who suggested they act on Klaufi's oath.

verse. His words speak of a desire to overcome or brook Yngvild, not words of tender emotion or longing for her. He says Hrolf Shiny—nose is the obstacle to obtaining Ljotolf’s mistress and power base through marriage.<sup>145</sup> Klaufi follows up this first verse with another equally prophetic one. He suggests he has been drinking, possibly too much, and he will meet his death over what he is doing here.<sup>146</sup>

Soon, Yngvild’s obedient and devoted nature to her family is revealed as her father is tricked into pledging her in marriage to Klaufi.<sup>147</sup> Even as she is carried away by Klaufi and Karl to *Klaufabrekka* she does not issue a word or fight, but accepting of her fate.<sup>148</sup> Left on her own, first by her father who runs in excitement to inform Ljotolf of what has happened, and then by Ljotolf himself as he takes no action to fight for her, even with twice the force of Karl and Klaufi. Regardless if Yngvild has an expectation to be returned to Ljotolf or not, she maintains her control and decorum, even when left to deal with the two men alone.

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<sup>145</sup> 1. *I hazard that Hrolf Shiny-nose hears me, he dares to defend the damsel against Klaufi. Boggvir, you brook not beautiful bride, until you take Shiny-nose to task. (169)*

<sup>146</sup> 2. *Merriment makes the red-nosed man; repay we will the wight for this. (170)*

<sup>147</sup> This event parallels Jarl Herrod’s threat by Moldi to either fight or give up his daughter in marriage.

<sup>148</sup> Women have little say in the choice of future husbands according to *Grágás*, Grg Ib 29, II 155, however she still could voice her opinion as many others have done. She may be moved by non-selfish reasons to remain silent, such as the threat of her father’s death.

Yngvild's participation in the saga involves two of the most influential events that take place; Klaufi's death, and the final mediation between Karl the Red and Ljotolf. Her involvement in these events is not owing to her active intent but through the actions and scheming of others, mostly that of Ljotolf. After Klaufi's attempt on Ljotolf's life during the confrontation at the common fold, he proves more difficult to manage even for Karl the Red. Due to previous lack of continuity in the saga's framework, the plan to kill Klaufi appeared isolated, even random, while placed squarely at the feet of Yngvild. This reference supported the perception of her vengeful character, even when her saving grace for taking the matter into her own hands has been that she was somehow justified.<sup>149</sup> Still, with closer examination it is found that while Yngvild and her brothers carried out this deed, it was part of a larger scale plan involving others such as Ljotolf, Skidi, Grís and Ásgeir.

The conclusion, that others in the saga are a part of this plan, is reinforced when Karl searches for the returning twins at *Hof* after they had been exiled. Both Yngvild and Ragnhild, Ljotolf's daughter,<sup>150</sup> are present but Karl's attention is solely upon Skidi. Had he believed Yngvild was

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<sup>149</sup> Being married to Klaufi appears enough justification to kill him, even with other options available such as divorce.

<sup>150</sup> The mother of Ragnhild is Thordis, a woman from *Moðruvellir*, and daughter of Gudmund the Old. Ragnhild's age is not determined, but she will marry Karl the Red's son, Karl.

responsible for the death of Klaufi, some angry consideration should have been directed toward her—but it was not. Karl and Ogmund attempt to trick her and Ragnhild to talk against Skidi, but there are no threats, blame or mistreatment directed toward Yngvild. Karl is positive of Skidi's involvement and has knowledge of the twin's whereabouts. He attempts to kill him in order to obtain this information.

When Skidi is asked to name his reward for his protection of the twins, he asks for Yngvild in marriage. With no text prefacing Skidi's request for Yngvild to suggest he had at one time, entertained hopes of wooing and winning her hand in marriage, his request for Yngvild in marriage parallels that of Klaufi's request. As marriage is a social and family arranged function in medieval Iceland, it would not be required that a romantic or lengthy courtship be conducted; however, Skidi's request can only be described as a blunt and sudden effort to obtain Yngvild as reward.<sup>151</sup> Skidi does not appear to have the political aspirations that Klaufi may have had, but this marriage would lift him significantly from his status of slave to a more substantial station in the community.

