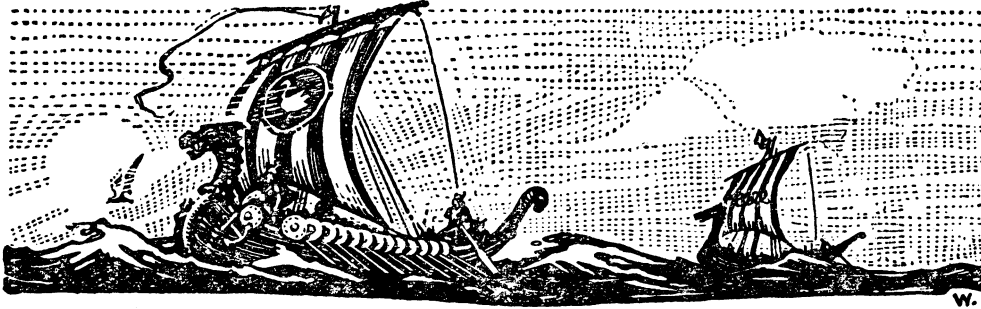


# Swain's End

## Arthur D. Howden Smith

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# SWAIN'S END

A Complete Novelette  
by  
Arthur D. Howden Smith

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**I**N THE old days the greatest man in the North, so the skalds sing, was Swain Olaf's son, who dwelt on the isle of Gairsey in the Orkneys and held lands far and wide in the Orkneyar and in Caithness on the Scots' main. He owned five longships, and traded overseas what times he was not for viking-faring or cultivating his farms. The Orkney Jarls looked up to him, both with fear and respect, for he was an ill man to be crossed by Jarl or common man; twice in his lifetime he brought about a shift of Jarls, and it was he who coined the saying, "One Jarl rules by might; two Jarls rule with justice."

Yet when Jarl Rognvald was slain in battle, and the complete dominion of the Orkneys fell to Jarl Harald, Jarl Rognvald's

young cousin, Swain, who had fostered Harald in his youth and once had driven him forth of the islands for a lesson, declared none other should share Jarl Harald's rule. And when certain of the *boendr*<sup>1</sup> fell to murmuring and reminding Swain that he, himself, formerly had warned them always to have two Jarls, so that one might be played against the other at need and their power be divided, he said to them:

"It is true that I spoke as you assert I did. That was many years ago. But Jarl Harald has grown up under my instruction, and if he was foolish in his youth, that is a right to which all youths are entitled. Now he is a wise man and a skilled warrior, and my opinion is that he is the best Jarl we could secure. Let him alone, and encourage

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<sup>1</sup> Hereditary land-holders.

him to raise up sons to follow him. He will defend you from your enemies and rule justly.”

Some of the *boendr* grumbled at this, but none of them dared to speak up at the Thing which was held at Kirkiuvag to confirm Jarl Harald's succession, and the long and the short of it was that the people accepted him, and with Swain at his elbow to advise him he ruled the islands for many years without once incurring trouble from within.

He was a tall man, and strong, very ugly, and in his later life little given to speech. Of all his friends he reckoned Swain the closest, and it was a source of sorrow to him that in a quarrel they had had in the past he had been—unwittingly—an assistant in the slaying of Swain's mother by Olvir Rosta, Swain's deadly enemy.

This Olvir was feared in the northern countries almost as much as Swain, for his home was his longship and he lived entirely by raiding and ravaging. He was a powerful man, with broad shoulders and long arms, and his beard was black; he was noted for his craft in war and his ability as a spear-caster. Many kings had courted him for the value of his services against their enemies, but he was never able to dwell long in any one place because of Swain's enmity. Their feud had begun when they were boys, and men say that it consumed more folk than any other one cause since Olaf Truggvi's son's time. Among those who perished were Swain's father and mother and his two brothers and Olvir's grandmother, Frakork, who was reputed a witch and slew many by means of malignant spells and incantations.

For a few years Olvir endeavored to stand up before Swain, but at last Swain became too strong for him, and thenceforward their warfare was a series of flights and pursuits. Once, Swain drove Olvir from Mikligard<sup>1</sup>, where Olvir had

taken service in the Vaerang Guard of the emperor; again, they clashed in Russia; three times Swain voyaged to Norway to root his enemy from the king's court, and each time Olvir escaped before Swain might lay hands upon him or bring him to swords' points. Their keels had furrowed the seas from Iceland to Njorfasund<sup>2</sup>, up and down the Mediterranean, all along the coasts of Serkland<sup>3</sup> around the circuit of Bretland<sup>4</sup> and Scotland and the green shores of Ireland,<sup>5</sup> into the harbors of heathen Spainland and Gaulland, and back and forth from the Norse countries and the islands of the sea, the Hjaltlands, the Sudreyar, the Syllingar<sup>6</sup> and beyond.

Olvir made numerous efforts to compose his differences with Swain by paying manbote for his slayings, but Swain's unflinching answer was that the deaths he held against Olvir could be wiped out only by blood. Even the Orkney Jarls attempted to adjust the quarrel because it took such bitter toll of their people, but no one of them was successful, and ultimately they found it to their advantage to take Swain's side. For if Olvir was a wolf of prey, as his enemies declared, nonetheless was Swain the great mastiff of the hunting-pack.

Olvir lived always beyond the law; Swain was never bound by law or creed, if it was not to his advantage to be, yet he preferred to live peacefully and considerately, in so far as he might. He harmed no man who did not harm him—except on his viking raids when he ravaged all except the Norse peoples. And he accumulated such wealth that Jarl Rognvald said there were really three Jarls in the Orkneys—by which he meant Swain as well as himself and Jarl Harald.

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<sup>1</sup> Constantinople

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<sup>2</sup> Gibraltar Straits

<sup>3</sup> Saracenland

<sup>4</sup> Britain.

<sup>5</sup> Ireland.

<sup>6</sup> Shetlands, Hebrides and Scyllies.

There was this difference between the two men, also:

Olvir lived to raid and burn and slay; he never planted a grain of corn or built a house or married a wife and reared children; he was, first and last, a means of destruction. Men feared him and loathed him, and his name was a catchword to frighten children; no one loved him. The very kings who hired him and his rough house-carls and viking comrades were chary of his company. He trusted no man; no man trusted him.

Swain was a man of property; he farmed wide lands; he had hundreds of contented tenants and servants; he was liked by his friends as much as he was hated and dreaded by his enemies. The plunder and booty he won by his viking cruises he sank into lands and longships and gear. He had two sons by whom he set great store, Olaf and Andreas. Their mother was an Irishwoman and queen in Man, but a mighty shrew, and for certain intrigues she had launched with Olvir, Swain committed her to a convent in the Syllingar where she lived out her days.

On no score did he resemble Olvir, save it be the hatred they felt for one another. They were both brave, it is true, yet the bravery was of different sorts. Olvir was brave after the crafty, calculating manner of the outcast; he lived for the one purpose of slaying Swain, and after Swain, Swain's two sons, as he had slain the others of their family. He would never stand and face Swain or any man, unless numbers and advantage were on his side. Death for a point of honor was a foolishness he mocked at. Swain, on the contrary, would have died sooner than flee. Honor to him was more than success. He felt a contempt for Olvir which was unjustified, and the reason for it was Olvir's unwillingness to meet him man to man and accept holm-judgment<sup>1</sup> after the

ancient usage. Because of this he set down his enemy as nidding and cowardly, whereas in truth Olvir had as much courage of another sort as he himself.

They were different in all things, as far apart as the sun-baked coasts of Serkland and the glazed cliffs of Iceland, Swain a huge, blond giant, his ruddy hair and beard still bright in middle age, his fiercely cold blue eyes undimmed; Olvir a massive dwarf of a man, all immense shoulders and bulging, apelike arms, black and swart as the Moors amongst whom he sought refuge more than once from Swain's prodding keels.

Strong, both. Brave, both. Both untamed. Both boiling with a hatred which overmastered everything. But wait! Everything? In Olvir's heart, perhaps, yes. In Swain's, no. Two passions tore at him—hatred of Olvir and care for the two sons he destined to carry on his name and avenge his death if Olvir won in their struggle. All he lived, all he owned, all he did and won, he entered up for Olaf and Andreas. They were his future, his continuity with what was to come after him, just as he had carried on the obligations, the savings and the hatreds of his father before him.

That represents the essence of the difference between the two men—Olvir, the freebooter, and Swain, the farmer and viking chief. Olvir was a lone wolf, with the lone wolf's disregard for all things other than his own ends. Swain was the leader of a herd, of a pack, and when he remembered his feud and his enemy, he curbed the lust of his hate with the memory of those who depended upon his conduct. He fought for more than his own hand. Olvir fought—as he lived—to destroy. Swain fought and lived to build up.

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<sup>1</sup> Ordeal by battle on an islet, whence escape was impossible for the defeated.

## II



IN THE Spring in which Swain's sons attained their eighteenth year—they were twins, born at a birth—a Norse merchant who had wintered in the south of Irland stopped in the Orkneys on his voyage home with the tidings that Olvir Rosta had taken service with the King of Dyflin<sup>1</sup>. As it chanced, Swain had completed the Spring planting and was casting around for an excuse for viking-faring, for he could never bear to bide at home after the Winter gales had ceased blowing and the seeds were in the ground, so he summoned Erik, who was his forecastle man at sea and the captain of his house-carls ashore, and bade him turn out the company of the steading and haul the longships forth from their pent-sheds and *boun*<sup>2</sup> them for the ocean-path.

"I dreamed of oar-threshing in the night," commented Erik. "We shall travel far."

"We go after Olvir Rosta," returned Swain. "If the gods are kind we shall sail back from this cruise with his head on *Deathbringer's* prow."

"No heathen god will help to Olvir's doom," answered Erik. "My advice is that you burn candles to the blessed saints upon this venture, Swain."

"No," said Swain, "this is too important to trust to any one god. We will burn the candles in St. Magnus' Church, and I will also seek out old Skallagrim, Thor's priest, who knows the ancient rites, and give him a horse for sacrifice."

This Erik was an Icelander, a small, leathery-faced man, with a blinking eye and a dry humor, bandy in the legs. He fought with an ax, and was esteemed to be exceedingly brave, albeit he would never

accept battle with a stronger if he could avoid it.

"Excellent," he approved now. "The old mare that is at grass in Skorfdale pasture is past her useful days. Give her to Skallagrim. Thor will never know the difference between her and a young stallion."

Swain said that he would, and then left the skalli and took a small-boat to sail through the Aurridafiord to Kirkiuvag on Hrossey where Jarl Harald dwelt. He entered the Jarl's hall after candle-lighting when the house-carls' tables were full, and all men looked up eagerly to see him, those who sat at the high table as well as the common folk.

"Ho, Swain," Jarl Harald greeted him, "I perceive by your face that the oar-itch is upon you."

Men laughed at this, and there was a crowding forward to hear Swain's answer.

"It is true, Lord Jarl," Swain said. "My fields are sown; my men are bounding the ships."

The Jarl nodded.

"I feared as much. Men told me what Ospakar of Bjorgvin<sup>3</sup> said when he beached at Orphir."

"Here is no fear," returned Swain somberly. "It is many years since Olvir came so close. My luck is with me. This time he cannot escape."

"Such is my hope, also," rejoined Jarl Harald. "Yet I must say to you as your friend, Swain, that you are challenging ill-luck by continuing your marauding expeditions. No man can continue forever to miss death, risking it continually, as you have done."

"What is your meaning, Lord Jarl?" asked Swain.

"My meaning is plain. You have been successful for many years and gained great wealth from viking-faring. Now, I would have you stop and think whether you

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<sup>1</sup> Dublin

<sup>2</sup> Equip

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<sup>3</sup>Bergen.



have not done enough, lest you perish in the full tide of your fame.”

“After this cruise, perhaps,” replied Swain. “When I have slain Olvir Rosta I will sit at home in my skalli and watch the exploits of my sons and other young men. But so long as Olvir lives I must pursue him. Else I am nidding.”

Jarl Harald shrugged his shoulders.

“Well I knew this would be your answer,” he said. “You are no man to take advice, however friendly meant.”

“Not so, not so, Lord Jarl,” cried Swain. “I would rather take advice from you than from any other. But I would have you remember, too, that my honor is at stake. All my life I have sworn to slay Olvir; all my life I have pursued him; and all my life he has evaded me.”

“I do not dispute what you say,” answered the Jarl. “But I spoke what was in my heart. It would be a sad blow to me if you perished.”

Swain smiled and reached across the high table, before which he stood, and

clasped one of Jarl Harald’s hands.

“The ale has turned sour in your stomach, Lord,” he said. “What talk is this of perishing? I may die in battle, as any man may; but it will not be Olvir Rosta who slays me so.”

Jarl Harald then took a gold chain from around his neck and hung it about Swain’s.

“We have passed through many dangers together,” he remarked. “We have been father and son, friend and enemy, outlaw and inlaw. And the end of it is that we are comrades. I give you this token, Swain, for the love I bear you and to signify my appreciation of services skalds have often sung.”

Now Swain was deeply touched by this, for Jarl Harald was a taciturn man, seldom disposed to such free expressions.


“You have spoken as becomes a friend,” said Swain. “Likewise, your advice is sound. If it were not for the honorable obligation upon me to slay Olvir Rosta I would heed what you say and bide at home as becomes a man who is past his youth, and whose strength is wasted away in the wet work and the fighting. But I do not doubt I shall catch Olvir on this cruise, for he is too near to escape me. When that is done I shall have no more occasion for viking-faring, unless it be on your account. Therefore I promise you that this shall be my last cruise. I will endeavor to win as much fame as possible on it, and afterward I will leave off war-going.”

“Ah, well, comrade,” returned the Jarl sadly, “you promise all that I have a right to expect of you, but it is difficult to know which comes first—death or lasting fame.”

He made Swain sit beside him on his right hand, and there were many ale-horns emptied to the success of the expedition and scores of chiefs and warriors came forward and volunteered to go upon it. And the Jarl,

himself, not to be behind the others in manifesting friendship for Swain, promised to send two large dragons, fully manned.

