

# GRETTIR'S SAGA

Translated by Denton Fox and Hermann Pálsson

## 32

There was a man called Thorhall who lived at Thorhallsstead in Forsæludale, which runs from Vatnsdale.<sup>1</sup> He was a rich man,

1 *Thorhall was the son of Grim, who was the son of Thorhall, the son of Fridmund, who was the original settler of Forsæludale. Thorhall Grimsson had a wife called Gudrun; their son Grim and daughter Thurid were growing up at this time.*

*Forsæludale* means 'Shadow Valley'; the name is an allusion to the fact that for several weeks in midwinter the sun does not penetrate into the bottom of the glen.

particularly in livestock; he had more animals than anyone else. He was not a chieftain, but nevertheless he was a very notable farmer.

Thorhall's farm was haunted, which made it very difficult for him to get a satisfactory shepherd. He consulted many wise men and asked them what he should do about it, but no one could solve the problem.

Thorhall, who had many excellent horses, used to ride to the Althing every summer. One summer, when he was at the Althing, Thorhall went to the booth of Skapti Thoroddsson the Lawspeaker, who was an exceptionally shrewd man and gave good advice whenever he was consulted. (There was this difference between Skapti and his father Thorodd: in spite of the fact that Thorodd was a prescient man he was considered by some to be deceitful, whereas Skapti used to give everyone the advice which he thought would be the most useful, if it were followed; that is why he was called Father-Betterer.) Thorhall went into the booth, and Skapti, who knew what a wealthy man he was, welcomed him and asked him for the news.

'I would like to get some advice from you,' said Thorhall.

'I'm not very good at that,' said Skapti. 'But what is your trouble?'

Thorhall said, 'This is the situation: I'm having much difficulty in keeping shepherds, for some of them have suffered certain injuries, and others have left before their contracts were up, and now no one who knows the circumstances is willing to take on the job.'

'Some evil creature must be at the root of this,' said Skapti, 'and that is why the shepherds are so much more reluctant to work for you than for other farmers. Now that you have sought my advice, I will get you as a shepherd a man called Glam, who is from the Sylgisdales in Sweden; he came to Iceland last summer. Glam is a big and powerful man, but few people find him very likeable.'

Thorhall said he did not mind that as long as the man could take proper care of the sheep. Skapti said that if Glam, with all his strength and courage, failed, other men would not find it an easy job. At that Thorhall left the booth. This was just before the Althing broke up.

Thorhall missed two pale-dun horses and went himself in search of them; because of this people believe that he was not an important man. He went up to Sleda Ridge and south along the mountain known as Armannsfell, and then he saw a man coming down from Goda Woðd and leading a horse with a load of faggots. Soon the two men met; Thorhall asked the other his name, and he said he was called Glam. He was a huge man and very strange looking, with

glaring grey eyes and a head of wolf-grey hair. Thorhall was somewhat taken aback at the sight of Glam, but he realized that this must be the man he had been told about.

'For what kind of work are you best suited?' said Thorhall. Glam said he was well suited for herding sheep in winter.

'Will you herd my sheep, then?' said Thorhall. 'Skapti has entrusted you to me.'

'You'll find me most useful,' said Glam, 'if I'm left free to do things my own way, for I become angry when I'm crossed.'

'That won't do me any harm,' said Thorhall. 'I want you to work for me.'

'I might do that,' said Glam. 'But are there any problems?'

'The place is thought to be haunted,' said Thorhall.

'Spooks will never frighten me,' said Glam. 'They could only make life less dull.'

'You may find that attitude useful,' said Thorhall. 'It's certainly no place for a coward.'

They soon reached an agreement, and Glam was to come at the beginning of winter. Then they parted, and Thorhall found his horses in a place that he had just searched. He rode back and thanked Skapti for the favour he had done him.

The summer passed, and Thorhall heard nothing from the shepherd, nor did anyone seem to know anything about him, but at the arranged time he turned up at Thorhallsstead. Thorhall treated him well, but the rest of the household disliked him, Thorhall's wife in particular.

Glam took charge of the sheep, and it was an easy task for him, since he had a powerful bass voice and the sheep used to gather together whenever he shouted. There was a church at Thorhallsstead, but Glam never went there, for he hated the chants and had absolutely no faith. He was rough and repulsive, and everyone found him thoroughly obnoxious.

Time passed until the day before Christmas. Glam got up early in the morning and demanded his food. The housewife said, 'It's not the custom of Christians to eat today, for tomorrow is the first day of Christmas, and so it's our duty to fast all day.'