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<sup>151</sup> This scenario plays opposite to Thorstein Thorgnyrsson's treatment of the marriage arrangement between him and Ingibjorg. In this instance, it is made clear that Yngvild is sought as reward for the debt Ljotolf owes to Skidi for protecting the twins.

Yngvild again becomes a part of the saga's most creative controversies. When she asks for conditions regarding the marriage bargain between her and Skidi, her words are later used in constructing other meaning and intent. The passage containing Yngvild's well-known words is:

*"But Ljotolf was moved to speak when he saw Skidi: "Choose yourself a reward for your reticence." Skidi answered, "You will do me honour as you wish, but the choice is easy if I may make it." Ljotolf answered, "What is it?" Skidi said, "I would like you to help me acquire Yngvild Fair-cheek as a wife. I think I deserve her because of the treatment I received from Karl." Ljotolf answered, "Why do you ask for the one thing which I least expected? I think that you will not have any happiness in marrying her." Skidi answered, "Be that as it may, I want this as my reward, but you decide how she is to be honoured." "Then let's see how she replies," said Ljotolf, "for I do not wish to marry her against her will." They then sought out Yngvild and raised the matter with her whether she wished to marry Skidi. She responded to Ljotolf, "I think you are showing me little honour by wishing me to marry your slave." Ljotolf answered, "I will rectify that for you. I will give him his freedom and enough wealth to guarantee that your rank will never be greater no matter how much more money you acquire." "That's an improvement," said Yngvild, "but I have one additional condition." Ljotolf asked what it was. She said, "The gash in his lip must be so well healed within five years so that I consider it completely healed." Skidi agreed to this, and the marriage settlement was concluded." (179-180)*

Ljotolf's reaction to Skidi of, *"Why do you ask the one thing which I least expected? I think that you will not have any happiness in marrying her"* is a good question and a good observation. It may appear more logical for Skidi to ask for his freedom and assets, rather than marriage.<sup>152</sup> Ljotolf's comment is not

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<sup>152</sup> Skidi may have understood he would acquire freedom and assets through the consequences if the bargain was struck. However, if he wished to have the woman herself a



a reflection on Yngvild as a disagreeable character as it could easily be taken, but an honest statement that her loyalty would remain with him, leaving little room for a happy marriage. This one sided and social edge to Skidi's request is substantiated further when Yngvild refers to Skidi as Ljotolf's slave. Her position indicates there is neither an existing dialogue nor relationship between the two.

Yngvild's displeasure at Ljotolf's request to give her as reward remains genuine, prompting her request for conditions. She agrees to the arrangement, but asks to be given five years with which to be obliged. Pledging the remainder of her life in exchange for Ljotolf's debt, even out of loyalty, would be unreasonable.<sup>153</sup> Viewed in this way, her request of having five years to say if Skidi's lip is completely healed, or demanding to have a say in when the debt is paid becomes realistic, while fitting within the framework of the saga. It should be noted that Yngvild directs this request to Ljotolf, but it is Skidi who responds in agreement. This action by the text

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more sincere path would be to obtain wealth and freedom, then pursue Yngvild as an individual and on her own terms.

<sup>153</sup> Similar to the bargain struck between Thorstein Thorgnyrsson and Jarl Herrod regarding ruling of the realm. Thorstein asks for three years to determine if he is able to rule or not. Here, Yngvild requests five years with which to satisfy Ljotolf's debt to Skidi.

acknowledges both of the men's understanding and acceptance of the bargain.

The terminology used in Yngvild's request for conditions in her marriage to Skidi will become purposefully misleading by those using it during the mediation between Karl the Red and Ljotolf. It will also be misused when Karl Karlsson pursues revenge for the death of his father. This frequently distorted phrase becomes a double entendre after its first use by Yngvild and Skidi to successfully break the final mediation between Karl and Ljotolf. It is ambiguity that creates the effect anticipated without causing detriment to Ljotolf's position and reputation.