### III

 THE next day Swain returned to Gairsey, and as he ran his boat ashore his ears were deafened by the clamor of the workmen who labored over his longships, the battering of the mallets of the calkers and the clinking of steel in the smithy by the strand where the armorers wrought upon the gear. Overnight Gairsey had turned from the peaceful pursuits of the Spring planting to grim preparations for the viking harvest, which was frequently more fruitful than any crop reaped from the furrowed earthen fields.

Erik and other of Swain's chief tenants and servants came up to him to tell what was being done and to hear the news from Kirkiuvag, but before they had more than opened their mouths to greet him two stalwart figures burst through the ranks and clutched him by either arm. With a bull-roar of good-humored wrath Swain knocked the intruders' heads together and then jerked them apart again.

"Ho, younglings, what rough play is this? We are men grown here."

"And so are we," shouted one boy.

"As fit for oarwork or fighting as a half of your house-carls," retorted the other.

Swain chuckled, despite himself. They were strapping lads, with muscles toughened under his own supervision. Alike in features and stature, Olaf was dark after his Irish mother, while Andreas had his father's ruddy blond hue.

"Could you find no tasks for them Erik?" demanded Swain, half-jestingly.

"They have been shifting food-chests from the storehouses," replied the little Icelander, "what time they were not assailing me for my influence with you."

"You promised we should go viking this year," cried Olaf.

"So did you," proclaimed Andreas; "and have promised it this past two years."

"You carried Hakon, Jarl Harald's son, with you last cruise," added Olaf.

"And we shall be the mock of all the young men in the Orkneyar," cried Andreas. "We shall be writ down niddering and spiritless, and no man will give up place in his skalli."

Swain cast them from him against the side of one of the longships, chocked upright on the beach.

"Peace, peace," he commanded. "You deafen me. Make an end of this babble. Since when were you Jarls' sons?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Andreas drew himself erect, rubbing the shoulder which had cracked against the longship.

"We are Swain's sons," he said proudly.

"Well answered," acknowledged Swain.

And a murmur of assent came from the circle around them.

"We bear a great name to live up to," exclaimed Olaf, following up his brother's advantage.

"And that is why you may not go," stated Swain. "You are my sons, the last of my blood; and I go after Olvir Rosta, as foul a hound as tracks his way over Rann's Bath. Either I shall be the death of him or he will slay me. I do not think the latter will occur, but if it does I hope to be avenged; and who will avenge me if you two fall first to Olvir's spear?"

"He can no more slay us than he can slay you," protested Olaf.

"And you promised," began Andreas.

"Promise or no promise, you do not go," growled Swain. "I spoke of a viking cruise, of harrying in Gaulland or South

Bretland, perhaps. I said nothing of a chase after the wildest, crudest ravager of the Northlands." "But Hakon ---"

"Hakon will not go with me this cruise. No boys are to go. This is a men's faring."

"Be advised," spoke up Erik kindly. "Swain is an eager as any of us to blood you fittingly, but you are more than two extra blades. You are his surety that his wealth will not go into strange hands, that his name will continue to excite respect outside of skalds' songs."

The two boys stood sullenly against the longship's mossy hull without answering.

"Yes, yes," urged Swain. "What Erik says cannot be gainsaid. Accept my rule in this matter, and next year ---"

"Next year!" sneered Andreas.

"Next year, youngling," Swain repeated. "That is what I said. Next year I will send you forth, each in his own longship, with Erik and a few other seasoned chiefs to guide you, and you shall fare as far as you please and set to the winning of your saga places."

Olaf exchanged a quick glance with his brother, and stepped forward eagerly.

"We have another plan, if you will not take both ---"

"Both!" roared Swain. "I take neither!"

"No, no," persisted Olaf. "We have a proper plan."

"A proper plan! By the memory of Jarl Rognvald, who are you to lay a proper plan?"

"Yet it is proper for your ends," answered Andreas. "Tell him, Olaf."

And Olaf hastened on:

"You say that you cannot risk us in company with yourself. Oh, often you have told us of your pursuit of Olvir. Never a lesson in weaponcraft, but you pointed it with a tale of Olvir's wickedness! But see!

You need not leave both at home. One can be hostage for the future ---"

"And cut the other's throat out of jealousy," remarked Swain dryly. "A proper plan, in truth!"

The two boys voiced simultaneous denial. "Let fate decide," said Andreas.

And Olaf cried:

"We cannot quarrel against luck. One goes. One bides at home."

"What could be fairer?" demanded Andreas.

"We cast lots to go or stay," explained Olaf.

Swain's chill blue eyes bored into their flushed faces. The mutter of approval from the circle of chiefs was sweet music in his ears. Two fine bear-cubs he had reared. Sons worth while, these.

"Humph," he grunted. "And how will you choose? What shall be the test?"

They crowded toward him, faces now alight.

"You agree?" they clamored. "One is to go?"

He hesitated, weighing the issue in his mind. One hostage or two? What had he to fear? Olvir Rosta? He snorted at the idea. He had supreme confidence in the result of his life-long chase. What, then? Why tie two lads at home? He decided.

"One shall go," he answered briefly. "But which? How will you choose?"

They exchanged another private glance, and Olaf replied with dignity:

"You shall pluck a hair from the beard of each of us. He whose hair is longest shall go."

Swain stared at them, then burst into a bellow of laughter, in which all present joined.

"Beards?" he snorted. "What talk is this of beards? Why, I see not enough to hide your lips! Say, rather, I may pluck from the backs of your hands."

Andreas answered him with

undiminished dignity.

"It is true that our beards may not yet be as apparent as we might wish. Nevertheless, if you look closely you will perceive that we are not maidens."

"And since we are equal in all things else, the fairest test between us is to discover which one has the longest beard," added Olaf.

Swain choked back another burst of laughter, and strode closer to his sons. He thrust a couple of immense fingers into either cheek, explored, caught hold of a sparse downy fuzz and finally came upon specimens sufficient to give him a purchase. A couple of tugs, and he stepped back, a filament of hair in either fist.

"Left and right," he murmured. "Olaf, left. Andreas, right. By the Hammer, but here is a fine-drawn distinction. Erik, you must aid me, for I would show Jarl's justice in this issue."

The Iclander peered down at the two hairs, his leathern features cracked by the same grin as masked every face in the group.

"Left—right," he murmured, too. "Humph! Let me see. Hold them to the light. Humph! It seems to me, Swain— and the gods forbid that I should incur thereby the enmity of any new-fledged warrior—yes, it seems to me that the—ah—the "

"Would you call it the right?" asked Swain, grinning.

"The right? The right?" Erik stroked his own sparsely-covered chin. "Humph! Now, let me look again. The right? It maybe—yes, perhaps. By the breadth of a thumbnail, Swain."

Swain flicked the two tiny filaments into the air.

"That is my judgment, also," he announced. "The right hair was the longest. Andreas goes."

Olaf swallowed hard.

"It was my plan," he said. "Better

that one goes than neither."

His father clapped him on the back. "Your's is the chief responsibility, boy," quoth Swain. "For you, the future, certainly. For Andreas, perhaps—and perhaps not. I will sacrifice to all the gods in this matter."

#### IV



SWAIN'S folk crossed over to Kirkiuvag on the Sunday, and Bishop Bjarni celebrated them a high mass, and Swain offered many candles to St. Magnus, the patron of the Orkney men and himself a viking-farer of renown. Afterward Swain and Erik and certain of the chief men sailed to Eidey where dwelt Skallagrim, Odin's priest, carrying with them the old mare, and Skallagrim led them to Odin's altar on a hillside overlooking the sea, and the horse was sacrificed and the blood offered, as of old. Little was said of this at the time, for that Bishop Bjarni and the other clerks were enemies to Skallagrim and strove mightily to put down the ancient worship; but it came to Jarl Harald's ears and he was very wroth.

"You have done ill," he said to Swain. "It is bad enough that you go on this expedition against my advice, but now you have brought down upon your head the curses of Christ's servants."

"Oh, no, I have not," returned Swain; "for they know nothing about it, nor is it my intention that they shall."

"It does not matter," said the Jarl bitterly. "You can have no good luck from such heathen practices."

"I am not so sure of that," rejoined Swain. "Olvir Rosta is the grandson of a witch, who was the enemy of all Christians, and he, himself, has trafficked with the Powers of Darkness. If he has a protector it will be among the Old Gods, and for that reason I have sought to propitiate them, as well as the Christian saints. I do not see



what the saints can do with Olvir; he is not of their sort.”

“All the same, you will secure no good by what you have done,” insisted the Jarl. “For, at the least, you cannot pay the price to the Old Gods which Olvir has paid, and therefore they will not sell him to you.”

“That is true,” admitted Swain thoughtfully, “unless it happens that he offends them. Well, I have done all for the best, and if the gods—Christian or other—intend to aid me, they will. If not, it cannot be helped. As for Bishop Bjarni, I have given him great store of gold and silver at divers times for masses and dispensations, and vessels for his altars and vestments for him and his priests. Indeed, I have never kept for myself what I spoiled from southland churches. So I do not see that the holy bishop has any cause for fault-finding with me. If he proves to me that his religion aids me to slay Olvir I will foreswear Thor and Odin and all other gods of our people; but until then I will serve both sides that neither may take offense.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Jarl Harald. “It is a difficult question, and each man must settle it for himself. But I beseech you to be cautious in what you do. For the skalds have sung truly that the gods may protect a man, but his own shield stops the arrow.”

“I will remember your words, Lord Jarl,” answered Swain. “And now I have a boon to ask of you.”

“Name it,” said the Jarl. “Whatever I have is yours, Swain.”

“It is that you will be governor over Olaf, my son, the while I am gone, and supervise his administration of my properties, treating him in all ways as your own son.”

“I will do so,” promised Jarl Harald. “And if ill luck has its way, and harm befalls you, he shall continue as my son, and I will support his cause against all oppressors and

in the end find him a good marriage and raise him to high place among my advisers according to his merit.”

“I cannot ask more,” said Swain. “But you may inscribe in your memory what I say, which is: Olvir cannot slay me living.”

“Cannot slay you living?” repeated the Jarl doubtfully. “Those are strange words, Swain. What mean you?”

“No, I cannot say,” said Swain. “Fate, itself, speaks with my voice. I know it, yet I cannot say how.”

“Why, you are no spaeman to foresee the future,” protested the Jarl.

“Not I,” replied Swain. “But perhaps the gods have favored me out of their usual course, for I say to you again that I know Olvir shall not slay me living. And if he cannot slay me living, how shall he slay me, dead?”

“This is past understanding,” said Jarl Harald.

And therewith he crossed himself. Nor did he or any other man understand Swain’s saying until the event befell, when it was remembered, and all marveled exceedingly.



ON THE day following, Swain’s vessels sailed from Gairsey for the south, seven dragons fully manned; and all the way through the Eufjusund to the open sea the shores of Hrossey and Hrolfsey were lined with people to watch them pass, and many ships attended them, Jarl Harald in his own longship accompanying them along the coast until they struck off westward into the Pentland Firth. It was one of the noblest expeditions which ever set sail from the Orkneys. Men said there had been larger, but none more handsomely equipped.

There were emblems of dragons and ravens and pictures of saints and crosses on the sails, and the sides of each ship were hung with shields newly painted. The rowers were all strong men of full growth, and their

oars swung in splendid unison. The poops and forecastles were crammed with chieftains and famous warriors, and there was a brave glint of armor and gilt and silvered mail.

They had fair weather, threaded the Sudreyar without mishap, and so came through Irland's Haf<sup>1</sup> to Dyflin. And great was the fear of the people of the city as they looked from their strong walls and saw Swain's longships in the river, and this notwithstanding that the city was well-fortified and in addition to their own numbers they could rely upon the aid of Olvir Rosta and his two hundred freebooters, landless men and outlaws, but nevertheless noted far and wide as raven-feeders, fearing no man and never seeking quarter or granting it.

The King of Dyflin was not then present in the city, but his chief men gathered in counsel and anxiously discussed their plight, for Swain's name was well known in those parts, and whenever his dragons showed on the Irish coasts the people fled inland and the small towns paid him tribute to escape worse scath.

Several were of a mind to strike a composition with Swain, while others declared it would be unworthy to buy off a viking rover; and in the course of the dispute they sent for Olvir, who was a favorite of the king by reason of his wickedness and ability to direct his hand to any evil mission that was required.

Olvir strode in to them all shining in silvered mail, with a winged helm on his head and his big ax, Skulltapper, in his hand. His beard was black as midnight, and it fell to his waist. So long was it that in battle he tucked the ends into his belt that they might not fly up into his face. His eyes were black like dead coals in the fire, but behind their deadness flickered a subdued, sinister light, which could leap up into a conflagration of

fiendish mirth or anger—as if a demon had blown it to life. His body was so broad that he seemed shorter than he was, although he was really a full head shorter than tall men; and his arms were so long that they hung to his knees. He was feared in battle because he could reach out to twice the distance of others, swinging his ax from a point where his enemy could not reach him.

The light in the depths of his dull, black eyes commenced to flicker with a derisive mirth as he listened to the opposing plans of the Dyflinmen, and when the last had spoken, he said—

“Do you wish me to tell you what I think you should do?”

“Yes, yes,” answered the richest merchant of the town, with a touch of uneasiness—he feared Olvir as much as Swain. “We know you have been a warrior all your days, Olvir, and are wiser in such affairs than we. Also, you know the heart of the king, our master, and can help us to decide according to his wishes.”

“That is to be seen,” replied Olvir. “However, here is my judgment on your plight. Both of your factions are in the right. It would be a great shame to surrender so rich a town, and so populous, to a roving viking squadron, and you do well to suppose that the king, your master, would not be pleased thereby. As against this view, too, may be set the fact that Swain is a brave and resourceful chief, and despite your high walls and multitude of people, you will be hard put to it to resist his attack.”