He answered, 'You have many superstitions which I consider quite pointless. I can't see that people are any better off nowadays than they were before when they didn't bother with such nonsense. I liked the old customs better when people were still heathens. I want my food now, and I'll have none of this quibbling.'

The housewife said, 'I know for certain that this will be a sorry day for you, since you take this evil course.'

Glam told her to bring his food at once, and said that otherwise it would be the worse for her. She didn't dare refuse, and when he had finished his meal he went out in an ugly mood.

It was very dark outside, with fluttering snowflakes and a howling wind. The weather grew worse and worse as the day wore on. During the morning the people could hear the shepherd clearly, but less so in the afternoon. Then the snow began to drift, and in the evening the weather turned into a blizzard.

People went to church for mass, and so time passed until nightfall, but Glam did not come home. There was some discussion of whether or not he should be searched for, but because of the snowstorm and the darkness nothing came of it.

Glam did not come home Christmas Eve. The people waited until mass was over, and when it was broad daylight several men set out in search of him, and found the sheep scattered about in snowdrifts, beaten down by the storm or straying up on the mountain. Then they came upon a large area of trampled snow high up in the valley; it seemed to them as if a violent struggle had taken place there, for in many places stones as well as earth had been torn up. When they searched more carefully they saw Glam lying near by; he was dead, and his body was dark-blue in colour and swollen up to the size of an ox. They were horrified and shrank back from the corpse. However, they tried to carry it down to the church, but they could drag it no farther than down to the edge of a ravine a little distance away.

So they went back home and told Thorhall what had happened. He asked them what could have brought about Glam's death, and they told him they had traced some footprints so huge that they were just as if the bottom of a cask had been thrown down, and that they led right up to the cliffs at the head of the valley – there had been large splashes of blood all along the track. Because of this people thought that the monster which had been there before must have killed Glam, and also that he must have wounded the monster fatally, for there has never been any sign of it since.

On the second day of Christmas another attempt was made to take Glam's body to church. Oxen were used to haul it along, but they could not move it at all when the slope stopped and they came to level ground. And so they had to give up.

On the third day of Christmas a priest came along with them, and they searched for Glam the whole day without finding him. The priest refused to go again, but Glam was found at once when the priest was not among the searchers. Eventually they abandoned the attempt to bring Glam to church, and buried him in a cairn just where he was.

A little later the people found that Glam was not lying quiet. Terrible things happened; many men fell unconscious at the sight of him, and others lost their sanity. Soon after Christmas, people began to see him walking about the farmhouse and were terrified by him; many of them fled away. Then Glam began to sit astride the roof at night and beat it so furiously with his heels that the house came near to breaking. Soon he was walking about day and night, and men hardly found the courage to go up the valley, even on urgent business. All this was a great calamity for the people in the district.

# 33

In the spring Thorhall engaged new servants and started farming again. The hauntings diminished as the days grew longer, and so time passed until midsummer.

That summer a ship from abroad put in at Hunavatn, and on board was a foreigner called Thorgaut. He was tall and powerful, with the strength of two men. He was on his own, without a job, and he needed to find some employment, since he had no money. Thorhall rode to the ship, saw Thorgaut, and asked if he were willing to work for him. Thorgaut said he was, and added that he was not very particular.

'I must warn you,' said Thorhall, 'that it is no place for weaklings, since the farm has been haunted for some time. I have no wish to deceive you in any way.'

'I can't see myself giving up, even though I should meet some spooks,' said Thorgaut. 'Other men will certainly find it hard to put up with, if it frightens me, and I'm not going to back out on that account.'

They soon came to an agreement, and Thorgaut was to be in charge of the sheep the following winter. The summer passed, and at the beginning of winter Thorgaut began herding the sheep. Everyone liked him.

Glam used to come to the house and sit astride the roof. Thorgaut thought this very amusing, and said the rascal would have to come closer before he was frightened by him. Thorhall warned him to be careful. 'It would be better if you were not to confront him.'

'It is obvious that every trace of courage has been shaken out of all of you,' said Thorgaut, 'but this nonsense is not going to frighten me out of my wits just yet.'

Winter passed until it was Christmas, and on the day before Christmas, when the shepherd was leaving the house to herd the sheep, the housewife said to him, 'I very much hope that the old story will not repeat itself now.'

'Have no fear of that, woman,' said Thorgaut. 'Something worth telling will have to happen before I fail to come back.'

Then he went to his sheep. It was a cold day, and snowing heavily. Thorgaut usually returned home at twilight, but that day he did not come back. People went to church as usual, and it seemed to them that the turn of events was not unfamiliar. Thorhall wanted to organize a search for the shepherd, but the church-goers were unwilling and said they were not going to expose themselves to trolls in the night. The farmer did not have the courage to go by himself, so nothing came of the search.