#### DEEDS OF WOE

*"When the peace settlement between Karl and Ljotolf was nearly concluded, Yngvild said that the gash in Skidi's lip would be a long time in healing if this settlement were achieved. Skidi said, "of all women you make the most vicious and nasty remarks." Gunnar answered, "Deeds of woe often result from the words of women, and it could be that this statement will cause the most terrible consequences imaginable." This was the end of the settlement negotiations, and they parted without a settlement."* (181)

This method of dialogue, where one individual makes an unclear statement and another reinforces its negative aspects while still not making the first statement clear, was used previously by Grís and Skidi at the Spring Assembly. The attempt there was to promote a negative inference that Karl

owed money to Ljotolf. Here the implication is that Yngvild is allowed a voice in these proceedings and is asking for blood revenge against Karl. Neither of these possibilities can be connected to text in the saga for support. This is especially true of Skidi's admonishment to Yngvild, "*Of all women you make the most vicious and nasty remarks.*" There is nothing in the text that indicates Yngvild's behavior or language as vicious or nasty.<sup>154</sup> In light of Yngvild's abandonment by her father, Skidi and especially Ljotolf, it seems unlikely she would have the political power to demand a voice in this or any other negotiation. Women are, by law, barred from political arenas in seeking their protection against violence.<sup>155</sup> This raises the question of the primary purpose and intent of her presence at the mediation. "Women usually achieved their objectives by inciting, shaming or goading their kinsmen into action, not through direct negotiations,"<sup>156</sup> pointing to Yngvild's presence at the mediation as having a secondary purpose.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> One exception to this may be at the end of the saga when Yngvild runs Ljotolf through with a short-sword. Prior to this she is nothing if not compliant.

<sup>155</sup> Sverrir Jakobson, 1999, 191-201. This could be the saga's attempt at reinforcing this law; highlighting the possible consequences of women who get involved in politics.

<sup>156</sup> Byock, 1989, 197.

<sup>157</sup> "Providing women direct access to the otherwise exclusively male world of revenge and feud, female whetting was basically a political tool." "Whereas the woman had appeared as a grand and impressive woman in the distant, mythic setting of poetry, in the familiar Icelandic society she was often vilified and turned into a scapegoat for men's failures in establishing peaceful society." Jochens, 1996, 175.

It should be added, that if Ljotolf had been interested in a successful mediation with Karl, Yngvild's comment would have had little effect—especially in its questionable and vague format. Ljotolf and Karl still have control over the negotiation. Mediation involves a third party in the negotiation; however, that party is not entitled to make a decision.<sup>158</sup> Both men, especially Ljotolf, could have spoken up to refute Yngvild's words regardless of what the mediator, Gunnar from Vik, thought about the matter.

#### LOYALTY DIVIDED

After the mediation falls through, the words Yngvild spoke turn into a request for blood revenge by the men who wish to use its meaning for their own purpose. A year later, when Ljotolf completes a final attack on Karl and Skidi has him cornered with eleven men, Karl uses these words in hopes of gaining an advantage. *Karl said, "... I know you have the integrity to fight me alone, and in that there is fame to be won. But if you attack me with the help of the others, then I think you will not have fulfilled your pledge to Yngvild which you made when you married her. I think that the gash in your lip will heal only if you overcome me alone."* This taunt to Skidi comes after Karl has fought long and heroically, already killing several men. He must know that even he lacks the

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<sup>158</sup> Andersson & Miller. 1989, 23.

stamina to face twelve more men with success. Skidi's reply is flippant yet telling — *Skidi spoke: "I am going to take advantage of the difference in numbers, and each can say what he wants about that. Whoever wants to call Skidi's lip healed may do so; he who does not can say otherwise."* (182) Skidi does not have any interest in honor and is not going to take any chances when fighting Karl.