“But this is not advice that you give us,” cried another merchant. “You tell us only that we all are right, and that no matter what we do either way disaster lies. For if we do not succumb to Swain we shall bring down upon us the displeasure of the king!”

“That is true past doubt,” returned Olvir blandly. “Your one hope of escaping evil consequences is to do as I bid you.”

“What is that?” demanded several of

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<sup>1</sup> Irish sea

his hearers.

“This. Swain is my deadly enemy. He has two motives in coming here. One is to compass my death; the second is to secure as much booty as he can.”

“What, then, is to prevent us from repelling him without effort by giving you up to him, with a small sum to reward his trouble?” demanded one of the younger merchants.

The derisive flicker became a glint as dully hard as the glow in polished steel as Olvir turned his eyes, beneath their heavily thatched brows, upon the speaker.

“Who would deliver me to Swain?” he inquired softly.

Nobody answered him, and he added:

“I do not believe your king would be pleased by such conduct, nor would it be spoken of to the credit of your city. I am here among you to defend you against the very peril which now confronts you.”

“And which you say comes upon us because of your presence!” cried the chief of the merchants.

“In part,” acknowledged Olvir. “But I warn you Swain is no man to let off lightly a city so cowardly as to surrender me without an effort of defense. He would take from you your last mark of silver and every jewel your wives wear.”

“We have yet to hear your plan,” said the merchant after a pause. “We will suspend judgment until we have heard it.” Olvir’s lips twitched in what might have been a grimace of saturnine amusement.

“Presently,” he said, “Swain will land his men and approach your walls. At your gate he will demand admission, and when it is refused him, he will say that he comes hither seeking me, his enemy, and to punish those who granted me in Dyflin a sanctuary from his vengeance. Now, my counsel is that you should accept his demands, agree to give me up and suggest

that he enter your city and estimate charitably the fine you should pay for your offense in receiving me in your midst.”

A gasp escaped the lips of the assembled merchants.

“And you call this the way to escape the evil consequences of your presence!” protested the young merchant who had spoken before.

“It is the first part of my plan,” said Olvir coolly. “I would have you say likewise to Swain, when you speak to him as I have recommended, that you desire him to enter because you find it impossible to cope with me.”

He broke off to remark off-hand—  
“There is no lie in that!”

And then continued:

“You will say to him that I have retired with my men into the borg by the river-shore and refuse to come out, because I know of your purpose to surrender me to him; and that therefore all you can do to aid him is to give him admission to the city, and a free path to conquer me in the borg as best he can. You may be sure Swain will accept your offer.”

“Are you so sure that you can resist him in the borg?” asked the chief merchant.

“What of us after he has entered?” called a second.

“You have given us to understand that he will not be moderate in his demands,” protested a third.

“Patience,” answered Olvir very gently. “I do not always say what I think, and in war I seldom offer an enemy what I actually intend for him. Do what I have said. Throw open your gate for Swain. But first dig a great pit inside the gate, covering it lightly with a framework to resemble the surface of the street. Muster and arm all your men, and conceal them in buildings close by the gate and the pit. Then when Swain leads his men in through the gate, he and those with him will be plunged into the

pit, his followers will be thrown into confusion and you can fall upon and destroy them.”

The Dyflin men wagged their heads in wise assent.

“But what of you, Olvir?” inquired the young merchant who had twice challenged him.

“Why, I shall be ready in the borg to come to your assistance and aid in the slaying,” answered Olvir, as the coals of his eyes flared alight again. “You would not have me by the gate? Swain is no fool to be trapped by any simple trick. You must do exactly as I have said or he will detect your object and refuse to enter.”

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed the principal of the merchants. “What you say is so, Olvir. This is a good plan that you have made. My judgment is that we should practise it.”

“It is the only way you can resist Swain,” said Olvir. “If you attempt to fight him without trickery he will break down your walls and ravage and burn from one end of the town to the other.”

“And by means of this trick we shall be rid of Swain and his raids forever,” cried the young merchant. “The blessed Patrick be our aid that we may sweep these northern scoundrels from the seas!”

“You will require more than the saints to master Swain,” grunted Olvir. And as he went out men heard him mutter—

“While the dog fought the cat the fox took his meal.”

But nobody knew what he meant.

## V



SWAIN mustered his men out of the longships, and arrayed them in a shield-wall on Dyflin strand. Then they marched up to the city gate, and took their stand a long arrowshot distant. The day was bright, and the sun sparkled on

the close-set helms and the spear-heads and the sword-blades and axes. So terrible was the spectacle that Swain did not marvel at the fear-struck faces that peered down from the city wall and the sounds of wailing that came from within.

“It seems they are poor-spirited folk in Dyflin,” he said contemptuously.

Erik, at his shoulder, looked dubious.

“They are merchant-folk, and unwarlike,” answered the Iclander. “But it is not the way of the Irish to give up hope before the fighting.”

“We have come this way before,” retorted Swain. “If they yield without a struggle, so much the better.”

He went forward to the gate, a house-carl bearing a peace-shield by his side and Erik and other chiefs behind him.

“Ho, Dyflinfolk,” he called when he was within hearing of the men on the battlements over the gate, “I am Swain of the Orkneyar. You know me.”

“Yes, yes, Swain,” shouted back the chief of the Dyflin merchants. “We know you well, and we have never done you harm.”

“You have done me foul harm,” returned Swain. “You have accepted into your city Olvir Rosta, who is an outlaw from the Orkneys because of the murders he has committed and who is my deadly enemy.” The merchant began to wring his hands. “Alas, alas,” he cried. “Well do we know how overbearing Olvir can be. He has been a harsh master to us in Dyflin.”

Swain snorted with renewed contempt. “He and his few against your many! Well, I am here to relieve you of your fears. Hand him over to me, and instead of sacking your city I will make a composition with you.”

“But we can not take him, Swain. He has retired into the king’s borg that lies by the river-shore. We knew he was your enemy, and we begged him to leave the city

that we might make a peaceful adjustment with you. And then he cursed us all, and said that he would not trust us farther.”

“This is a queer tale,” muttered Erik in Swain’s ear.

But Swain shook his head.

“It is like enough what Olvir would do. You do not know him as well as I, Erik.” He turned again to the Dyflin merchants on the wall above the gate.

“You have done me a great wrong,” he said. “You have shielded my worst enemy, and now, when I ask you to give him up to me, you say that you can not do it. That leaves me nothing to do except to take your city, and with it, Olvir.”

“No, no,” cried the merchant.

And as if at a concerted signal there rose within the city a redoubled volume of wailing and weeping.

“We are peaceful folk,” the merchant went on. “The king and his warriors have gone from us, and we have no means of fighting, even if we would. Spare us, Swain!”

“You speak foolishly,” replied Swain. “Why should I spare you when you have offended me, and are helpless, into the bargain?”

“But we will do anything to assist you. We will make any reasonable terms.”

“What do you call reasonable terms?” demanded Swain.

The merchant appeared to pause and consult with his fellows. Then he answered— “If we yielded the city in order that you might be able to capture Olvir, would you undertake not to despoil us and to retire as soon as you had achieved your object?”

“You must pay me scath and fine for shielding Olvir, as well as for the trouble and expense I have been put to,” returned Swain.

“But we are poor people,” bemoaned the merchant. “We can not ---”

“I am weary of talking,” interrupted Swain. “I see that it would be possible to take the city with little effort, even though you offered resistance. Will you pay or not?”

“How much?” countered the merchant. “One hundred marks of gold and five hundred marks of silver,” Swain replied promptly.

The merchant tossed up his hands in horror.

“There is not so much amongst us! No, there is not so much in all Ireland!”

“That or nothing,” insisted Swain.

“We can not pay it,” rejoined the merchant.

“What can you pay, then?” asked Swain.

“Twenty marks of gold and ---”

“We will take fifty marks of gold and two hundred marks of silver,” Swain cut him off. “My answer! Swiftly, Dyflinfolk, or we loose the arrow-hail.”

The people on the battlements ducked for cover, and the chief of the merchants cried out:

“We accept! We accept! You will take oath to do us no harm?”

“Any oath you please, so long as you render us the city and do not stand in the way of our seizing Olvir,” promised Swain.

So the Dyflinfolk called priests to the battlements, and they made Swain swear to the terms on certain holy relics.

“This is all very well, Swain,” objected Erik when the oaths had been taken; “but it occurs to me that it is you alone who are swearing. The Dyflinfolk have not sworn to anything.”

Swain laughed harshly.

“Why should they?” he replied. “What have we to fear from them? Once we are in the city, we hold them and all their property in our hands.”

But Erik shook his grizzled head.

“I like it not, Swain,” he persisted

stubbornly. "A city is not an open field. There are streets and houses, and in narrow places the bravest host may be shot down by any enemy."

"You are leaping from shadows, Erik," remonstrated Swain. "It is no more than to be expected that the Dyflinfolk should prefer us to Olvir. Also, by this plan, they get rid of both of us at one stroke."

"It is not right," declared Erik. "I have a feeling there is something wrong."

"What?" challenged Swain.

"How can I say? But let us do this: There is no reason why all of us should go into the city together. If you are set upon going, let me hold back with a few score men, and be ready for whatever happens."

"Nothing can happen," answered Swain. "If the Dyflinfolk should attack us we would slay them like kine at a strand-hewing."

"That is true, yet Olvir is a wily foe, and it may be he has a trick behind his shield. If you attack the borg, and parties of the city-folk fall upon you in the midst of the fray, you will be in a sorry plight, with a foe in front and another behind. Do as I say, Swain, and let me bide outside the walls to aid you at need. Yes, and better still, let us manage it so that the Dyflinfolk do not perceive what we are doing."

Swain was impressed by Erik's earnestness, albeit unconvinced by the Icelander's arguments.

"Have it your own way," he said. "But I see not how you can conceal from the Dyflinfolk that you remain outside."

Erik pointed to a chapel and priest's house at one extremity of their shield-wall, the only buildings close to their array.

"I will pass the men under cover there before you march in," he said. "We will draw up our strength so as to conceal it, and I shall remain hidden until all is well or you have occasion to require us."

Swain agreed with this plan, and

they returned to the shield-wall and moved the men into a dense column alongside the chapel and priest's house, and while the array occupied this position Erik and five score more slipped into the two buildings, without even the foremost house-carls being the wiser for it. Then Swain gave the word, and the Orkneymen marched forward to the city gate, which stood open. The group of merchants had retired from the battlements above it, and the walls were almost deserted. Only here and there a man stared down at the dense mass of mail-clad Northern giants, swinging along with immense, kite-shaped shields on their left arms.

Inside the gate the streets of the city were empty and the houses shut up, but Swain did not pause for this, for he imagined that the Dyflinfolk were too fearful of his company to risk contact with them. He did not even unsheath his sword.

No outcries greeted the invaders. The wailing had died away long since. The tread of the column echoed loudly between the shuttered houses. Only the dust stirred to meet them, and it was this which roused Swain's first hint of suspicion. Immediately inside the gate the roadway was beaten hard, but halfway down the street the earth was soft and crumbly, and suddenly the ground rumbled hollow under-foot.

Swain halted and flung up his hand.

"Back, there! Let us ---"

But the front ranks of the column automatically had tramped after him across the crumbly stretch of earth. There was a grinding, crackling noise, and the street caved in, as the light withes and planks which upheld it sank beneath the burden of armored men. A cloud of dust billowed into the air, and Swain and his vikings tumbled in a heap to the bottom of the pit the Dyflinfolk had dug.

The onward thrust of the column drove after them several additional files, and the pit became a struggling mass of

humanity, kicking and striking and biting at one another, uncertain of what had happened and fearing treachery at every hand.

A howl of glee from the surrounding houses! Roofs and windows swarmed with men, and a storm of spears and arrows smote the startled column of the Orkneyfolk. From adjoining cross streets poured other bodies of the Irish, who made up for their inferior arms and stature by the surprize of their onset. The invaders reeled back, startled, baffled, panic-stricken. Their ranks were shattered. A hasty attempt to form a shield-ring in that narrow space was ended almost as soon as it started. The topmost men of the writhing mass in the pit were butchered without a chance to strike a blow.

Swain, himself, was saved because he was the first to fall, and with him, nigh smothered under the sweating, frenzied heap, was Andreas. Instinctively, as he felt the earth give, Swain had reached out and thrown his arm about the boy, and luckily for Swain, Andreas had landed undermost, easing his father's fall. But it was impossible for either of them at first to break free from the weight of dead and living men above them. Swain ruthlessly slew one fellow who cumbered his sword-arm, thrust aside another with his shield and strove to stagger erect, intent upon clambering over the high-stacked bodies to the pit's lip; but each time he gained his feet he was knocked down again, and in the confusion his house-carls ignored his bellowed orders to raise shields over their heads to resist the missiles that continued to rain down upon them, and the Dyflinmen reaped a red harvest from Olvir's strategy.

To say truth, it was well for Swain he was kept down perforce. Men had run out from the houses now, and stood at the edge of the pit casting their spears at the Orkneyfolk they had trapped; and the main body of the islanders were fully occupied

defending themselves. There was a moment here when it seemed likely that Olvir's plan would win every advantage he had sought—and surely, the luck was bitter against him, for by every rule of chance he should have secured the death of Swain and Andreas at the first blow.

But Erik's caution saved the day for Swain. The Icelander, from the door of the little chapel, watched the column of his friends defile through the gate, marked the last flutter of red and green cloaks, the dwindling glint of helm and harness. All went well, so well that he diverted his attention from the gate and idly noted that the few men who had lingered on the walls had vanished. Then there came faintly to his ears a yell of surprize and consternation. A pillar of dust towered beyond the gate. And as he sprang out of the church he heard a swelling clamor of voices.