After breakfast on Christmas Day several men set out in search of the shepherd. First they went to Glam's cairn, for they thought he must have been responsible for the shepherd's disappearance. As they approached the cairn they saw that something remarkable must have happened, and indeed the shepherd was found there with his neck broken and every bone in his body crushed. They brought him back to church, and no one suffered any harm from him afterwards.

Glam began asserting himself even more than ever before, and now he committed so many outrages that the entire household fled away from Thorhallsstead, except for the farmer and his wife. The same cowherd had been there for a long time, and Thorhall did not want him to leave, for the cowherd was a kind man and good at his job. He was getting on in years and very loath to leave; he realized that everything the farmer owned would soon be destroyed if there was no one there to look after the farm.

One morning after midwinter the farmer's wife went to the cowshed to milk the cows at the usual time. It was broad daylight by then, for no one risked going out earlier, except for the cowherd, who used to go out at dawn. The woman heard a crashing noise and a terrible bellowing from the cowshed, so she ran screaming back into the house and said she didn't know what horrible things were happening there.

The farmer went out, and when he came to the cows he found them all goring one another. He didn't like the look of this at all, and went inside. Then he saw where the cowherd was lying on his back with his head in one stall and his feet in another. The farmer

went up to him, felt him, and found that he was dead, with his back broken. It had been broken on the edge of the raised slab of stone which separated the two stalls.

The farmer realized that it was impossible for him to stay there any longer, so he fled, taking away with him as many possessions as he could. Every single beast which he left behind was killed by Glam. Then Glam started going through the entire valley, and he laid waste all the farms up from Tongue. Thorhall stayed with friends for the rest of the winter. No one could go to the upper reaches of the valley with a horse or a dog, for it was sure to be killed at once.

In the spring when the days became longer, the hauntings lessened somewhat, and Thorhall wanted to get back to his farm. He had great difficulty in engaging servants, yet he started farming again at Thorhallsstead. Everything happened just as before: when the autumn set in, the hauntings grew worse again. This time it was the farmer's daughter who suffered the most, and eventually she died as the result. Many remedies were tried, but they were all in vain. It seemed obvious to everyone that Vatnsdale would be all laid waste, unless some solution could be found.

## 34

Now the story goes back to Grettir Asmundarson, who stayed home at Bjarg through the autumn after his encounter with Bardi at Thoreyjargnup. Just before the beginning of winter Grettir set out from home and rode north across the ridges over to Vididale, and stayed at Audunarstead overnight. He and Audun were fully reconciled; Grettir gave him a fine axe as a present, and they agreed to remain friends.<sup>1</sup>

Grettir rode north to Vatnsdale and paid a visit at Tongue, where his uncle Jokul Bardarson was living at the time. Jokul was a tall strong man, and exceptionally arrogant. He was a seafarer, very difficult to deal with, but a man of considerable importance. Jokul

1 *Audun lived at Audunarstead for a long time, and had many descendants. His son was Egil, who married Ulfheid, the daughter of Eyjolf Gudmundarson, and their son was Eyjolf, who was killed at the Althing; this Eyjolf was the father of Orm, Bishop Thorlak's chaplain. Thorlak Thorhallsson (St Thorlak) was bishop of Skalholt from 1176 to 1193.*

gave Grettir a good welcome, and he stayed there for three days. By this time Glam's reappearances were so much discussed that people talked about hardly anything else. Grettir enquired closely about all that had happened, and Jokul said that the stories did not exaggerate the facts. 'Do you want to pry into matters there, kinsman?' he asked.

Grettir said he did, but Jokul warned him not to go. 'That would be tempting fate,' he said. 'Your kinsmen have much at stake where you are concerned, for we feel that now there is no young man to compare with you. From evil beings like Glam only evil can be gained, and it is always better to deal with human beings than with monsters of his kind.'

Grettir said he still wanted very much to go to Thorhallsstead and see what had been going on.

Jokul said, 'I see that there is no point in trying to discourage you. The old saying is certainly true that "Good luck and great ability are two different things."'

'"Disaster is close to your own house once it has entered your neighbour's." So you should rather be thinking about what will happen to you in the end,' said Grettir.<sup>2</sup>

Jokul replied, 'It might be that both of us are able to see into the future, and also that neither of us can do anything about it.'

With that they parted, and neither of them liked the other's predictions.