The premise of Yngvild wanting revenge originates from the men who wish to avoid blame and increase their profits.<sup>159</sup> Their image and view of her makes it difficult for the saga audience initially to see other possibilities to Yngvild's character.<sup>160</sup> Throughout the saga, Yngvild's impression emerges as a vindictive, shrewish, proud and heartless woman, based on others' portrayal of her, never through her own words and deeds. If Yngvild had not been beautiful with the nickname of Fair-cheek,<sup>161</sup> would the negative image of her character have survived throughout the saga? We love to hate Yngvild Fair-cheek out of our own deficiency, our own desire for wealth,

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<sup>159</sup> Miller notes the classic case involving divided loyalties of men and women. While women will embody divided loyalties, men will seek to avoid accusations of divided loyalties, seeking a whole, or pure state. 1990, 162.

<sup>160</sup> Helga Kress provides a comparison of Yngvild as shrew and the giantess of mythology, and a structural pattern of the more realistic Icelandic Family Sagas view of ordinary women who refuse to be oppressed by male power. 2002, 88-9.

<sup>161</sup> There is only one other description of Yngvild other than her nickname of Fair-cheek, which is when Karl Karlsson assaults her home, her hair is described as long and beautiful. It is understood this implies she is an attractive woman however the saga leaves any actual image of her to the saga audience.

honor, beauty and fame, refusing to believe anyone with such loyalty as her may exist. Even as the saga text contradicts its own stereotype, Yngvild's sincerity remains untrustworthy to the point her good looks become her one saving grace. Yngvild Fair-cheek could never to be considered a perfect character; she is both good and bad. When she falters and fails like most other characters in *Svarfdæla saga* however, there remains less sympathy and less understanding of her situation. And yet, with all her faults, Yngvild's loyalty stands in the saga as the most virtuous.<sup>162</sup> While others supported Ljotolf because of payment or benefit, Yngvild pledged herself without profit.

In the final passages of *Svarfdæla saga*, it is the actions of Karl the Red's son, Karl Karlsson, which will again project Yngvild's words to reflect responsibility on his father's death. He uses this and the attack on Yngvild in his own quest to re-ignite the old conflict, as a way to achieve honor. Because Karl Karlsson attacks her, claiming in a however thinly veiled manner, that she had a hand in his father's death, many readers conclude that the strength and stamina behind Yngvild's resistance to the torture she endures for so

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<sup>162</sup> She is the parallel of Thorolf Thorgnyrsson and his loyal devotion to his brother. Thorolf died for his devotion of his brother, whereas Yngvildr survived. Although their circumstances were different, their devotion was the same.

many years proved from cold-hearted vindictiveness, rather than loyalty and devotion.

Yngvild's image forms to show a woman born into an aristocratic and powerful family, who is used for political gain. When her usefulness is spent she becomes a scapegoat for those who took advantage of this utility. With rarely a word or action of discontent, Yngvild's ability of character, strong mind and heart become the profit of those who counted on her loyalty. Her devotion and fortitude will be compared to the great devotion of Thorolf Thorgnyrsson for his family. Even more than he, as she was publically refused the honor she deserves.

Was Yngvild truly caught in a stereotype, making the difference between her and Thorolf Thorgnyrsson a matter of gender? It can be seen that Thorolf's character could have been taken advantage of by those around him just as Yngvild's was. If she was not a beautiful woman, would her treatment and the perception of her have been different? While Yngvild was targeted in a culture where being a woman begins at a disadvantage and so limits her avenues of action,<sup>163</sup> Svarfdæla saga brings forward a point regarding the many variables and consequences existing in many societies. If

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<sup>163</sup> Although against the law, it would make sense that women would share in the common ethic of just retaliation. Clover, 2002, 17.

this is so, are these questions pragmatic for both genders—as well as for societies past and present?