This was sufficient for him. He summoned his men from their hiding-places and led them at a run toward the gate, but as he neared the walls he heard more distinctly the tumult of the fray and it was very plain to him that the tide was setting against the Orkneyfolk. Through the open gateway he glimpsed a swirl of fighting, ragged, disordered, a conflict of scattered groups. And from this alone he knew that the issue was doubtful, for if the Orkneyfolk had their way they would be fighting coolly, methodically, in the invincible array of the shield-ring, or, in wedge-shaped formation, chiefs and captains at the peak of the wedge, hewing a path through the loose ranks of the Dyflinmen.

Here was defeat, disaster. Erik stopped and bent a wary eye upon the line of the walls. They rose before him, gray and empty as far as he could see, and the thought popped into his brain that such aid as he could carry to Swain might better come across the walls than through the gate, falling as unexpectedly upon the men of the

city as had their onslaught upon Swain's column. So he struck off from the road, sending back a score of men to fetch furniture from the chapel and the priest's house. With this material, and a tree he chopped down with his ax, he contrived a means of scaling the wall, and presently he stood on its farther side, peering up a narrow alley toward the confusion of battle in the main street.

A babble of dismay greeted his appearance from some women in a near-by house, but they were too frightened to make him any trouble and Erik's men climbed over the wall like so many ants, dropping in couples and by fours at his side. After a score of them had reached him he undertook an advance to secure a better idea of the fighting. He had not gone six paces when a redoubled outburst of shouting and sword-clashing ahead caused him to break into a run, calling over his shoulder for his people to follow him at speed.

The alley brought him to a wider street which ran into that in which the battle was joined, straight in front of him perhaps a spearcast away. The Irish, with their backs to him, were hacking wildly at the scattered groups of Orkneymen, but the center of the fighting bubbled about a vast pit in the street. Erik could see men in winged helms striking up out of the pit, and the lightly-armed, nimble townsmen thrusting down at them.

As he watched, there was a surge in the pit, and a huge figure was upthrust as if a catapult had propelled him. A gilded helm gleamed in the sunlight, a great sword flashed and the warrior from the pit gained the edge. Tottering, he balanced there, then lurched forward, slaying an enemy as he moved. The roar of a mighty voice pulsed in Erik's ears; the sword swept up and down, back and forth, slashing through armor, leather jerkins and unguarded flesh. Other lesser figures jumped up beside the gilded

helm. Then the Dyflinmen swirled around the group, and submerged it under a pelting rush of bodies—and Erik came into action. His voice thundered an answer to the roar which had reached his ears.

“Hold them, Swain! Out swords, Orkneymen! Shield to shield!”

With his own force he smashed into the rear of the Irish who assailed the groups of Swain's men nearest the gate, scattered the townsmen and tore their ranks asunder, drove on across the street, and beat back the enemy there. Hastily he collected all of the Orkneyfolk who could stand and threw them into two bodies, which he led along either rim of the pit towards the whirlpool of the Irish who still assailed the little party that had fought a way up out of the hole behind Swain. And here he had a more difficult task, for the Irish, knowing that they had shot their bolt and fearful of the vengeance the invaders would visit upon them, fought with a desperate valor that took no account of numbers. Pinched back and front now, themselves, they died in their tracks, content if they could drag down a foeman with them, snapping their teeth at northern throats, trying to hamstring those nearest them as they fell.

But Swain's savage lust for slaughter and the organized discipline which Erik infused into the main body of the Orkneyfolk proved too much for mere bravery. The moment came when Andreas, darting forward under the sweep of his father's sword, stabbed the last enemy between their ranks and the oncoming host of Erik's men. One last sweep of blades, a final harvest of Irish lives, and the enemy's remnants broke and fled helter-skelter into the byways of the town. And a mournful keening rose from the rooftops where the women had taken refuge and whence they had watched the dread conclusion of the struggle.

Erik leaped a litter of corpses, and



straddled his bandy legs to stare up into Swain's keen, blue eyes, smiling with the joy of battle from the clotted mesh of his red-gold beard.

"That was a wise fear which kept me beyond the gate, Swain," he cried. "We should be cold clay otherwise."

Swain gave him a clout on the shoulder which all but brought him to his knees.

"You had the right of it, little man. Trust an Icelander to perceive war-wiles through a stone wall!"

Erik nodded, very self-satisfied.

"Oh, I was sure Olvir would never yield so readily or allow others to, for that matter," he said.

A puzzled look came into Swain's face. "Yes," he answered, "but where is Olvir?" Erik gaped.

"Where is Olvir?" he echoed. "What of all this?"

He swept his arm toward the shambles that cluttered the street from where they stood to the city gate.

"I have seen nothing of Olvir," replied Swain. "I have not seen him, nor have I heard his war-cry, and I would know his voice at any time."

"Humph," grunted Erik. "This had all the seeming of one of his tricks."

"It is in my mind that we should be watchful for more trickery," said Swain grimly. "Call in the men. We must find a prisoner who can be persuaded to speak of their plans. A rich merchant will do best; they are always supple under torment."

## VI



BUT as Erik sounded a horn to rally the Orkneyfolk a man named Valbrand Gutorm's son—he was a tenant of Swain's in Caithness—ran up all out of breath

"Olvir Rosta is shoving off two

longships from the haven by the borg!" he shouted.

"After him, then, before he clears his keels," answered Swain.

And all those who were with Swain ran toward the king's borg which rose by the river; but by the time they had traversed the twisting streets and gained the river-bank Olvir's ships were floated and the oars were manned.

Foaming with balked rage and hate, Swain waded waist-deep into the water, shaking his bloody sword aloft.

"Bide for me, Olvir," he screamed. "Hold where you are, and I will come against you with equal strength, ship to ship or man to man, as you choose."

Olvir clambered onto the poop-gunwale of his dragon, spear in hand, a sour grin on his swart face.

"I am become weary of fooling you, Swain," he returned. "You grow simple as you wax in years. But you have the luck of all simple folk. Yes, that is to be said for you. Any but a witless man would have perished in the trap I set for you today. Yet I call all to witness, knowing you as well as I do, I was prepared for your luck, and laid my plans accordingly."

"You are nidding, and a coward, also," cried Swain. "Words are your weapons and witchcraft the only means you have of doing harm. A boy could conquer you." Young Andreas had jumped into the river after his father, all aflush from the fighting and the fleshing of his maiden steel. He, too, swung his dripping sword aloft and called out in his ringing voice: "Fight me, if you fear my father, Olvir! I will meet you with any weapon you say."

"I choose this," returned Olvir.

And heaving back his arm he cast his spear with all the power of his bulging back and shoulder muscle. Low and true it skimmed across the surface of the water, direct toward Andreas' heart, but the boy

threw himself to one side and caught it aslant upon his shield, so that it struck only a glancing blow. Then he caught it up, wet and dripping, and cast it back. But he had not the strength for such a far cast, and was hampered by the water which came above his waist. Olvir reached out and plucked the spear from the air.

"I see you return my gift," he said. "That is unkind of you, but it may be I shall present it to you a second time."

"You are afraid to meet us," shouted Swain again. "Ho, it is you are the fool, Olvir. If you had been a warrior you would have joined the Dyflinmen when they assailed us inside the gate. Then you would have been the end of me."

Olvir shook his head with a mocking grin. "I do not think so, Swain. You would have smelled out the trick sooner had I been there. Also, why should I lose men against you when I can secure others to fight you in my stead? It is true that I should find pleasure in thrusting my spear into your bowels—as I hope yet to do—but after all, your death is your death, come one way, come another, and it is all the same to me how it befalls."

"Whatever my end, it will not come at your hands," rejoined Swain. "For you lack the courage to fight me."

"Yet I shall be the means of your death," retorted Olvir. "It has been foretold. But the tide is ebbing, and I must fare seaward. I owe you thanks, Swain, for diverting the townsfolk the while I plundered the king's treasures from the borg. I am finished with Dyflin, and you may have what is left."

He waved his hand lightly, and sprang down from the gunwale. The oars of his longships hovered, dipped and pulled home, and their prows shot down-river, urged by the suck of the ebb. That was the last that was ever seen of Olvir Rosta in Irland or in any of the eastern and southern

lands, but afterwards in Iceland he boasted to folk who spoke to him of Dyflin-taking that he had drawn the townspeople into their treachery to Swain for the two reasons: first, that they might, perhaps, overcome Swain or slay him; and second, to provide himself with the opportunity to load his longships with his own plunder and the king's treasures and escape while the combatants were engaged with each other. For it was always Olvir's way to ignore faith with any men to gain his advantage.

"If the luck was with me," he told the folk of Bishop's Tongues, "I reckoned the Irish would slay Swain, and in any case, I was not for risking myself with them, whatever the odds in their favor, for well I knew they would never stand against the Orkney-men if it came to a push. And it is evidence of the skill with which I planned that the Irish failed to slay Swain and in the end he overcame them, yet while the two parties fought with each other I made away with all that was worth carrying from the king's borg and got to sea and so came hither." Thorhall Asgrim's son, who was the chief man in the Bishop's Tongues dales, cleared his throat after Olvir had spoken.

"What you say is doubtless true, Olvir," he observed. "Yet some men might say that you had foregone an opportunity to make sure of Swain's death by lending your aid to the Dyflinfolk."

Olvir laughed coldly.

"Some might say so," he acknowledged; "but they who reason so are not gifted with far-sight. It is not my way to risk my life when I can get others to fight for me. Also, Swain's coming afforded me the opportunity I had long sought to make away with the treasures the King of Dyflin had stored in the borg. He was an ale-quaffing-fellow whose thick wits had begun to weary me."

"Ah," said Thorhall politely, "Yet you had taken service with him?"

“After a manner of speaking,” agreed Olvir carelessly.

“Each man fashions his own conduct,” said Thorhall.

And albeit the Icelanders had scant use for Olvir and his ways, they suffered him to abide in peace on a farm he had from old times high up on Greyfell under the flanks of the Jokul. But we have sped on in advance of the story, and turn back now to where Swain stood on Dyflin strand, with the city behind him a smoking furnace of rapine and slaughter and Olvir’s longships fleeing down-river.

It was never Swain’s habit to bide quietly in the face of disappointment, and he waded quickly ashore to muster his men. They were gone clean out of hand, what with the blood-lust that had come upon them and the loot that lay on every side; but he and Erik and the other chiefs set upon those that were rebellious and beat them with the flats of swords, and the Orkneyfolk were outside the walls and running for their ships before Olvir’s sails had been blurred out in the river-haze.

Swain’s first fear was that Olvir might have tarried in passing to assail the beached dragons of the Orkneymen. If he had done so there would have been few to resist him, for Swain had led to Dyflin all save a handful of watchmen, barely enough to guard the ships against any little party of hostile countryfolk. But if Olvir had tarried he must have lost the ebb, and he feared that Swain might come upon him in the act of destruction and save ships to go after him. And without the ebb to help him on, Olvir knew well he would lose in such a race.

The end of it all was that Swain’s ships were whole and safe, but his men were spent with the fighting, two score of them slain outright and twice that number wounded grievously in body and limb; and when Swain sought to push off the tide turned, and with it the wind. He knew the

chase was hopeless at that moment, so he bade the weary crews rest on the shore and held council with his chiefs.

They discussed the situation at length, and the decision reached was that three longships, carrying the wounded, should return to the Orkneys, while the remaining four dragons, manned by the pick of their men, were to pursue Olvir as long as they could secure information as to the course he steered. In order that they might not lose trace of him they launched their ships that evening and rowed slowly to the river-mouth, where they captured some Irish fisherfolk who told them Olvir’s ships had headed south.

Swain drew his vessels together in a star, and he, himself, stood on the prow of his dragon *Deathbringer*, where all men could see and most could hear him.

“This cruise has begun otherwise than I had expected,” he said. “Also, it appears to me that it will require more time and effort than I had supposed it would. But I am resolved to pursue Olvir wherever he goes, no matter how long we must remain afloat, for I have given promise to Jarl Harald that I will not go viking-faring another year, and moreover, it bodes ill for my reputation that Olvir should have tricked himself out of our hands so easily. I charge those of you who return home to acquaint our friends with what I say, and especially, to tell our Lord Jarl why I remain so long abroad. We will endeavor to conduct ourselves so that you need not be ashamed of what we do after our parting.”

All the crews cheered lustily what Swain said, and Gunni Hroald’s son, who was to command the three homebound longships—he held lands of Jarl Harald in Sandey—called out to Swain:

“Luck to you, comrade! We will tell the skalds and those who sit at the high table that your valor is as restless as of old. Many men would say a cruise was fitly successful

if it achieved the intaking of the strongest town in Irland, but that is not enough for Swain!”

And all the homebound folk cried after Gunni:

“Luck to you, Swain!”

“Luck to you, Swain’s folk!”

Then the longships parted. Gunni and his three fared northward, and Swain led the other four south. He had for ship-captains Havard Grim’s son, of Caithness; Thorar Hnefi’s son, who dwelt at Westness; and Kolbiorn Jon’s son, of Hrossey. They were men of great courage and skill in seamanship. Of Kolbiorn, as of Swain, it was said, that he had followed the path of Erik the Red and Leif Erik’s son into the unknown western seas; but this is outside of the present tale.

Swain was his own ship captain. Erik, as always, was his forecastle man, and Andreas, with whom Swain was much pleased for his daring in Dyflin taking, was chief over the bowmen and spear-casters on the poop. They were a mighty company.

## VII



IN THE night there blew a halfgale out of the northeast, and Swain had this profit from it: that it filled his sails before it did Olvir’s far away to the south, and with the dawning the lookouts on the prows of the Orkney ships glimpsed the hulls of the outlaws low down in the southwest. The Orkneyfolk clapped on all their speed in the effort to overtake their prey. The forecastle and poop men took their turns at the oars with the rowers, and the steersmen conned the ships so as to secure the best advantage from wind and wave. But it was no use. When the night came the pursuers were no nearer than at first, and in the morning Olvir’s craft had disappeared.

Two days later Swain had word of them from a fishing-hamlet on the Irish

coast. They had passed under full sail, headed northwest. And again, three days afterward, when the pursuers put in for fresh water at the mouth of a large river, they were told that two Norse galleys had been before them.