## 35

Grettir rode over to Thorhallsstead and the farmer welcomed him warmly. He asked Grettir where he was going, and Grettir said he would like to spend the night there, if the farmer didn't mind. Thorhall said he would be very grateful if Grettir stayed. 'But lately few people have found it desirable to spend any time here. You must have heard about our trouble, and I shouldn't like you to come to grief because of me. Even if you manage to get safely away yourself, I know for certain that you will lose your horse, for no one who comes here can keep his horse safe.'

2 Grettir's remark is a prophetic allusion to the fact that King Olaf Haraldsson had Jokul put to death several years later, as is related in *St Olaf's Saga*.



Grettir said that horses were easy enough to get, if anything should happen to his. Thorhall was delighted that Grettir was staying and received him with open arms. They stabled Grettir's horse and put a strong lock on the door, and then they went to bed. The night passed and Glam did not come to the house.

Thorhall said, 'Your visit has certainly brought about an improvement here, for Glam has been in the habit of straddling the roof or breaking the doors every night, as indeed you can see clearly for yourself.'

Grettir said, 'This can mean only one of two things: either Glam will resume his old habit very soon, or else he will give it up for more than one night. So I'm going to stay another night and see what happens.'

Then they went to Grettir's horse, and he had not been tampered with. The farmer thought that every sign was pointing the same way. Grettir stayed for the second night, and the thrall did not come to the house. The farmer thought this very promising, and went to look at Grettir's horse, but this time the stable had been broken into, the horse dragged out through the door, and every bone in its body broken apart.

Thorhall told Grettir what had happened, and said that he should save his own life. 'You are sure to die if you wait for Glam,' he said.

Grettir answered, 'The very least I can have in return for my horse is to get a glimpse of the thrall.'

The farmer said that it would do him no good to see Glam. 'For he does not look like any human being,' he said. 'But every hour that you are willing to spend here is a great comfort for me.'

The day passed, and when the people went to bed, Grettir did not take off his clothes, but lay down on the bench opposite the farmer's bedcloset. He covered himself with a shaggy fur cloak, wrapping one end of it around his feet and the other around his head in such a way that he could see out through the neck-hole. The front bench-board was strong, and Grettir put his feet against it. The entire frame of the outer door had been broken away, and a crude hurdle tied carelessly in its place. The wooden partition which before had separated the hall from the entrance passage was also broken away, both below and above the crossbeam. All the beds had been moved out of place, and the house seemed rather uninviting. A light was kept burning in the hall throughout the night.

When about a third of the night had passed, Grettir heard a great noise outside. Someone seemed to be climbing the house and then straddling the roof-top above the hall, and beating his heels against the roof so that every beam in the house was cracking. This went on

for a long time, and then it was as if someone was climbing down from the roof, and coming to the door. Then the door was opened, and Grettir saw the thrall stretching his head through it, and the head was hideously huge, with enormous features.

Glam moved slowly, and when he was inside the door he stretched himself up to his full height so that he towered up to the rafters. He turned towards the hall, laid his arms on the crossbeam, and stretched his head into the hall. The farmer did not utter a single sound, for he thought that the noise outside had been quite enough. Grettir lay still and did not move at all.

Glam noticed a heap lying on the bench, so he crossed the hall and pulled hard at the cloak, but Grettir braced his feet against the beam and did not budge. Glam pulled at the cloak a second time, and much harder, but the cloak did not move at all. The third time Glam seized hold of the cloak with both hands and pulled at it so violently that Grettir was forced up from the bench, and then they tore the cloak in two between them.

Glam looked at the torn piece he held in his hand and wondered who could have pulled so hard against him. At that moment Grettir leapt under his arms, grasped him around the waist, and clasped him as hard as he could, hoping to bring him down. But the thrall gripped his arms so tightly that he was forced to break away. Grettir kept retreating from one bench to the other, and they started breaking up the beams and smashing everything that was in their way. Glam wanted to get outside, but Grettir braced his feet against anything he could, and yet Glam succeeded in dragging him out of the hall. Then they had a fierce struggle, for the thrall wanted to force Grettir out of the house, but Grettir realized that, difficult as it was to deal with Glam inside, it would be even worse in the open, and so he struggled with all his might against being dragged outside.

Glam was now using all his power, and when he reached the vestibule he pulled Grettir towards him. Grettir realized that he could resist no longer, and so he flung himself violently into the thrall's arms and at the same time braced his feet against a half-sunken boulder that stood in the entrance. Glam had been striving hard to pull Grettir his way, so he was unprepared for this. He fell backwards and crashed out through the door, his shoulders catching the lintel so that the roof was torn apart, both the rafters and the frozen roof-sods, and as he fell on his back out of the house, Grettir landed on top of him.