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MEN WHOOPED AND YELLED

*“Over at Grund the horses that people intended to ride that day were rounded up. Among them was a three-year-old unbroken colt. It was as big as horses get, and had a large mane. Karl the Speechless was outside when the horses were brought home. He saw the unbroken colt and ran after it and grabbed it by the tail. He worked his way forwards and took hold of its mane. The horse went wild and galloped around the field. Karl ran along with it and did not let up until he was mounted on its back and had locked his feet around its belly while holding onto its mane. The colt ran back and forth until the other men were ready to go. Then Karl rode with them up the hill. The colt ran sometimes in front of them and sometimes behind them, and the men whooped and yelled at him.” (183)*

Karl Karlsson spends the first twelve years of his life in silence. He grew quickly and to a great size, but intellectually he lagged behind.<sup>164</sup> Many in the valley thought him an idiot, calling him Karl the speechless (*ómali*). It will be during a horse fight that Karl Karlsson will provide Svarfdæla with a glimpse of his mettle as he mounts and breaks a wild colt bareback. The events that occurred at this horse fight appear to set in motion Karl’s desire to avenge his father’s death. Unfortunately for him, there appears no one else in the valley, other than his mother, who is interested in pursuing revenge for Karl the Red. Even his stepbrothers refuse his plan, preferring to surrender

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<sup>164</sup> Karl Karlsson is a *kolbítur*, in the tradition of his great-grandfather, Thorstein Thorgnyrsson. See n34.

their inheritance rather than to take part. Not to be reliant on the more traditional methods of obtaining honor and fame such as his grandfather pursued, Karl's persistence in obtaining vengeance for his father may be the most readily available course open to him. The valley is clearly not behind him as he is forced to trick hired men for his assault on Yngvild and Skidi's farm. With the hoped for expectations of provoking vengeance, once again this family has underestimated Ljotolf's cold-heartedness while banking heavily on his sense of honor.

Still, Karl's attempt at valor may simply be the chance to humiliate Ljotolf as opponent,<sup>165</sup> while his actions provide him with a common pretense to find honor in the community. Karl recognizes Yngvild's emotional investment in her husband and sons, but fails to see her greater loyalty to her *goði*.<sup>166</sup> This misperception creates a lengthier and complicated situation than he had first hoped for, as Yngvild is able to withstand abuse for many years.

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<sup>165</sup> Andersson & Miller, 1989, 39-40.

<sup>166</sup> She is not the first woman to sacrifice her sons in light of a larger loyalty. Yngvild's motives are due to loyalty, unlike Guðrún's motivation of loyalty through revenge in *Atlakviða*.

WHY DO YOU KEEP HARPING ON THE SAME THING?

*“Karl drew his sword and said to Yngvild “Is the gash in Skidi’s lip very large?” “No,” she said, “there is no gash whatsoever.” Then he took Thorkel, their oldest son, and cut off his head, then went up to Yngvild and asked whether the gash in Skidi’s lip had healed. She said it had completely healed. Then he took her second son and cut off his head. He went to her and asked the same question. She said there was no gash and answered the same. Then he took their youngest son, Bjorn, and cut off his head, then went over to Yngvild and wiped off his sword on her shirt and asked whether the gash in Skidi’s lip had healed. She said that he did not need to keep harping on the same thing: “It is completely healed.”” (186)*

If Karl Karlsson is acting on the belief Yngvild is responsible for the death of his father, it is reasonable to assume the execution of her three sons should fulfill the revenge code. Why then, does he continue to torment her by abducting and selling her into slavery? Karl Karlsson is not misguided or lacking knowledge of how his father died, or at whose hand. However, he cannot successfully attack the powerful *goði* Ljotolf and must choose someone he perceives as an equal match.

Understanding Skidi’s loyalty is with no one other than himself, Karl offers him freedom and his life to leave Iceland, which he quickly does. The execution of their three sons proves to all that he is capable and willing to kill, and so should be taken seriously. Yngvild, while being aristocratic, is viewed as earnestly loyal to Ljotolf. Out of this perception, Karl Karlsson may

understand that Ljotolf's loyalty is reciprocal, and he would seek vengeance for the acts he commits against her and her sons. Yet, after receiving no reaction from Ljotolf for one year, Karl Karlsson is forced to alter his plans.<sup>167</sup> Unable to harm Yngvild by Icelandic law, Karl Karlsson could not gain honor through her death. Lacking his hoped for reaction, he now has a mother who is asking him what he plans to do now, and a woman he has abducted and must feed. Karl comes to the conclusion that the only way he is going to overcome Ljotolf and gain honor is to become Ljotolf's friend. Riding to *Hof* in the spring he speaks with Ljotolf, asking him to take over his assets in *Svarfdæla* when he goes abroad. By surrendering all control of his assets to his rival as a gift, he places the onerous task on Ljotolf to now act with honor. He tells Ljotolf he has decided to go abroad with Yngvild with hopes of obtaining his honor there.