The next day a storm came from the west, and Swain’s ships were driven for shelter into the nearest haven. But they put to sea undeterred on the fourth day, so soon as the seas had moderated, and steered on toward the north. From then on, however, they lost track of Olvir until they came to the point of Ireland which juts out into the wide ocean all by its lone, an empty headland where the waves beat all of the days and the curlews and whaups cry shrilly from year’s end to year’s end.

Here they put in for meat, and were fortunate enough to catch a farmer, who, in his guttural Erse, which Erik alone could comprehend, stammered a tale of a big, black-beared viking chief who had fallen upon a little village up the coast and plundered it to the last crude barrel of rough ale and the bacon-flitches hung from the peasants’ eaves.

“What way did he sail?” asked Swain.

And the Irlander, when Erik had translated the question, gestured to the north.

“That would be Norway,” said Swain.

“Yes or Daneland or Swedeland or Gardariki<sup>1</sup>,” said Kolbiorn Jon’s son.

“Or Iceland,” amended Erik.

Swain frowned.

“It requires no argument to prove that we cannot fare to all these countries at once,” he remarked.

“That is to be accepted as common sense,” replied Erik. “But at least you have two choices of a course to steer henceforth.”

“How so?” questioned Swain.

“Northwest lies Iceland,” answered

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<sup>1</sup> Russia

Erik. "North of east lies Norway and the countries beyond. One way or the other you can go, but not both ways."

"My judgment is that he has fared for Norway," said Swain.

"It is curious how men differ in their opinions when they guess at a venture," said Erik. "My own belief is that he is for Iceland."

"No, no, Erik," returned Swain. "In Iceland he would be at the end of his rope; once there, he could fare no farther. But in Norway he has many resources at his command, friends he has made in the past and means for escaping the country and passing on to other places."

"That is the truth," observed Kolbiorn.

And the other chiefs spoke to the same purpose. Erik shrugged his shoulders.

"I am alone in the view I hold," he said. "Yet I cannot be convinced that you are right. But as I am in the minority I will say no more, and we will do whatever Swain considers wisest."

Swain answered to this that the best course for them to steer was toward the Hjaltdlands<sup>1</sup>.

"If Olvir is headed for Norway and the other Norse countries," he said, "he is very likely to stop in the Hjaltdlands for water and news of what is happening in those parts. If we hear of him there, it will serve to confirm what we do. If we do not, we shall be no worse for it."

This they did, but when they reached the Hjaltdlands the islanders could give them no word of Olvir, although the Hjaltdlanders had heard from the Orkneys of the return of Gunnir's three galleys from Dyflin and that Swain was keeping to the chase of the outlaws. Some of the chiefs now inclined to Erik's view that their quarry had gone northwest to Iceland, but Swain said—and this none could dispute—that Olvir might

well have deemed it advisable to avoid the Hjaltdlands in order the better to conceal his whereabouts. So the fleet held on for Norway.

They made excellent progress, and came to Bjorgvin<sup>2</sup> several weeks before mid-Summer. And here again they found only disappointment. Swain was for sailing south to Daneland, when an Iceland merchant named Einar Hardkiopt sailed into port on his annual eastern voyage. It was common talk in the city and haven that Swain sought Olvir Rosta, for, indeed, all men in the north knew of the feud between these two, which had been the cause of countless expeditions and several wars and had wrought more man-scathe than any other one thing, and the story coming to Einar's ears, he waited upon Swain at the inn in which the chief of the Orkney-men dwelt.

"It is not my habit to mingle in other folk's quarrels," he said gruffly, after the ale-horns had been filled and Swain had inquired courteously after the success of his voyage, "but I am no friend to such men as Olvir Rosta, who will set upon honest Norsemen like myself if there do not happen to be outlanders handy for them to ravage. And while it may be unknown to you, my wife, Ragna Kraeling's daughter, is second cousin to you on the distaff side. For these reasons, Swain, I think it right to tell you that I sighted two Norse longships bearing up for Iceland when I was perhaps two days' sail west of the Faroe Isles."

Swain blinked his eyes and swallowed hard.

"This is a kind and friendly act on your part, Einar," he said. "And it has this effect likewise—which you could not have foreseen—that it proves me more or less of a fool. For I have been in the wrong in the views I have held as to Olvir's plans. To show you how valuable I consider your

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<sup>1</sup>Shetlands.

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<sup>2</sup>Bergen

news, I will tell you that I propose to boun my ships by night of tomorrow and sail with the first coming of the next day's light." He stripped a gold ring from his arm and gave it to Einar for a token-gift, albeit the Icelander was at first unwilling to take any reward. And then he sent a messenger for Erik and the two of them sat late over the ale with Einar, questioning him as to the condition of the weather at that time of year in the northern seas and the landfalls of the Iceland coast. Erik, as has been said, was Iceland born and bred, but it had been many years since he had visited his native land, and he was as blithe as Swain for fresh news and the details of the famous families that held power in the several Quarters and controlled opinion in the Althing.

When they ended talk that night Swain gave his hand first to Einar and then to Erik, and as he clasped with Erik, he said:

"You have been wiser than I, little man. Had I taken your advice at the start-off my vengeance would have been completed by now."

But Erik shook his head sadly.

"It was not to be, Swain," he answered. "Much do I wish that you had been right, too, for I like not to think of you faring for Iceland."

Swain laughed in the deep, thunderous way he had, from out the heart of his chest that was round and thick as a barrel beneath the ruddy sweep of his beard.

"Iceland is as good a land for Olvir to die in as another," he replied.

On the following day they bought corn and salt fish and meat and brown Norway ale from Hordaland, and stocked their ships, and as Swain had said, they pulled out from Bjorgvin haven at the dawn-breaking of the second day.

They were not late boun, for many Iceland farers set sail later than they that Summer, but as it chanced, they were plagued by an ill luck which made them the

butt of continual storms, and several times blew them a week's sail out of their course. One longship perished in a gale off the Faroes, and with it Thorar Hnefi's son and all his folk, but the other three clung together and lived out the black fate that harassed them, and Summer was barely three-fourths past when the peak of Vatna Jokul loomed in the north and they knew that they were in sight of their goal.

The crews lined the gunwales with eager expectation, for few had sailed that way before, since there was small booty and hard faring to be found Iceland way, and the island folk, like the Norse people of the easterling lands, sought viking luck to the southward.

"I see that this is a warrior's land," commented young Andreas as he craned shoreward like the rest at the harsh gray barrier of the mountains and the narrow strip of green that was wedged between the shore cliffs and the rock-wall of the bleak interior.

"It is no land for weaklings and nidding folk," assented Erik.

"Then shall I secure a return from the candles I lighted in St. Magnus's Church and the old mare Skallagrim sacrificed," said Swain. "It is my thought that Olvir cannot escape me in such a land."

"He will have difficulty in finding a place to flee to for refuge," admitted Erik. "On the one hand, the sea. Against it, the mountains, wherein no living thing grows or thrives, only the ice and fire of the Jokuls. But what is to happen is in the lap of the gods. I would not be so sure of the future if I were you, Swain."

Swain thumped the little, bandy-legged man upon the back.

"Not sure!" he rumbled. "I am as sure that I shall slay Olvir as that I stand here. I know it!"

"There is a price to be paid for all things," grumbled the Icelander.



## VIII

SWAIN'S ships came ashore hard by the stead of Thorhall Asgrim's son, and there was great running to and fro of the Icelandfolk when the word was passed that strange dragons had beached in Vyrkiof Haven. For though Iceland saw less of viking ravages than any other part of the world, times had been known when men sought private vengeance regardless of how their measures affected innocent people. There was fighting in the dales and by the seaside for long centuries after Grettir died, and if the feud that sprang from the burning of Njal and his sons was ended before Swain's faring other disputes and differences continued to take their toll.

Therefor Thorhall and the other wealthy men mustered their followers, and came ashore and on foot to Vyrkiof Haven and formed their ranks upon a hill over against where Swain's men labored on the strand, fetching up goods and gear from the ships.

"These people appear peaceful enough, despite their numbers and their weapons," remarked Thorhall to those with him. "My advice is that I should go to them straightway and ask their intentions."

"That is good advice," agreed his associates.

So he displayed a peace-shield, and descended to the beach with a single house-carl to attend him. Swain marked him afar and knew him at once, for Thorhall was a widely traveled man, who, in his younger days, had traded to many countries and was included among the close friends of Jarl Rognvald whom Swain had served in the Orkneys.

Several of Swain's chiefs were disturbed by the appearance of the Icelandfolk in array, but Swain said they had nothing to be concerned about if Thorhall

was present, and Erik supported him in this view. It was Swain and Erik who went out to meet Thorhall, and when Thorhall recognized Swain he was very glad and sent his house-carl to bid the Icelandfolk break from their array.

"We have nothing to fear from Swain Olaf's son," he said. "But I know well who has."

Swain cast down spear and shield as Thorhall drew near, and hand-fastened him warmly in the sight of the two gatherings.

"It is ill coming to a strange land, if there be not a friendly face to smile a welcome," said Swain. "I greet you well, Thorhall."

"Heart's greetings to you, Swain," returned Thorhall. "I had half-suspected your company of hostile intent until I saw your face."

"Why," exclaimed Swain, "if what men say be true Iceland see little of enemies from the sea."

"They do say true," assented Thorhall, "yet there is a first time in all matters."

"It may be that you had reason to suspect this was a first time," suggested Swain.

Thorhall nodded grimly.

"Seeing that you are who you are, Swain, I will even admit that to be so," he answered.

"Ah," said Swain, "then it may be, too, that you have knowledge of my reason in coming here."

"I know it is not to pay me a visit of courtesy," retorted Thorhall, smiling, "albeit that is not for want of an invitation. It was never your habit to push longship for no profitable purpose, and I take it for granted that you are come hither now upon a serious errand."

"I am," said Swain. "And while it is not my desire to involve you in my personal affairs, I must ask you if I am the first

stranger from overseas to land in Iceland this Summer.”

Thorhall jerked a pebble from under his foot with the butt of his spear. His brows were knit in thought.

“I will be frank, Swain,” he replied at last. “I can not mingle in your private affairs, nor can other of our Icelandfolk, for if we did then would the whole country be upset with broiling and sword-play. But I have guessed already what brings you hither, and in so far as I can, without committing myself or my people, I will aid you, for the reason that I knew you of old and we both shared Jarl Rognvald’s friendship. Also, I consider that you are an honorable man and that Olvir Rosta is a wastrel fellow who causes trouble wherever he goes.”

A terrible light flooded Swain’s face.

“He is here, then?” he cried.

“He is,” answered Thorhall. “He dwells at the farm he held aforetime on Greyfell.”

“Is it far?”

“A day’s ride,” interrupted Erik, who had remained silent throughout their debate. “I know the path.”

“It is a dangerous path,” said Thorhall, “and Olvir has with him some seven or eight score fellows as wild as himself. They live at free quarters with him.”

“I will presently relieve him of their charges,” commented Swain,

“I am not one to gainsay you in that,” rejoined Thorhall. “But I would have you remember that all the Icelandfolk are not of the same mind with me. Many of our younger men look up to Olvir for his exploits and bloody past. It will be as much as we can do to prevent them from joining Olvir against you. You must walk warily.”

“I must walk as I must,” answered Swain impatiently. “Olvir is my enemy. I am here to slay him. I will not harm any one

who does not side with him. What more can be asked of me?”

“Nothing,” said Thorhall, “but I suggest that you come with me to my skalli and set your plan before our most worthy men.” Swain agreed to this, and dispatched Erik to bid the ship-captains finish the disembarkation of his crews. Then he climbed up from the strand with Thorhall, and they walked to Thorhall’s hall through curious groups of the Icelandfolk. Other chiefs and men of prominence joined them as they walked, so that when they reached the skalli, in a vale protected from the sea-winds, there were twenty or more in their company. Thorhall ushered them all inside, and the thralls and servingmen brought in ale. After the horns had been filled Thorhall repeated what Swain had said to him on the beach, and inquired if any man present desired to question Swain.

One of the younger chiefs—his name was Sigurd Gussi’s son, and he dwelt in the Greyfell vales—spoke up.

“It seems to me that you propose to go against Olvir with twice as many men as he has, Swain.”

“I have many times offered to fight Olvir, man to man, ship to ship or with any equal number of combatants,” answered Swain coldly.

“Nevertheless, now you are to attack him with an overwhelming force,” argued Sigurd.

“It does not matter,” said Swain. “He will not stand before me unless he must. That is not Olvir’s way.”

“Do you say that he is afraid to fight?” cried Sigurd.

“I say that he is afraid to fight me if he can help it,” said Swain carelessly. “He knows I shall be his bane.”

Sigurd addressed himself to the company. “Swain is an outlander,” he declared. “Olvir Rosta, whatever we may think of him, has dwelt before in Iceland,



and to many of us he is a friend. I do not consider it worthy for us to suffer Swain to attack Olvir with twice as many men as Olvir can raise from his own following. Either Swain should be required to leave some of his men behind or he should be sent away."

"Is it your suggestion, Sigurd, that we should enter this quarrel between Swain and Olvir?" inquired Thorhall.

A murmur of opposition rose from the ranks of the older men.

"No, no!"

"This is no quarrel of ours."

"No Icelandfolk in an outland feud."

"Let them fight it out alone."

Sigurd flushed with temper.

"My suggestion is that we refuse to permit Swain to do an injustice to Olvir in our midst," he flared.

Several men chuckled openly at this. "Since when has Olvir become an apostle of justice?" asked Thorhall.

And another chief—he was Brusi Hakon's son of the Sea Side—called out:

"Any man who has been oversea knows of Olvir Rosta. How got he to be dubbed 'Roysterer,' do you think, Sigurd? Why should we any of us risk our lives on his behalf?"

"Or in Swain's behalf, either?" cried a third man.