Outside the moonlight was bright but intermittent, for there were dark clouds which passed before the moon and then went away. At the very moment when Glam fell, the clouds cleared away, and

Glam glared up at the moon. Grettir himself once said that that was the only sight he ever saw which frightened him. Then, because of exhaustion and the sight of Glam rolling his eyes so fiercely, Grettir was overcome by such a faintness that he could not draw his short sword, and so he remained there lying closer to death than to life.

Glam, who was endowed with more power for evil than any other revenant, then spoke the following words:

'You have been very determined to meet me, Grettir, but it will hardly surprise you if you do not get much luck from me. I will tell you this: you have acquired by now only half of the strength and vigour which you were destined to get if you had not met me. I cannot take away from you what you already have, but I can see to it that you will never be stronger than you are now, and yet you are strong enough, as many will find to their cost. Up until now your deeds have brought you fame, but from now on outlawry and slaughter will come your way, and most of your acts will bring you ill luck and misfortune. You will be made an outlaw and forced to live by yourself. I also lay this curse on you: you will always see before you these eyes of mine, and they will make your solitude unbearable, and this shall drag you to your death.'

As soon as Glam had spoken these words the faintness that had come over Grettir left him. He drew his short sword, cut off Glam's head, and placed it against his buttocks.

Then the farmer came outside. He had put on his clothes while Glam was making his speech, but had not dared to come anywhere near until Glam was laid low. Thorhall praised God and thanked Grettir warmly for vanquishing this unclean spirit. Then they set to work and burned Glam to ashes, gathered them into a skin bag, and buried them at a place far away from all paths of men and pastures of animals. After that they went back home. It was about daybreak, and Grettir lay down to rest, for he was very stiff.

Thorhall sent for men from the neighbouring farms, and showed them and told them what had happened. All who heard about this deed were greatly impressed by it, and said that no man in the entire country was Grettir Asmundarson's equal in strength, in courage, or in accomplishments. Thorhall gave him fine gifts when he left, a good horse, and splendid clothes, for the ones he had been wearing were torn into tatters. They parted the best of friends.

From there Grettir rode over to As in Vatnsdale. Thorvald gave him a good welcome, and questioned him closely about his encounter with Glam. Grettir told him all about their dealings and said that this long struggle had been the greatest test of his strength

he had ever experienced. Thorvald warned Grettir to restrain himself. 'If you do that, all will go well with you, but otherwise you will have much bad luck.'

Grettir said that this incident had done little to improve his temper, and that he had now much less control over himself than before, and found it more difficult to put up with any offences. He also said that he could notice one change: he had become so frightened of the dark that he did not dare go anywhere alone after nightfall, because all kinds of phantoms appeared to him then. It has since become a common saying that people who suffer hallucinations have Glam's vision, or that Glam has lent them his eyes.

Afterwards Grettir rode back home to Bjarg, and he stayed there for the rest of the winter.

## ~~36~~

~~Thorbjorn Oxen-Might held a great autumn feast, and had many guests. It took place while Grettir was north in Vatnsdale. Thorbjorn the Traveller was at the feast, and there was a great deal of gossip. The men of Hrutafjord asked about the encounter on the ridge the summer before; Thorbjorn Oxen-Might gave a good account of Grettir and said that Kormak would have got the worst of it if no one had turned up to separate them. Then Thorbjorn the Traveller said, 'It is certainly true that I didn't see Grettir doing anything to his credit, and I even think he was scared when we arrived on the scene, for he was very eager to leave and he made no attempt to seek vengeance for Atli's servant who was killed there. So in my opinion Grettir has no courage unless he has plenty of men to back him up.'~~

~~Thorbjorn the Traveller had a great many other abusive remarks to make about this, but most people disagreed with him and said this was foolish talk, for Grettir would never let the matter rest there if he came to hear of these words. Nothing else happened at the feast, and when it was over the guests went back home.~~

~~There was much ill-feeling between the two sides that winter, but neither attacked the other, and nothing more happened then.~~

~~*I only had two companions  
as I passed this splendid farm:  
with this small retinue  
I rode through his meadow.*~~

~~From this the newcomer guessed who these men must be, and he rode down to the house and reported that Grettir had ridden by. When Thorir came home, many people thought that Grettir had made a fool of him. Then Thorir set spies to watch out for Grettir, wherever he might go. But Grettir decided to send his companion west with their horses, and he himself went up into the mountains in disguise. At the beginning of winter he came back north without having been recognized. Everyone thought that Thorir had come off just as badly, or even worse, in their dealings this time.~~