His gift to Ljotolf accomplishes two tasks. By surrendering control of his assets, he lets Ljotolf know he has no political aspirations as chieftain, while giving notice that he is taking Yngvild out of the country. *Grágás* does

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<sup>167</sup> Karl anticipates an attack due to the abduction of Yngvildr as his friends advise him to move away from *Grund* and out of reach of Ljotolf. Over the winter, he has realized Ljotolf will not engage him in battle and decides he must approach him from another angle, finding his honor abroad.

not allow an Icelandic woman to be taken out of the country without the permission of her male family member or guardian. By allowing Karl to leave with Yngvild, Ljotolf is agreeing that he may have her to do with as he chooses.

Ljotolf's control of Karl's assets puts their relationship on completely different level and one of trust. This trust eventually turns into friendship. But what of Yngvild? She is the only one who has not been told the feud is over, as her position of loyalty remains steadfast. Once again, she is used as political reward, and although unstated between the two men, it is understood that Yngvild is offered as scapegoat. Yngvild remains unaware of her abandonment for years, believing she is acting under the good faith of Ljotolf. In response to Yngvild's nature to loyally protect her father, brothers and *goði*,<sup>168</sup> she will endure abuse and torture as well as the shame and humiliation of rejection by the men she aided and depended on.

SHE SAID IT WOULD NEVER BE HEALED

*"Then Karl bought the slave woman and counted out six hundred ounces of silver for Brynjolf and led her to the ship. It was Yngvild Fair-cheek. She put her arms around Karl's neck and cried. Karl had never seen her moved by anything that had happened*

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<sup>168</sup> Yngvild accepted her situation when married to Klaufi as a way to keep her father alive; she married Skidi as a way of paying for the protection of her brothers; she sacrificed her sons on behalf of her loyalty to Ljotolf; and she resisted betraying her loyalty in the face of brutal enslavement.

*to her. Karl had a bath prepared for her and gave her fine clothes. Afterwards Karl went to talk to her and drew the sword with which he had killed her sons and asked whether the gash in Skidi's lip had healed. She said it would never be healed."* (191)

Yngvild recants her loyalty. After years of abandonment to abject slavery she must now possess some clarity as to her purpose as scapegoat, and surrenders to Karl Karlsson. Against the odds, she held to what she believed until there was no longer a need to do so. The saga compounds and highlights the significance of her abuse when both her husband and her *goði* reject her<sup>169</sup> in order to keep the valley's established *status quo*. Does Svarfdæla saga promote that the audience could accept the horrific treatment of Yngvild as just payment for anything she may be guilty of doing? Had she actually been accountable for the death of Karl the Red, could this extraordinary treatment provide any sort of balance or justification? By comparison, the outlandish actions of the men of Svarfdæla saga seem to be

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<sup>169</sup> Karl knows where Skidi can be found and after giving him support in his fight against the Irish they become friends. Karl tells Skidi he has brought his wife, Yngvild, to him, he replies, *"I do not want to set eyes on her. I have never performed a worse deed than that which she forced me to do when I killed your father."* Taking Yngvild to Iceland and to Ljotolf, Karl says, *"I have brought Yngvild Fair-cheek. I would like you to take charge of her. You may now marry her to anyone you like, because she will not seem too proud to anyone."* Ljotolf answered, *"That is one woman I never wish to see, because it was because of her that I committed the worst deed I have ever done when I killed your father."* (191) Karl and Ljotolf are able to settle their difference while maintaining their friendship faithfully. Karl rode home to Upsir and Ljotolf took charge of Yngvild Fair-cheek.

taken in stride by those concerned, while Yngvild's conduct takes on the wrath of the *gods*, leaving other meanings to apply here.

## CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

## THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A GOÐI

*“Ljotolf lived at Hof until he died. He was found in a hideous hole in a field; he had been run through with a short-sword that had been fashioned from the sword, Atli’s Gift, which Klaufi had owned and which Ljotolf had taken after the battle against Karl the Red. Ljotolf’s remains were moved south and down the heath.” (192)*

In all its ironic subtlety, the saga presents a legacy of continuity for Ljotolf in the end. Over the years, through industriousness, perseverance and cunning, he achieved his goal to become the one remaining chieftain in Svarfdæla, only to have his life end in a hideous hole. Not the auspicious finish expected of a man of his standing. It is curious that with no surviving rivals or enemies,<sup>170</sup> Ljotolf’s death is not one of old age with a large family surrounding his death bed mourning their loss. His death in this manner may come as a surprise and mystery to some. Who would have a reason to kill the valley’s chieftain in such a dishonorable way? And more importantly, why does the saga protect this person by not pursuing the matter?

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<sup>170</sup> Karl Karlsson was the last of the rival chieftains. The only other possibility would be Thorgrim the Gray, but he has not been heard of since his exit from the saga after their last conflict many years ago.



The people of Svarfdæla have voiced their opinion regarding Ljotolf's death similar to the way they dealt with the revenge sought for Karl the Red by his son. They have remained remarkably quiet on both issues. Someone has murdered their chieftain and *goði*, and yet they show no interest. Even his burial is afforded little attention as its location is described only as, *south and down the heath*. Implying it could be almost anywhere, down there, somewhere.

The circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of the *goði* illuminate those convoluted events throughout the saga, allowing them to galvanize. With the same irony and panache that produced the clever *tricks* played in the saga, enough clues are provided to understand Ljotolf's death came at the hand of the one who was once his most loyal and devoted friend. Yngvild may not have obtained the honor afforded men during her lifetime but she sought and found revenge, along with the respect and protection of her community for her hard won loyalty.

In finally recognizing Yngvild Fair-cheek's role in the final events of the saga, the dynamics of the whole saga shift. The saga begins as the tale of four generations of men; how they lived and died, and yet, without her—the woman—the saga would have lost its purpose, its mortality. A woman named Yngvild Fair-cheek was vital to the unfolding of the saga's framework. If this

is, as Heinemann suggests, the saga world's representation of the dark night of the female soul—the subconscious gratification of a longing to strike back, then Yngvild's quiet, subtle voice is a single lit candle guiding someone along the way. She has leveled the playing field. For those who understand what has taken place in Svarfdæla, Yngvild—the woman—is the last one standing. She is the one who survived against all odds, which had become so important to so many men. There seems to be a special place in the community of Svarfdæla for those who survive to carry on—no matter the cost. Yngvild has done this.

It could be said she went back on her loyalty by saying the words Karl Karlsson wanted to hear, by recanting. But that loyalty was as much a fairy-tale as the beginning half of the saga. This loyalty came only from Yngvild without a reciprocating thought from Ljotolf. She had been betraying herself for years, never Ljotolf. So when Yngvild fashioned the sword Atli's Gift into a short—sword, making it more of a woman's weapon and easier to conceal, then plunging it into the middle of Ljotolf while they were together alone in a field, she renewed her ideal of loyalty and honor.<sup>171</sup> And quite possibly that of the saga's.

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<sup>171</sup> “With little evidence found in Norse society to support that individual women engaged in physical and bodily aggression, *Grágús* occasionally suggests female violence. Crediting

Looking back over the *saga*, beginning with a *fornaldarsaga* that reveals how a man turns himself into a paragon of manhood; a warrior and icon when once he had nothing except contempt and displeasure for those around him. He was created with the help of others, allowing his endeavors and skills to convene, pushing him beyond the pale. His readiness to earnestly accept other's support will become a singular mark of his nature. His success became the accumulation of all who involved. Each treated the other with respect. Thorstein's greatness as a human being is illuminated through the magnitude of his brother's loyalty and unbending devotion, allowing him to achieve this paradigm for generations to follow. This is reflected in Iceland by those who surround Ljotolf to ensure his successes— only in a different way. This different way is the result of how he views them. What their purpose for him ultimately is. Where Thorstein Thorgnyrsson understood the importance and value of taking care of those around him, Ljotolf is only able to see self-purpose.