"I ask nobody to risk his life for me," said Swain in reply to this. "I do not even desire to have a guide to conduct me to Olvir's stead. All I ask is that those of your folk who have it to spare sell me food and ale for my men at whatever rate you deem equitable."

A number of men exclaimed that this was a fair and honorable offer, but Sigurd rose, his face flaming more than ever.

"Have it as you will," he said. "I see plainly that all here save myself are enemies of Olvir. But I will not have it said of me that I participated in the counsels of those

who betrayed an Iclander to an outlander."

And he flung himself from the room.

"I am sorry that this has occurred," said Swain when he had gone. "I have no intention of causing trouble for any one who does not aid Olvir, and I never thought ---"

"Do not be disturbed," Thorhall cut him off. "The rest of us appreciate your motives, and I believe we shall be able to restrain most of the young men. Some of them may go to Olvir's assistance, but you must be lenient if they do, and do them as little scathe as possible. They are led astray by mistaken admiration for a man we know to be a scoundrel."

"That is fairly spoken," answered Swain. "But you must not read more into what I say than I mean," went on Thorhall. "We will suffer you to land with all your men, and sell you food and drink, and place no hindrance in the way of your marching to Olvir's stead, and if you slay him or he slays you we will not interfere either way. But you must agree to wreak no harm to any man's property, and when you have done what you have come to do—or failed to do it, as your luck falls—you must depart from the country as quickly as possible, lest more trouble be caused by your deeds."

"It is not my purpose to delay," answered Swain. "I was late bound for Iceland, as you must perceive, and if I am to fare Orkneyward before Winter I have ample cause for haste."

"Ah, but it is not the coming of Winter alone which should speed you," said Thorhall. "There will be grave discussion of what my friends and I have decided here, and the folk of other Quarters and districts will not all agree with us of the Bishop's Tongue Dales. Some one will move the issue in the Althing or cry for a levy against you, and if you were here then we should be put to it to save you from paying heavy man-bote or outlawry or, perhaps, death, itself. Olvir has friends, as Sigurd showed

you, and he has more friends amongst those who know of him only by repute than here where we see something of the evil life he leads. For your own good I urge you to achieve your object quickly, and go."

"You have acted as becomes honorable men," answered Swain, "and in a spirit of friendship. I will endeavor to conduct my affairs so as to do you no prejudice."

And after giving them such late news as he had heard in Bjorgvin and other parts oversea he departed to rejoin his men on the strand.

## IX



WHEN Swain returned to Vyrkiof Haven he found the three longships drawn up, safe and snug, the war-gear ashore and the crews gathered around fires broiling mutton which Andreas had purchased from a farmer whose flock grazed on the tough grass of the seaward fields. He called to him Andreas, Erik, Havard and Kolbiom and explained to them the upshot of his discussion with Thorhall and the other Bishop's Tongue men.

"What does it matter whether the Icelanders favor Olvir or not?" exclaimed Andreas. "We are here. Olvir is where Erik can teach us to reach him. That is enough. I hear the ravens screaming over those mountains."

And he pointed his sword toward the savage peaks that cluttered the purpling skyline. The twilight of the day was deepening. The fires of Hecla already showed faintly crimson in the dusk. Torfa Jokul hulked monstrously in the north.

"In the old days men said the Norns made their homes in Iceland's wilderness," said Havard, shuddering. "There is a place where warriors might step easily from earth to Valhalla."

"It is a warrior's country," answered

Andreas, repeating the phrase he had used on *Deathbringer's* deck. "I do not wonder at the might of Iceland's champions now that I have seen where they are bred. It is a challenge to us. Let us go up and prove ourselves worthy to be spoken of with Grettir and Skarphedin and Flosi."

"You are over anxious for the battle, youngling," said Swain kindly. "It is not for you to offer counsel before grown men have spoken."

"Yet he speaks sensibly, though he be fey," said Erik.

Swain looked closely at the little Iclander.

"Fey?" he repeated. "What is this, Erik? Who is fey? The boy ---"

Erik shook his head stubbornly.

"Never ask me what I can not answer. He has spoken after the manner of those who are fey. But nevertheless, as I have said, he speaks sensibly. What you have told us indicates that we should lose no time in going against Olvir. His friends will send him warning that we have landed, and as it is, we can not hope to surprize him; but perhaps we can reach him soon enough to prevent him from flying to a place where we should have more difficulty in coming at him."

"Yes, yes," murmured Andreas eagerly. "What do you say?" Swain asked of Havard and Kolbiorn.

"It is as Erik says," they replied.

Swain pulled his beard reflectively.

"I, too, have an inclination to agree with the little man," he said. "Yet—" he paused and stared off at the serrated ridge of the mountains, their jagged rock-teeth biting at the sky like the uplifted jaws of some enormous monster of titanic voracity—"yet, there is something within me says to pause."

"What?" clamored Andreas.

"No, how can I say?" returned Swain.

"I am not given to reluctance in

offering battle, as all men know.”

“If you delay,” said Andreas, “not only may Olvir flee from us to hiding in the rock deserts, but if his Iceland friends rally to him they may enable him to master us.”

“That is the plain truth,” agreed Erik. Still Swain pondered. His eyes were fixed upon a distant ridge whereon a last vibrant ray of sunlight was turned to a pale pink on the broad breast of a glacier that coiled across the land like some icy serpent.

“I would never have believed it had a man warned me!” he muttered, almost to himself. “It is not fear. But what is it? No, I should be niddering did I delay my vengeance. My dead would cry out against me. What must be, will be.”

“If a man is fey, he is fey,” spoke up Erik softly. “Only the gods can know.”

Andreas glowered sulkily at both of them, “You talk like old women,” he rasped. “Fey? I am as keen for battle as any, and as little touched by foreboding. If we carried Dyflin in face of treachery, have we anything to fear from Olvir with half our numbers? March at once, and we may surprize him in his bed.”

But Erik shook his head, and would have moved away.

“It is too late for surprize,” he said. “A horse can reach Greyfell’s upper slopes long before men on foot tramping an unfamiliar path.”

Scowling, Swain gripped the little Icelander by the arm.

“What did you mean when you said he was fey? Speak, Erik! When did you have the sight?”

Again Erik shook his head. His leathery face was impassive under its sparse, grizzled thatch of beard.

“How can I answer, Swain? A man hears a thing or sees it, and without his reckoning how, he seems to feel over and beyond it into the depths of time.”

Swain’s eyes shifted from the raw

pile of mountains in front of them to the placidly heaving sea—and finally, to his son, alert, vigorous, glowing with life and brave energy.

“I am glad I left Olaf in Gairsey,” he said slowly.

His manner changed abruptly. He became in an instant all harsh readiness.

“Call up the men! Erik, I give it to you to muster the bowmen. Havard and Kolbiorn and I will each lead a company of spearmen. Andreas, do you bide beside me. With speed, all! Let us finish this business by tomorrow’s night.”

The fires were hurriedly stamped out. A dozen older men, backsore from rowing-benches, were told off for shipkeepers. The necessary stores were distributed. Then the long column of the Orkneymen wound up the bluff above the strand and straightened out across the dimming hollow of the river valley. Men and women and children clustered in front of the steads to watch it pass, silent, wondering. The word already had gone forth.

“This is a private vengeance. Let them be.” But there was a rustle of excitement from end to end of the Bishop’s Tongue Dales, a rustle that spread and spread to the east and the west and the North. This was a greater vengeance than the oldest skald could remember, greater even than the old sagas told of, the greatest since Flosi Thord’s son had ridden from Swinefell to the Althing with six score friends at his back to face the suit of Kari Solmund’s son for Njal’s burning.

That was a bright night. The stars shone with the clear sparkle of the far north, and later the moon gleamed in the phase of its last quarter. So far as Thorhagl’s skalli the road was clearly outlined, and Thorhall, himself, was at his stead-gate to whisper a warning in Swain’s ear.

“It is more than I promised,” he said,

“but you should know that Sigurd rode north an hour past. You do well to tread his heels. Luck go with you!”

Swain thanked him, and strode on. They mounted from the valley, higher and higher, as the country sloped up from the sea-level. The houses and steads became less frequent. For a while they might know by the pricks of the candles in the darkness whenever they came to a human habitation; but afterward it was the barking of dogs that gave them notice men were near, for the folk were all abed.



ONCE, near midnight, Erik missed his way, and stopped at a farm to inquire. The man who answered his knock peered out in the moonlight at the ridge of helmets, at the spear-heads twinkling in the starshine.

“What is this?” he gasped. “Is the king come from Bjorgvin?”

“We are the Orkneyfolk,” answered Erik. “We go upon a private vengeance. None of the Icelandfolk have cause to fear us.”

The farmer crossed himself.

“Ho, it is Olvir Rosta you seek,” he said. “I know. Well, it is to be seen you are bad folk to cross.”

Beyond here they left the horse-path they had followed and took to a sheep-track, which threaded the tangled vitals of the foothills. The distant fire on Hecla was a landmark for them. Erik kept it over his right shoulder, and pressed on. When the dawn glow commenced to throb in the east he allowed Swain to halt on the verge of the shoulder of Swinefell, and rest their weary followers. But they resumed the march as soon as it was light. Swain, preoccupied, puzzled by the feeling of emptiness in the triumph he knew to be at hand, led the column, as tireless as the sturdiest young house-carl at his back, wearing down even the restless vitality of Andreas, beside him.

They could see now where they were. The mass of Torfa Jokul towered to their right, ahead. Undulating before them was the grassy stretch of Greyfell. As they topped a ridge the distant barking of a dog reached their ears, and Swain's keen eyes glimpsed a figure that darted from an eminence and disappeared in a patch of dwarf trees.

“One of Olvir's lookouts,” grunted Erik. “He is prepared for us.”

“We knew he should be,” grunted Swain in answer.

But he waved forward a dozen bowmen to make certain there was no ambush laid for them. Andreas sprang to accompany the scouts, and Swain half-raised his hand to check the boy, but dropped it again to his side.

“What must be, will be,” he muttered.

Erik's voice rumbled back—

“Only the fool kicks at the footstool of the gods.”

They continued in silence. The patch of trees was deserted; their own men had passed it. On the farther side they opened out a considerable valley, a broad slash in the upheaved surface of Greyfell. A little river foamed, tumultuously shallow, across their line of march. Beyond it showed the weatherworn buildings of a steading, and a patchwork of tilled fields. Between river and buildings was drawn up a body of men, rather more than half as numerous as Swain's company.

Swain stopped for a moment, and inhaled a deep breath. His feeling of satisfaction, of conviction in the attainment of the vengeance he had striven for since his youth, had returned. His eye traveled over the surrounding country. In back of the steading the farther lip of the valley swelled to meet the bulge of a foothill. After that crag was heaped on crag until the whole culminated in a welter of pinnacles that

defied the approach of anything without wings.

Swain's nostrils expanded; his chest swelled; involuntarily, he drew his sword.

"As I thought," he said aloud. "He cannot escape."

Erik's eyes bored into Swain's.

"Who, Swain?"

Startled, Swain's gaze swerved to the Icelander's. A mist of anger blinded him; his word heaved in air.

"Are you mocking me?" he roared in his bull's voice. "I will cleave you to the chin!"

Erik never flinched. His beady black eyes met Swain's steadily.

"You will yet have need of your steel," he answered. "It is a poor beginning to a fight to slay your best friend."

"Friend!" snorted Swain. "You are a foul croaker!"

"Not so," replied Erik. "I am one who seeks to save you from bitter ruth—yes, and it may be worse."

Swain lowered his blade.

"What is this help you prate of?" he demanded gruffly.

Erik drew him to one side, out of earshot of the front files of their people, who had beheld dumfounded the apparent breach between the chief and his forecastle man.

"It is this way, Swain," he began, and paused uncomfortably.

"Yes, yes," replied Swain. "But what way?"

A voice hailed them from mid-way of the sloping valley wall, a fresh, young voice, brimful of confidence and the zest of impending conflict. Swain glanced down, nodded impatiently and returned his attention to Erik.

"Yes," he said again. "What way?"

"Why, see you, Swain," the little Icelander plunged desperately. "There is Olvir."

"I can see that much," Swain

admitted grimly.

"We have him," Erik opened his fist and shut it again. "Like that! He can never get far in this country. If he could have, be sure he would have done so by now. So, I say, we have him safe. But there is no reason why you or Andreas should leap into the slaughter I see ahead. We can catch Olvir for you, past doubt, and then you can use him as you please."

Swain's brows knit; his cold, blue eyes blazed with a sudden heat.

"I am to skulk behind the shield-wall?" he asked, quietly menacing.

"No, no," cried Erik. "It is only that— Well, what should we do if harm befell you? And it is needless! When we catch Olvir you can make him fight you, man to man, for his life. But there is no cause for you to rush into the weapon-broil."

Swain dropped a heavy hand upon Erik's shoulder; the Icelander's bandy legs quivered under the pressure, but he contrived to stand straight.

"You mean well, Erik," boomed Swain; "but you should know I am no man to strike over another's shoulder. Get forward with your bowmen."

"But Andreas!" pleaded Erik. "Keep him back. He is rash and inexperienced. This will be a stern clash. Those are old viking fellows yonder. Look at the array of their shield-wall!"

Swain's gaze strayed down the hillside to where his son was waving them on.

"Remember," pressed the Icelander, "there will be no time to throw your shield over him. And if he ---"

Swain looked up sternly.

"No!" he answered. "What did you, yourself say? 'If a man is fey, he is fey.'"

"But I am no spaeman! Who am I to claim foreknowledge?"

"I would accept your foreboding before many a seer's," replied Swain. "No,

the boy must take his chance. Let the gods decide.” And he added bitterly—

“I have paid them sufficiently well!”

## X



A SPATTER of arrows at long range that rapped upon interposed shields. Shouts of derision from both sides. Then Olvir’s squat, solid figure stood forward from the shield-wall across the river.

“Ho, Swain!” he called. “Will you try holmgang<sup>1</sup> with me?”