# 64

There was a priest called Stein who lived at Eyjardaleriver in Bardardale; he was a good farmer and owned a lot of livestock. He had a son, Kjartan, who was a vigorous young man. A man called Thorstein the White was living at Sandhaugar, south of Eyjardaleriver. He had a wife called Steinvor, who was young and cheerful; their children were still small. The farm at Sandhaugar was said to be haunted by trolls. Two years before Grettir came to the north it happened that Steinvor had gone to the Christmas mass at Eyjardaleriver, as was her custom, but her husband stayed home. In the evening the household went to bed, and during the night they heard a great noise in the hall, as something moved towards the farmer's bed. No one had the courage to get up and see what was happening, for there were only a few people on the farm. When the housewife came home in the morning her husband had vanished, and no one knew what had become of him.

Twelve months passed, and the next Christmas the housewife again wished to go to mass. She asked her servant to stay home; he was unwilling, but told her she could have her own way. Everything happened just as before, and the servant disappeared. This was thought a great marvel. When some spatterings of blood were

discovered in the outer doorway, people realized monsters must have taken both men.

The news of this spread far and wide. Grettir got to hear of it, and since he was so good at putting an end to hauntings and ghosts, he set off for Bardardale and arrived at Sandhaugar on the day before Christmas. He concealed his identity and called himself Gest. The housewife thought that he was an exceptionally big man, but the rest of the household were frightened by him. He asked if he could stay for the night, and the housewife said he was welcome. 'But you must look after your own safety.'

He said that so it should be. 'I will stay here,' he said, 'but you go to mass, if you want.'

She said, 'I think you must be a very brave man, if you dare to stay here at home.'

'I'm always willing to try something new,' he said.

'I don't want to stay at home,' she said, 'but I can't get across the river.'

'I will help you across,' he said.

Then she made herself ready to go to church, and took along her small daughter. There had been a great thaw, and the river was in flood, and filled with broken ice.

The housewife said, 'Neither men nor horses can cross the river now.'

'There must be fords in it,' said Grettir, 'and don't be frightened.'

'Take the girl first,' said the housewife. 'She is lighter.'

'I can't be bothered to make two trips for this,' said Grettir. 'I will carry you on my arm.'

She crossed herself and said, 'This is impossible. And what are you going to do with the girl?'

'I'll think of something,' he said.

He picked them both up and put the girl on her mother's knee, and carried them on his left arm; he had his right arm free, and in this way he waded into the water. The women were so frightened they did not dare to scream. The river immediately crashed against his chest, and a huge ice-floe was driven at him, but he pushed his free hand against it, and fended it off. Then the water became so deep that the river was surging on his shoulder, but he waded through it strongly until he reached the bank on the other side, and tossed the women onto dry land.

Then he turned back, and it was already dusk when he reached Sandhaugar. He asked for food, and when he had eaten he told the household to go to the back of the hall. Then he took the table and other available timber and built a bulwark across the hall; it was so

high that none of the household could get over it. No one dared to contradict him or to murmur in any way. The door in the hall was on the sidewall, close to the gable, and by the door there was a raised wooden floor. He lay down on it, but did not take off his clothes. There was a light burning in the hall near the door.

The housewife arrived at Eyjardaleriver for mass, and everyone wondered how she could have crossed the river. She said she did not know whether it was a man or a troll who had carried her across. The priest said that it certainly must have been a man. 'But there will be few men who are his equal,' he said, 'and we should keep silent about it, for it may be that this man is meant to put an end to your troubles.' She spent the night there.

# 65

Now to tell of Grettir: as midnight was approaching he heard a loud noise outside, and then a great she-troll came into the hall. She carried a trough in one hand and a big cleaver in the other. She looked around when she came inside, saw where Grettir was lying, and rushed at him. He got up to meet her; they started grappling fiercely with each other, and fought for a long time in the hall. She was the stronger, but he eluded her skilfully, and everything that came in their way was smashed, even the partition. She dragged him out through the door and into the entryway, but there he stood firm. She wanted to drag him out of the house, but could not do it until they had broken away the whole frame of the outer door and carried it out on their shoulders. The ogress shoved him down to the river and all the way to the edge of the gorge. Although he was exceedingly weary, he had to fight even harder than before, or else let her throw him down into the gorge. They kept fighting all night, and he thought he had never come up against so powerful a monster before. She held him so tightly to herself that he could not use either of his hands, and was forced to clasp his arms around the woman's waist. When they reached the gorge, he gave the ogress a swing, so that his right hand was freed. At once he seized the short sword at his waist, drew it, and struck at her shoulder, slicing off her right arm. With that he was freed, and she dived down into the gorge and vanished under the waterfall.