Svarfdæla saga begins and ends with loyalty. While themes of honor and greed are strong important threads throughout the saga, hinging on

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women with homicides, a paragraph stipulates that “a woman should be prosecuted in the same way as a man if she succeeds in killing a man or woman: (Gr 2:350) The qualifier, “if she succeeds” might suggest that the physical force required to kill a human with crude weapons was not frequently demonstrated by women.” Jochens, 1996, 158. In the case of Yngvild, her years as a slave would have enabled her the skill and force to accomplish this task.

friendship, patronage, but it is loyalty that propels their value within the saga. Thorolf Thorgnyrsson has an automatic and resilient sense of loyalty to his brother, while Thorstein must journey until he understands the importance of this type of love above all else. Yngvild, Thorolf's parallel character in Iceland, proves her value through her blind and unflinching loyalty against the contrasting motives of the greedy Ljotolf. And while both Yngvild and Thorolf will suffer at the hands of those they are devoted to, their legacy of obedience is evoked with honor within their community, and through Svarfdæla saga. Thorolf's name continues with the birth of his nephew, while Yngvild's name continues with the birth of Karl the Red's granddaughter. It could be said that while loyalty was the greatest downfall of both Yngvild and Thorolf, it also garnished their greatest honor.

While no one appears as they actually are, the second half of the *saga* insists that in order to really find the people of Svarfadardal, the observer must dig deep and beyond the obvious, as they will not obediently present themselves. As the framework of the saga is exposed, Yngvild Fair-cheek comes forward as comparable to Thorolf Thorgnyrsson and an ideal of loyalty, while she fills the heroic role as a returning warrior who avenges herself.

As a woman Yngvild began at a disadvantage to the men she was reliant on for protection. She complied with what her society told her is

correct and yet, she is abused by those with control. So what happens to those women who cannot rely on being treated well by the men who hold responsibility? They cannot all suffer life in silence.

In considering Yngvild's role as whetter, it is suggested that this is largely a male construct, applicable to the pagan era in order to serve a greater, loftier purpose for the community. The whetter served as a convenient scapegoat for those male misdeeds that threatened the existence of the present society. And so by its very nature, would contribute significantly to an understanding of the male-dominated society that produced them.<sup>172</sup> Yngvild's words were used to imply she goaded the men in her life, taking advantage of this social tool, and likely with her consent. However in the end, her sacrifice as scapegoat proved more than anyone could have bargained for, and simply to allow these men of Svarfdæla to reach peace at last without disgracing themselves.

Yngvild has also been viewed as a villain in the past. Pointing to her vengeance as a result of her pride for being taken in marriage by a man beneath her, she incites her brothers to kill him. Because of this she is treated differently than other saga women. That the abuse she experiences in Svarfdæla saga justifies her behavior and once finally humiliated and

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<sup>172</sup> Jochens, 1996, 211.

defeated, she is forced to admit she was wrong.<sup>173</sup> Possibly the saga could carry this meaning somehow, but in light of rethinking the saga and Yngvild, it does not seem true.

In the case of Svarfdæla saga, as a reflection of the present world, Yngvild's respect and honor won is different from that of her parallel Thorolf, but she still achieves them. She has been misunderstood and mistreated, but her community has stood by her in the end, allowing her vengeance while protecting her. Svarfdæla will appear to forget where Yngvild is or her exact circumstances after she murders Ljotolf, their chieftain and *goði*. The saga is only able to speculate if she was given again in marriage, or possibly she committed suicide out of despair. It seems when the people of Svarfadardal are asked, no one can really say what happened to her. However, it is hoped by some that she lived out the remainder of her days quietly, in peace and contentment.

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<sup>173</sup> Karras, 1992, 300-301

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