

shepherd's shelters. When they finally arrived in Hauge's village, they were exhausted. However, at last they saw the light of the sun yet again gain in strength and the days grow longer.

They saw the humans preparing for the coming of spring. Some of them, already braving the cold and travelling in the mountains.

When the ravens returned to Odin, their tales were especially filled with stories of the two foreign women; of their walks in the village and on the mountainsides. Tales of how the men were staring longingly after them; especially after the beautiful Edwina. Of how she, a magnate's daughter, was enthralled in England by Haakon, and had ended up in Hauge's village, when young Hauge had claimed her as part of his compensation from Haakon's village. The story of how Edwina had been turned over to Hauge along with the other thrall, Hilda, and the young child she cared for.

"Oh, that young Hauge, he has someone on his mind!" Odin mumbled, when he heard of the foreign women. "Couldn't the harsh and cold weather be of use to him in that, I wonder?"



2. The Traps

The sun sparkles in the snow and blinds him. Hauge squeezes his eyes and treads carefully; beneath the creaking snow there might easily be hidden cracks and crevasses. If only the fox traps caught something! He's carrying his bow, in case he should come across a mountain hare. The white winter fur of both fox and hare bring in good prices at the winter market.

Once in a while he stops and looks around. The hills are glazed and shiny white from ice and snow. Far off, some ragged, glaciated peaks reach for the sky.

The dogs have run ahead. Hauge follows them in between the ice-covered trees, ducks beneath the branches heavy with snow, and listens. He can hear the laughter and cries from some children skating on the small lake in the clearing.

He waves to the children as he walks by the lake.



“Hauge! Where are you going?” It is Lauge Longsight’s younger brother, Torleif, who runs up to him. Torleif has grown a lot this past year, but then, he must be nearly 13 now.

“I’m going to check on my traps. Do you want to come along?”

“What’s Hannibal doing?” Torleif asks a little later.

“I have no idea; he didn’t want to come with me today.”

“Oh, he’s probably talking with that Edwina girl?” Torleif says with a wry smile. “Those two talks a lot, don’t they? And he talks a lot with that other one, Hilda, too. You know the one with the small boy?”

“Oh yes. That might be what he’s doing. But then they do know each other, too, from England.”

“But Hilda – isn’t she a thrall, Hauge?”

“Well, sort of, I think. She is Edwina’s servant girl, at least. Haakon took both of them over there.”

“And you thought they were both thralls, right?”

“Well, they were thralls, Torleif, but when Hannibal told me where they really came from, I felt that to be wrong and freed them.”

They reach the first of the traps.

“Well, an animal has been here!” Hauge says. “The trap has collapsed.”

“How did you make it, anyway? The trap, I mean.” Torleif asks, as they shift through the pile of stones.

“I’ll show you!” Hauge pushes the stones aside, so Torleif can see it. “The bottom of this trap is a small hollow in the rock. But in other places, on soil, I simply dig a hole in the ground, and then build up the stones above it.” He starts piling the stones, each the size of his hand, around the hollow again.

“But what causes the stones to collapse, then?” Torleif asks, while he helps him pile the stones.

“Why, that’s the most important part of it!” Hauge says. He picks up a piece of wood lying in the middle of the stone pile. Then he carefully balances it upright, and places the biggest stone on top of it, in such a way, that it will collapse at the lightest touch.

“Wow that is crafty!” Torleif exclaims. “It’s a shame that the fox got away with your bait, though!”
he says, teasingly.

3. The Avalanche

Fortunately, though, there is a fox in one of the other traps. They skin it on the spot. Then leave the meat to the eagles, and the Gods. One needs to be on good terms with them! Besides, fox meat isn't worth eating anyway.

They are in a high mood as they turn back again. Hauge is carrying a branch on his shoulder. It is adorned with a beautiful white fox fur!

Nearing the village, Torleif suddenly stops.

"Look, there!" he whispers and points upward. And up there – right above the trees – two women are playing; jumping, cheering, and laughing, while throwing snowballs at each other! One of them carries a small boy on her arm.

"It's them, Hauge! It's Edwina and Hilda – and the little boy!"

As if he can't see that! Today, as every time he runs into that girl, a strange fluttering fills his chest! It is completely different from what he has ever felt around any other girls.

Even though they were nice, and warm-blooded, it never did develop any further.

He has tried to talk to her, on several occasions, actually, however, always in vain. He would like to know more about her, and of her homeland, England. But she just looks at him in that strange way. With those defiant eyes, as she did the first time they met – in Haakon's village.

The time when Hannibal will bring her back to England is probably not far away. Then he won't see her again. Fortunately! Or...?

A thundering noise from somewhere above cuts off his thoughts.