Grettir was stiff and worn out, and he lay for a long time at the top of the cliff. When the dawn broke he went back to the house and lay down on his bed, all bruised and swollen. When the housewife came home from church, she thought her house had been terribly disarranged. She went up to Grettir and asked him what had happened and why everything was broken and smashed. He told her the whole story; she was greatly impressed, and asked who he was. He gave her his true name, and asked her to send for a priest, because he wanted to see one. She did this, and when the priest Stein came over to Sandhaugar he soon found out that it was Grettir Asmundarson who had been calling himself Gest. The priest asked him what he thought had happened to the men who had disappeared. Grettir said he thought they must have disappeared into the gorge, but the priest answered that he could not believe that story without some evidence. Grettir said they would soon find out, and with that the priest went back home. Grettir lay in bed for many days, and the housewife took good care of him. And so the Christmas season passed.

Grettir said that the she-troll dived down into the gorge when she received the wound, but the men of Bardardale claim that the day dawned upon her as they were wrestling, and that she died when he cut off her arm – and she still stands there on the cliff, turned into stone.

The people in the valley sheltered Grettir secretly for the rest of the winter.

It happened one day after the Christmas season that Grettir went to Eyjardaleriver, and when he met the priest there he said, 'I know, priest, that you put little belief in what I say. I want you to come with me to the river and see for yourself whether there is any evidence.'

The priest agreed, and when they came to the waterfall they saw there was a cave down under the cliff. The cliff was so sheer that it could not be climbed, and it was almost ten fathoms down to the water. They had brought a rope with them.

The priest said, 'It is utterly impossible for you to get down there.'

Grettir replied, 'It is certainly possible, and especially for those who are men of courage. I am going to find out what there is in the waterfall, and you must look after the rope.'

The priest told him to have it his own way, and he drove a peg into the top of the cliff, piled stones around it, and sat down.



# 66

Now to tell of Grettir: he tied a stone to a loop at the end of the rope, and dropped it down to the water.

‘How do you intend to get down?’ asked the priest.

‘I have a feeling that I don’t want to be tied up when I reach the waterfall,’ said Grettir.

After that he got ready for the descent: he wore few clothes, and girded himself with a short sword, but had no other weapon. Then he plunged down from the cliff and into the waterfall. The priest glimpsed the soles of his feet, but had no idea what happened to him after that. Grettir dived under the waterfall; this was a difficult thing to do, because the eddy was so strong that he had to dive down to the riverbed before he could get behind the waterfall. Inside, there was a ledge, and he climbed up on it. Above it, and behind the waterfall, there was a huge cave under the cliff edge where the river came crashing down. He went into the cave, where a great log-fire was burning. Grettir saw sitting there an immensely huge giant of terrifying appearance. When Grettir approached him the giant jumped up, seized a pike, and struck with it at his visitor. This pike, which had a wooden shaft, could be used both for striking and thrusting; such a weapon was called a *hepti-sax*.<sup>1</sup> Grettir parried the blow with his short sword, and hit the shaft, cutting it in two. Then the giant tried to reach back to get a sword which hung there in the cave, but at that moment Grettir struck him in the chest and sliced away his front ribs and belly, so that his entrails gushed out of him and into the river, which swept them downstream. The priest, who was sitting by the rope, noticed some bloodstained shreds of flesh being swept down the river. He assumed that Grettir must be dead, and thought there was no reason to stay, so he ran home, leaving the rope unattended. It was evening by then, and the priest reported that Grettir was certainly dead. He added that such a man was a great loss.

But meanwhile, Grettir kept striking the giant furiously until he

1 This word is unique to *Grettir’s Saga*, and it is interesting to note that a similar compound, *heft-mæce*, occurs in *Beowulf* (line 1457) as a term for the sword Hrunting which Unferth loans to Beowulf.

was dead. Then he went farther back in the cave, lit a light, and made a search. It is not known how much treasure he found in the cave, but people think it was a fair amount. He stayed there into the night, and found the bones of two men, which he put into a bag. Then he made his way out of the cave and swam to the rope, thinking to find the priest there. When he realized that the priest had gone home, he had to climb up the rope, hand over hand, but he managed to get to the top of the cliff. Then he went back to Eyjardalriver and left the bag containing the bones on the church-porch. Beside it he left a staff on which these verses were beautifully carved in runes:

*Alone I made my way  
into the gloomy gorge.  
The rock-spitting cascade  
gave me a cold wet greeting.  
The crushing waterfall  
embraced me forcibly.  
In this ogre-infested place,  
the eddy slapped my shoulder.*

*The ugly giant came out  
to welcome me;  
he grappled with me  
in a long hard struggle.  
I cut the shaft of his hepti-sax,  
and then my gleaming sword  
ripped the breast and belly open  
of this black monster.*

In the runes Grettir also said that these bones had been taken by him from the cave. Next morning when the priest came to church he found the staff and the bones, and he read the runes. Grettir had gone back to Sandhaugar.