Swain desisted from his task of forming a V-shaped shield-wall of attack, and advanced to the near bank.

“I have many times offered to abide judgment by combat with you,” he replied in some surprize.

“But you fear me now, it seems,” gibed Olvir.

Swain regarded him without answering. “Come,” urged Olvir. “I will go farther. I will first fight your whelp there. That will give you a chance of avoiding me.” Andreas rushed to his father’s side.

“Let me slay the boaster,” he cried. “I can make short work of him.”

“Ho, ho,” laughed Olvir. “Hear the cockerel crow! Boy, I could break you with my bare hands in holmgang.”

“I will meet you weaponless,” fumed Andreas. “You dwarf! I will tear one limb from the other.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” bellowed Olvir. “Brave talk! But Swain is silent. He thinks. He considers if his men will laugh behind their shields to see him thrust forward the youngling in his place.”

Swain spoke.

“Yes, I am considering, Olvir. I am considering why you, who have feared to face me, if you could help it, since I bested you in our youth on Morkaorsbakki, are now

so eager to test my sword.”

Olvir lifted the finely-balanced ax he carried, its haft of polished, resilient horn, curving to give full impetus to the strokes of the flaring head.

“Skulltapper here has been whispering to me,” he answered. “It has been my policy to await the right moment when you could not escape me. That moment has come. You are delivered into my hands, Swain. Whatever course you take, your death is decreed.”

Swain contemplated the scanty ranks of Olvir’s followers.

“Your craft must outweigh your inferiority, then,” he remarked.

“It does,” replied Olvir.

And the outlaw’s lips parted in a grimace which showed the long, yellow fangs that jutted wolflike through his beard.

“You speak of trying holmgang,” said Swain. “Where is the holm?”

Olvir pointed with his spear to a flat rock that rose from the middle of the rivulet, perhaps ten or twelve ells<sup>2</sup> from either bank. It was barely large enough to accomodate two men. Idly, too, Swain noted that its surface showed two colors, one the natural dull gray, the other a gleaming, darker tinge.

Erik sidled up to him.

“There is trickery in this, Swain,” muttered the Icelander. “Refuse him.,,

But even as Erik spoke Olvir ran forward and bounded into the air in a graceful leap which carried him across the gap between his side of the river and the rock. He landed easily on the dull, gray patch, staggered a moment and stood erect.

“I am waiting, Swain,” he called. “Which is it to be, you or the cub?”

Andreas started to push past his father. “Is he to insult us without punishment?” he growled.

But Swain seized the boy by the arm,

<sup>1</sup>Single combat to the death on an islet.

<sup>2</sup> The Norse ell was about two feet.

and tossed him a spear's length away.

"Keep your place," he roared. "It is for me to slay Olvir!"

"No, no," protested Erik. "There is a trick—depend upon it, there is a trick. Hold, Swain!"

Swain flung off his grasp.

"This is better than I had hoped," he shouted. "Keep back, Erik! Let none of our men go forward until I have made ravens' meat of Olvir."

"He will strike you as you land," cried the Icelander.

"I do not fear his blows," returned Swain. And he took a short run, and launched himself from the bank as Olvir had done. Erik snatched a bow from a man close by, and called out—

"If you lift weapon, Olvir, I loose!"

But Olvir, crouched behind his shield, which covered him to the knees, made no attempt to raise his spear or clutch at the ax hanging by a thong from his neck; all his attention was concentrated upon Swain's body as it sped forward and up across the boulder-strewn torrent, knees drawn high and arms flung wide to secure the greatest distance. Erik, with arrow on string, could see no excuse to loose. Something was wrong, the little Icelander was sure. Yet what? There was no sign of trickery.

A sudden shout rose from both river-banks, exultation from one side, fear from the other. Swain's feet, meeting the gleaming rock surface, shot out from under him. He measured his length with a clang of weapons and armor, and slid prostrate to Olvir's half of the holm. The outlaw's spear flashed out. Down drove the keen point, fair for Swain's side. No links could withstand that thrust. Erik loosed his arrow, and cursed as he realized he could do no more than pierce Olvir's shield.

But another shout went up. Young Andreas had duplicated his father's leap. His

lithe body was hurtling through the air like a rubber ball. Olvir, hearing the shout, looked up, hesitated—and in that moment of grace Swain twisted over and over and rolled head first into the water that raced along shoulder-deep.

Andreas dropped on the rock as his father had, but he contrived so to balance himself as to slide across the gleaming surface without a tumble. He smashed squarely into Olvir, who fended the boy off with his shield and feinted a spear-stab at the throat. Andreas thrust back for Olvir's groin, but the outlaw, standing secure, had no trouble in turning it aside, and countered by driving his shield into his opponent's. Involuntarily, Andreas stepped back. The slippery covering of the nearer half of the rock pulled his feet from under him, and as he crashed down, Olvir reached over and thrust up under the lower edge of his mail-shirt. The spear-head ripped through groin and bowels, and Andreas died there without a groan.

Olvir tore out the death-spear and stepped back to the far edge of the rock. Swain had swum with the current downstream, making for the bank his men held, and Olvir cast the spear at his head, bobbing on the water. It struck Swain's helm a ringing blow, and tore it from his head; but Swain recovered the helm before it could sink and he also seized the spear.

"That for you, Swain!" shouted Olvir. "The whelp died first, after all."

Now, so swift had been the action on the rock and so brisk the interplay of figures that no man on either side had raised a weapon since Erik loosed his futile arrow. But at Olvir's shout the Icelander led a rush of men into the river, and Swain, himself, rearing up from the stream, cast back the spear with such true aim and force that it sped through Olvir's shield and pinned together shield and arm that held it. Another would have been hindered by this, but not so

Olvir. He pulled the spear free, and threw it at Erik, who dodged it, and it was the bane of the next man behind the little Icelander.

Then Olvir caught up his ax in his hand, and with it hewed the head from dead Andreas at his feet, and he took the head by its long locks and tossed it at Swain who was beginning to forge across to the far bank of the river.

“A token of my regard, Swain,” he called. “But it is an indication of the luck you had that you escaped the slide I greased for you.”

With that he slung his shield around on his back, and leaped for the far bank, with no more than two steps to aid him. And since that day men have called the place Olvir’s Leap. Spears and arrows rained after him, but he gained the bank, unharmed and ran to join his people who were coming to dispute the crossing with the Orkneyfolk.

Swain was the first of the Orkneyfolk to pass the river, and he was fearsome to look upon, dripping with the water, and his eyes coldly ablaze and a light in his face that made men shiver to behold. He had his sword out as he came to land, and without waiting for any of his men to join him he ran after Olvir Rosta and sought to bring him to battle; but this was not to Olvir’s fancy, and the Roysterer fled behind the protection of the shield-wall his outlaws lapped for him.

Never a word said Swain, but he sprang at the shield-wall with whirling sword, heedless of the blows that were aimed at him. Some of them he parried with his own blade; some he met with his shield; some he dodged or leaped over. There was no stopping him. Whenever his sword fell, a man died. He hewed through the tough lindenwood of the shields, through the steel of the byrnies, through the plate of the helms, through ax-helve and spear-shaft and sword-guard. And about him there was a heap of corpses, and the blood running in

pools.

Men say but for him Olvir’s folk would have reached the river-bank in time to meet the Orkneyemen as Erik led them from the water, and in that case it might have gone hard with Swain’s people, for the bank was steep so that men on the dry land held a great advantage over men striking up from the river-bed. But Swain stayed the rush of the outlaws long enough for Erik and the leaders of the Orkneyfolk to come to his side, and after that it became a question how many of Olvir’s men might escape the sore scathe they suffered.

Against their center raged Swain and Erik; Havard and Kolbiorn hammered at their wings. They were pinched back into the curve of an ax-blade, then into a huge U and at last into a circle. Swain thought he had them fast when his ship-captains welded the outer ring, but he reckoned without Olvir’s subtle wits. The Roysterer drew in his people, massed them compactly, and set them to retreating with a peculiar turning movement that was most disconcerting. They whirled like a wheel of shielded men, and the Orkneyfolk were dazed by the trick. It was baffling to strike at one man, and the next moment have another step into his place to counter the blow.

Only stout carls, hardened to battle, desperate with the knowledge that no quarter was offered them, could have done it. Wheeling, slashing, pausing, yielding, recovering again, the shield-ring forced a way over the rough ground, avoided a plantation of trees and approached closer the enclosure of the steading. In the midst of the ring Olvir nursed the slow retreat. His eye was quick to see the crevice in the ranks that might become a gap, and albeit he refused to meet Swain he was not averse to performing his share against the common men.

Swain was mad with rage. His ruddy beard was flecked with the foam that flew from his lips. He no longer made any



pretense of fending against attacks. His shield he had cast aside in splinters. He pounded into the outlaws' shield-ring with the frantic wrath of a berserk of the old days, and the bravest sea-ravager of the lot felt for him the same reasonless, frantic fear that the berserk always inspired.

His voice a croak in his throat, he called Olvir again and again, bidding him stand forth and prove his manhood. It was he who broke the shield-ring, jumping the outer rank and bringing the turmoil of unexpected death inside the circle. Men drew away from him instinctively, and the disruption created an opportunity which Erik was not slow to seize. The little Iclander hewed a gap two men wide with his own clever ax and so won to Swain's back.

The shield-ring split asunder; men flew right and left, and the Orkneyfolk after them. What had been an ordered battle became a series of flights and pursuits, isolated stands of little groups. But Olvir was not one of those who died with the savage ferocity of wild beasts, blaspheming as they sank to earth, slaying and maiming with the last ebb of strength in hand and wrist. The Roysterer fled the field the moment the shield-ring was shattered, a dozen men at his side. They ran into the stead yard, and headed for the stables; and Swain, with Erik and a score of others, ran after him.

Beside the stables three horses were tethered, and there was a brief struggle for these in the ranks of Olvir's party. Olvir, himself, stabbed one man who had seized a bridle; two other fellows won clear; and the three were off. The luckless ones who were abandoned vaulted a fence and disappeared in a corn-field. Swain sent a few men after them, for he was resolved to exterminate the outlaws, and then made sure there were no horses in the stable.

"Olvir has a clean start of us, it seems," said Erik, peering under his arm at

the empty stalls.

"We can climb on foot wherever horses can," answered Swain curtly. "Rally a score of lusty fellows to go with us."

And he stared curiously after the three figures that showed incredibly small against the stark barrier of the mountains as they galloped over the fell.

"Twice Olvir has tricked himself out of my hands," he murmured; "but where will he find tallow to grease rocks or foolish folk to die for him on the Jokul's flanks?"

## XI



UNDER the first of the beetling precipices of the Jokul Swain's folk came upon the squashed bodies of a man and a horse. Two miles farther on, they encountered another foundered beast, and stretched across a rock, a second man cut down from shoulder to waist.

"Olvir required a fresh horse," grinned Erik, "Humph, those who served him paid a stiff price."

"His price is yet to be paid," growled Swain.

They pressed on. Long since they had lost sight of green fields and meadows. The sweep of Greyfell was far below them. On every hand lifted the naked cliffs, and their footing was over cold lava flows, knife-edged wherever the molten stuff had boiled out of a flat mold.

There was no path, only such footing as the rocks afforded. At intervals they found traces to show that Olvir's horse had stumbled or fallen, clots of blood and hair daubed on sharp ridges along the way. The last of these places was where a ravine branched, and Erik whistled low as he marked the course the fugitive had chosen.

"He is cunning, this Olvir," exclaimed the little man. "See, where he is gone, Swain!"

“It means nothing to me whither he goes,” replied Swain coldly. “Soon or late, we shall overtake him.”

“It will be soon now,” answered Erik. “He has over-reached himself for very cunning. This way he follows now leads down between the Jokul and Hecla, and if he had the strength to continue and the luck to escape us it would fetch him out upon East Side. But when I was a boy I discovered a short-cut over the cliffs which no horse could take. It will bring us squarely across his path.”

“That is well,” said Swain. “But let us not waste time in talk.”

Erik led them almost straight up the back-slanting face of the cliffs, crawling from shelf to shelf and from crevice to crevice. One man lost his grip, and pitched down five hundred ells, and so got his death; but the rest won safe to the top, and then fared east and south over a vast saddle of rock that was one of the buttresses of the Jokul. Mid-afternoon saw them in a narrow valley through which dashed a brooklet of snow water, which gave life to a cluster of bushes and two or three gnarled, stunted trees.

Erik examined the ground carefully upon both sides of the brook.

“Olvir has not been here yet,” he announced. “Indeed, I know of no way he could have traveled faster than we, since his path must have been thrice as long.”

“Must he, in truth, pass this way?” asked Swain.

“Unless he elects to turn back, Swain. Also, this is the only water, and by now he must be dry from thirst, and his horse, as well.”

Swain frowned gloomily.

“My wish is that we should surprize him,” he said. “And if any man so much as scratches him in the taking, that man I will slay myself.”

Erik shrugged his shoulders.

“All this is easily said, Swain, but Olvir is a warrior of prowess, and he still has his ax.”

“It can be done,” answered Swain shortly. “Do you all cut branches from the trees and bushes. When I give the word, fall upon him together and hold him down with the branches. What happens afterward is my business.”

Erik said that it should be so, and when they had all provided themselves with branches they sought shelter in the bushes by the bank of the little stream and waited. To Erik and the rest it seemed a long time, but Swain never so much as stirred, nor did his eyes stray up the valley in the direction from which Olvir must come—not even when a clatter of stones and the panting of a tired horse gave warning the outlaw was at hand.

Olvir walked around a shoulder in the hillside, leading the horse by the bridle. His ax hung from his neck by its thong; his shield was gone; his left arm, which Swain’s spear had pierced, was bound with a cloth. He was bloodstained and dusty and soiled with the foam from the horse, but he walked with unstemmed vigor.

He let the horse drink first, then stooped to drink, himself. And as he stooped, Swain stood erect, and tossed across his back a heavy tree bough. Olvir started up, displacing the bough, but the rest of Swain’s men darted forward, and a dozen boughs and branches poked into his face, fell between his legs, prodded his body. He caught at his ax, and cut the arm off a man who ventured too close, and that man died. Yet it was of no avail, for in striking at that man he laid himself open in the rear and he was pushed over and the ax torn from his grasp as he lay on the ground.

His captors dragged him to his feet, and Swain stepped in front of him.

“It seems your luck has turned, Olvir,” said Swain heavily.

“The man who speaks of luck that has turned is he who has known ill luck,” retorted Olvir.

“You have been the bane of many of my family,” acknowledged Swain. “That is well-known.”

“The last I slew no later than this morning,” rejoined Olvir.

“Yes, the *last*” said Swain. “And I have a son left, Olvir. When I die my name will continue. In an hour’s time there will be no more than a memory of you.”

Olvir’s lips drew back, so that his teeth stood out like the tushes of a cornered wolf, shining and yellow against the black of his beard.

“You will have need of that last son,” he jeered. “For I have a feeling that I shall not be the last one to die in our feud. Yes, yes, Swain, it was wise of you to leave one son at home. Had he been here he would not have escaped me. Frakork, my grandmother, whom you slew, and who had foreknowledge and the power of the future, told me from my coming to manhood I was born to be the death of your stock. Heh! If I died this moment no man could say I had not fulfilled my destiny. You are a noted warrior, Swain, but you can not set off slaying against slaying in your account with me. The odds are double in my favor, and if I die it will not alter it, for I take two with me.”

Erik sidled up to Swain.

“Let us burn him,” he suggested. “He has a foul tongue, and has lived too long.”

“Not so,” answered Swain. “I will have him released.”

Amazed, the house-carls relaxed their grip upon the outlaw’s arms. Olvir, too, looked at his enemy with undisguised astonishment, which did not decrease when Swain picked up his ax from the ground and offered it to him.

“Take it,” bade Swain with a touch of impatience.

And as Olvir’s hand stretched out, almost fearfully, as if he suspected some new form of torture, Swain added:

“I have never been able to get you to meet me since we fought in our boyhood on Morkaorsbakki. It is my purpose to see if I can beat you today as I did then.”

“It is you who are fey, now, Swain!” cried Erik. “Take thought in your madness. You have been a good lord to me, and I would not see you put your life to needless risk.”

“Stand back, Erik,” answered Swain. “And heed what I say. Give Olvir weapon-room, and should he best me, remember, he is to depart free and unscathed. I shall put his boastings to the proof.”

“Now do I know you are fey!” repeated Erik, wringing his hands; and the rest of Swain’s folk muttered uneasily amongst themselves.

“I know what I do,” said Swain. “Do you think I might go to my grave in comfort without having proved I could slay Olvir Rosta?”

A wicked light flared in Olvir’s swart face. He snatched the ax from Swain’s hand, and in the same breath leaped backward his own length. The great weapon whirred in a glittering arc around his head, and an animal cry of hatred escaped his lips.

“A mating, Swain!” he cried. “Skulltapper claims a bridegroom.”

But Swain’s answer was to spring at him with the sudden, vibrant ferocity of a wolfhound. Swain’s sword flashed down, and Olvir plunged sidewise to dodge it. Then the outlaw was on his feet again, and ran in to close quarters, his ax chopping in quick, lightning-fast strokes, from right to left, up and down, down and up, from left to right. Swain gave ground before him, guarded, fended, warily, watching the opportunity for a counter-attack. When he, in turn, dashed forward, Olvir sidestepped and retreated.

Swain pressed the advantage, fearlessly, almost recklessly, as if he was entirely contemptuous of his foe, and Olvir was not slow to understand this. The sword rang and hammered upon Olvir's helm and mailed shoulders, drew blood through a weak link in the outlaw's byrnie. And Olvir affected to stagger and sway, the ax drooping in his hand. Up went Swain's sword for the slashing overhead stroke from left to right which would lop off head and shoulder with it. In pecked Olvir's ax for Swain's middle, and Swain escaped it by the margin of a mighty leap. As it was the upper horn of the ax-blade ripped a long gash in his left leg and his breeches hung in bloody strings and rags.

Olvir's wolf-grin became a howl of satisfaction.

"I have lamed you, Swain! Next it shall be your head."

Swain made no answer, but the grim confidence in his face was undiminished. He fought on as recklessly as ever, forcing the fighting, if anything, seeking close quarters, parrying Olvir's strokes with his blade or avoiding them by almost imperceptible movements of head and limbs. He limped slightly, but not enough to bother him.

It was Olvir who stepped back finally, short of breath, and Swain, instead of following him up, dropped sword-point to the ground and leaned on the hilt, silently watchful.

"Suffer us to slay him with spears, Swain," called Erik from where the house-carls watched. "We can compass it without scathe to ourselves."

"He is mine," answered Swain, never taking his eyes from Olvir's face.

The wolfish grin again contorted the outlaw's mouth.

"No, no, you are mine, Swain," he cried. "I shall have you. Frakork promised you to me!"

And in he bounded with whirling ax.

Swain leaped to meet him, and their blades hammered together, disengaged. Then Swain became a steel-tipped tempest, an inhuman force. The watchers held their breaths and marveled at his ceaseless rain of blows. Olvir abandoned thought of attack, and tried only to defend himself. The ax-blade was a shield, and no more, and sometimes the sword's edge bit over it, and nicked Olvir in leg and shoulder. He tried to leap away, but which ever way he leaped, Swain came after him.

The end was so abrupt that no man saw how it happened. Swain dealt a shower of blows, and one of these Olvir was obliged to ward with his ax-helve. The keen blade of Swain's sword shore through the horn a foot above the hand-grip, and the ax-head dropped to the ground. Olvir stood motionless for an instant, bewildered by the swiftness with which fate had struck; and in the space of that instant Swain's sword whistled down upon his bare neck.

The black-bearded head seemed to spring up into the air on the torrent of blood that spouted from the severed veins. The body tottered, with clutching hands, took a step backward and collapsed. The head rolled across the ground to within an ell of where Swain stood, and as it came to rest, the tormented lips snarled back, the yellow tushes ground apart and the basilisk eyes glared in a last message of hatred.

Some of the men who were there say that the head spoke a single word—

"Mine!"

The helm had tumbled from it, and Swain lifted it by the hair and carried it to the horse which was cropping grass unconcernedly at the far end of the glade. The horse would have shied from it, but presently Swain succeeded in knotting it by the hair to the saddlebow; and then he called out to Erik and the rest of his company.

"The work is done," he said. "We have a long journey to do."

"It is late, Swain," replied Erik. "The men are weary, and you have a raw wound. We had best lie here tonight."

"No," said Swain. "We return to Greyfell tonight. I must see to the raising of a fit hough for Andreas."

"But what do you do with Olvir's head?" asked Erik. "It is an ill-looking thing." Before Swain answered he started to mount the horse, and the beast shied again, for the bloody head bobbed up and down upon its flank and the scent of the blood maddened it. Erik came to his side and held the bridle, and Swain climbed stiffly into the saddle. Yet as Erik stepped away the horse reared, and the head swung against Swain's thigh, and one of the long, yellow eye-teeth caught in the wound Olvir's ax had made. Swain pushed it from him, and knotted it tighter to the saddlehorn.

"It is an ill-looking thing, as you say," he replied, gathering the reins in his hand, "and it seems to preserve an enmity for me. I shall put it under Andreas's feet in the hough we will build where Olvir's stead is now." But Erik shuddered.

"There is bad luck in a head that bites after death," he said. "Let me bury it where it can wreak no more harm."

"Good luck or bad luck, it will fall out as the gods have willed," returned Swain; "and having had my vengeance I will accept whatever befalls me."

"Here is another man whose speech betrays him fey," cried Erik.

"I am no more fey than you, Erik," answered Swain; "and the proof is that you foretold harm of my meeting with Olvir, but I slew him as I knew I should, and our feud is ended."

"Thy dog if it be so, O Christ!" exclaimed Erik. "And Thor's honor, also!"

## XII



THEY traveled all through that night, for Swain would not permit them to halt longer than was necessary to make sure of the rock path, and they came to Olvir's stead on Greyfell about the time of their arrival the morning before. As Erik helped Swain to dismount he perceived that Swain's leg was red and swollen and that his eyes shone with an unearthly light.

"You are spent, Swain," he said. "You must rest, and I will make a poultice for your wound."

But Swain shook his head.

"Summon the men," he answered. Havard and Kolbiorn and the other chiefs greeted him warmly, and they showed him Andreas's body, with the head that had been recovered from the river, stretched upon a bed in the hall of Olvir's skalli. "You have done well," said Swain.

And he took Olvir's head which he still carried, and placed it under his son's feet.

"Only a dead man could abide with that head," he said gravely. "For it bites, although it be dead."

Havard and Kolbiorn looked at each other, vastly startled.

"It is true what Swain says," spoke up Erik. "There is bad luck in that head—and it may be, worse."

"Worse or better, here it lies," remarked Swain. "And now I would have all the rest of the dead fetched in here, friends and enemies, and piled around Andreas."

This, too, was done.

"And now we will raise the hough," said Swain.

It was high noon, and Erik and Havard and Kolbiorn looked concernedly at his flushed face.

"Right gladly will we do what you

bid us, Swain,” said Kolbiorn, “but it is time that you had rest.”

“I have no occasion for rest,” replied Swain. “You have a green wound,” said Havard. “So have most of you. I am no weakling to yield to a slight cut.”

They argued with him as strongly as they might, but in the end he blazed into one of his cold rages, and for fear of vexing his fever they gave in to him. He stood all day in the sun, leaning upon his spear, and watched the men heaping the dirt against the walls of the skalli. He was loath to allow them to pause in their labor at night, for the dirt was still below the eaves; but the chiefs told him their people had fought and labored without stint now for several days and nights and must have rest, even if he, himself, would not.

He said nothing in reply, and went to a booth near by where he laid himself down, refusing all food, but drinking a great quantity of water. Erik, saying nothing to any other, lay at the door of this booth, and in the night Swain waked him, calling.

“What is it?” asked the little Icelander. But indeed he knew without Swain’s answer. The wounded leg was swollen as large as a man’s body.

“I have pains all through me,” said Swain. “It is in my mind that I have received my death-wound.”

Erik hunched down on the floor beside him.

“If you will let me fetch herbs, and --”

“I am past herbs, Erik. There is a fire burning in my bowels. It is as if Olvir’s spear was twisting there.”

“It is a yellow tooth,” muttered Erik. Swain nodded assent, very calmly, like a man who discusses another’s plight.

“That is so, little man. You had the right of it from the beginning. And so did Olvir. Men always said his grandmother Frakork laid a spell upon me, and it must be

that this is it. Only a witch could bring about the end of a hale man through the bite of a dead man’s head.”

“There was fate in it,” said Erik.

“Yes, it must be so,” assented Swain. “For, as you know, I sacrificed amply to the Old Gods and the White Christ, too. It was to be—so we need not lament it.” He said nothing for a space, and Erik rose to fetch in Havard and Kolbiorn, thinking death was upon him. But Swain raised one hand in a gesture of command.

“I think my wits are leaving me, Erik. The darkness is shot with faces. See! By the door there. It is Frakork; her gray locks are powdered with charcoal from the burning. And there is Olaf, my father— and Valthiof, my brother, whom Olvir slew— and Olvir—he holds his head in one hand— But that can not be, for his head is under Andreas’s feet.”

“It will pass,” counseled Erik. “You have nothing to fear from the dead, Swain.”

“Not I,” returned Swain. “I have slain and injured my enemies, and done well by my friends. But there is this I would say to you while I can master my wits, Erik. Lay me in the hough beside Andreas, and then fare for the Orkneys before the Winter gales. Bid Olaf, my son, carry forward my name. Sons, a man must have sons! And tell Jarl Harald he was right in prophesying I would go viking-faring too often. Too often, said I? No, I have accomplished what I might. I have slain my enemy. Yet I would that the gods had sent me another death than from a dead man’s tooth. But what was it you said once? Or did I say it? ‘What must be, will be!’ ‘Ho, there is Jarl Rognvald! And Jarl Paul—and Jarl Erlend! Many Jarls I have known. A few I have made. Jarl-maker, they called me, Erik. Well, a Jarl-maker comes to his doom like a common man—it may be, more foully. A dead man’s tooth! Death is as strange as life!”



HE DIED when the dawn was in the sky. Erik closed his eyes, and went out from the hut and blew a horn. And when the Orkneyfolk had gathered Erik told them Swain was dead. For a moment there was silence, and then, very softly, a man commenced to clash his sword upon his shield. Others did so, and others, and gradually the noise increased, until the clangor echoed through the valley; and Erik and Havard and Kolbiorn picked up Swain's body and carried it forth from the booth and bore it to the skalli. They made a hole in the roof—for the doors and windows were heaped with dirt—and lowered it beside Andreas's. Then they covered the hole, and heaped on the dirt all of that day and the next. When they had finished there was a hough that rose out of the valley like a hill. There were twelve score men in that hough. The Icelandfolk afterward called it the Orkneyhough by reason of the Orkney men who filled it and built it. It was a landmark people traveled

far to see.

And this was the end of Swain Olaf's son, called Jarl-maker, who was accounted the greatest man in the North and the most famous of those who held no title.

Of Swain's son Olaf it is said that he lived to be an honor to his father's memory and a viking-farer of renown. Jarl Harald gave Olaf his own daughter, Margaret, to wife, and delighted always to favor him. Men say, likewise, that Erik Crooked Legs, as he was called, took service with Olaf Swain's son, and got his death in battle with the Scots. He was a man of much repute, and held in great respect because he had been first to see that Swain and Andreas Swain's son were fey.

"I was Swain's forecastleman," he would boast. "And I was by when he slew Olvir Rosta and had his bane from the bite of dead Olvir's head. A little thing may bring about a great man's death."

This is all of the story of Swain's End and of Olvir Rosta's.