# 67

When the priest next saw Grettir, he questioned him closely about what had happened and Grettir gave him all the details of his excursion, and told him that he had not stood faithfully by the rope.

The priest admitted it. People realized that these monsters must have been responsible for the disappearance of men from the valley, and indeed there was never again any trouble there from ghosts or monsters. So Grettir was thought to have rid the countryside of a great curse. The priest buried the bones in the churchyard.

Grettir stayed the winter at Sandhaugar, but only a few people knew he was there. However, Thorir of Gard heard a rumour that Grettir was in Bardardale, and he sent men to kill him. Grettir was advised to leave, and so he went off towards the west. When he came to Modruvellir he went to Gudmund the Powerful, and asked him for help. Gudmund said it would not be easy for him to take in Grettir. 'Your best course,' he said, 'is to find a place to stay where you need not be in fear of your life.'

Grettir said he did not know of any such place.

Gudmund said, 'There is an island in Skagafjord called Drang Isle; it would be a safe stronghold because you can only get up on it by using ladders. If you could once get there, I don't think that anyone could attack you with weapons or by any other means, as long as you looked after the ladder.'

'I will try this,' said Grettir. 'But I have become so afraid of the dark that I could not stay there all by myself, even to save my life.'

Gudmund said, 'That may be, but be sure you trust no one so well that you do not trust yourself still better; most men are hard to judge.'

Grettir thanked him for the good advice, and set off from Modruvellir. He did not stop until he came home to Bjarg, where his mother and Illugi gave him a good welcome. He stayed there for several days, and then he heard that Thorstein Kuggason had been killed. The killing had taken place in the autumn, before Grettir had gone to Bardardale, and Grettir thought it a serious blow.

Afterwards Grettir rode south across Holtavordu Moor with the intention of avenging Hallmund, if he could find Grim. But when he reached Nordriverdale he learned that Grim had left two or three years earlier, as has been related already. Grettir had been slow in hearing about this, because first he had been in hiding for two years, and then he had spent the third winter at Thorisdale, so he had not met anyone who could tell him the news.

Next Grettir went over to the Breidafjord Dales and ambushed travellers who passed through Brattabrekka. He also robbed the smallholders of their possessions. By this time it was about mid-summer.

Late that summer Steinvor of Sandhaugar gave birth to a son, and he was named Skeggi. At first he was thought to be the son of

Kjartan, the son of the priest Stein at Eyjardaleriver. Skeggi was unlike his brothers and sisters because of his size and strength. When he was fifteen years old, he was the strongest man there in the north, and so it was concluded that he was Grettir's son. Everyone expected him to become an outstanding man, but he died when he was seventeen, and there is no saga about him.

## ~~68~~

~~After the killing of Thorstein Kuggason, Snorri the Priest became very unfriendly towards his own son Thorodd, and towards Sam, the son of Bork the Stout, but it is not clear what they had done to deserve this, except that they had refused to carry out some important deed which Snorri had requested of them. For this reason, Snorri the Priest threw Thorodd out and told him not to come back until he had killed some outlaw and so it had to be.~~

~~Thorodd went over to the Dales. At Breidabolstead in Sokkoldale there lived a widow called Geirlaug whose shepherd had been sentenced to outlawry for assault; he was only a youth. Thorodd heard about this, and rode over to Breidabolstead. He asked where the shepherd was, and the housewife said he was with the sheep. 'And what do you want with him?'~~

~~'I want his life,' said Thorodd, 'for he is a condemned outlaw.'~~

~~She replied, 'It is no great achievement for you to kill him, that poor wretch, considering what a hero you think you are. I can tell you about a much greater deed, if you really want to test yourself.'~~

~~'What is that?' he said.~~

~~She replied, 'Up in the mountain over there Grettir Asmundarson is hiding. Go and fight with him; that would be more fitting for you.'~~

~~Thorodd was pleased with this. 'That's what I shall do,' he said.~~

~~He spurred his horse and rode up the valley, and when he came to the high ground north of Austurriver, he saw a pale dun horse with a saddle. He also saw there a big man carrying weapons, and he turned to meet him.~~

~~Grettir greeted him, and asked who he was. Thorodd gave his name and said, 'Why don't you ask me my errand, rather than my name?'~~