Torleif and the dogs have stopped abruptly. Torleif looks around. Suddenly he yells: "Let's get out of here! I think it's an avalanche!"

Just then masses of snow thunder down the mountainside. At first it is only light snow, and small lumps of snow. But soon the air is thick with snow. They can't see a thing in front of them.



Torleif jostles through the snow. He grasps hold of Hilda and drags her off. And Hauge gropes through the whirling snow towards the spot where he last saw Edwina.

“Edwina! EDWINA!” he yells. But it is drowned out by the roaring of the snow-blizzard.

What were they doing all alone up in the mountains, anyway? It's stupid! Don't they know a thing like this might happen?

Finally, as the whirling snow slowly calms down, he spots her. She's half buried in a heap of snow behind a big stone. Is she dead?

Hauge struggles his way through the deep, loose snow to get to her. Then start digging her out with his hands. He pushes her gently as he works.

Suddenly, she sighs! A deep sigh. She's alive!

However, her movements are laboriously and slow. And she just stares at him empty-eyed.

He grips her tightly and tries to pull her away from the site: "Come on!" he says, determined. "It might happen again! We need to get out of here!"

Suddenly, she snaps back. She stops and looks at him, terrified.

"What, Edwina? What is it?"

"The boy! Hilda's boy, where is he?" she yells.

Hilda is much too shocked to say anything. She's just standing there, staring ahead of her; shivering and cold.

"I'll bring those two back home," Torleif says. "They need to get warm. I'm sure Astrid has some herbal potion or something. And, I'll bring someone up here afterwards, to help you look for the boy."

4. Olav

Reluctantly Hilda goes with Torleif. “Come on!” he says to Edwina. “You’ll freeze to death!”

“No!” Edwina responds angrily. She’s already digging in the snow.

“Who held him?” Hauge asks.

“I did!” Edwina answers angrily. “And his name is Olav!”

“He must be around here!” Hauge starts digging next to her.

They have to hurry now! If they don’t find him before help arrives, it might be too late.

Hauge and Edwina fight with the snow – and time! Suddenly Hauge’s hand touches something.

“Here!” he gasps and carefully grabs a small, cold hand. Then immediately dig the boy out. Edwina takes the small lifeless body and shakes him gently.

“Olav! Olav!” she cries, tears running down her cheeks. But the boy is completely limp. He doesn’t react at all.

“Let me try!” Hauge says, taking the boy from her. He removes the cold, wet clothes from him, and places the small naked body beneath his skin tunic. Right on top of his own warm belly. Then he starts dancing around and around in circles, while Edwina stares astounded at him.

“Great Odin! Powerful Thor!” he chants. “Let the boy stay with us! Oh hear us!”

Edwina throws herself down on her knees. Her hands tightly folded hard around her cross, she prays quietly and sincerely to her God.

Suddenly Hauge stops, laughing. Edwina looks at him, questioningly.

“He’s alive! He peed on me!”



5. In the Bathhouse

Hauge and Hannibal sit cloaked in warm steam inside the small bathhouse. It's really comforting. At first, Hannibal wasn't too keen on using it. However, eventually, he's even enjoying it. Though, enough is enough: going to the bathing house once a week is excessive!

"She speaks a lot about you," Hannibal says, suddenly.

"Who does?"

"Who do you think?" Hannibal answers, teasingly. "Well, Edwina, of course!"

Hauge throws some water on the red-hot stones. They hiss and sizzle, and soon cloak the entire room in a steamy fog.

He is thinking a lot about that beautiful foreign girl. Actually, he doesn't find her a foreigner any more. But then, she has been living with them for close to a year now. Soon, winter will turn into spring and it won't be long until she can obtain passage on a ship; along with Hannibal, maybe? And be able to travel back home to her family in England.

The first traders have already arrived in the village. But Hauge has secretly been sacrificing to the Gods. He's prayed for something to happen. Something, which would make her stay a little longer.

"She can't go back home, Hauge," Hannibal says quietly, as if he has guessed what is on Hauge's mind!

"Why not? Isn't that her greatest wish?"

"It was! That is how it was. That is, until she learned how things are back home in England."

“What do you mean, Hannibal?” Hauge has a hard time hiding his relief. So the Gods did listen to him?

However, Hannibal sounds very serious when he says: “There have been a lot of raids in England. I think it’s the Danes. That’s what is said, anyway.”

“Who says that?”

“Well, the people who came by here a little while ago. They were on their way to the spring market in Birka. They told me. They had heard that the place Edwina comes from had been severely ravaged. So no one knows if any of her family is alive or living there anymore.”



Hannibal gets up and walks to the big barrel standing on top of the oven. The snow in it has melted; now the water is nice and warm. He dips a pot into it and fills it with water. As he pours it over his head, he adds. "But there's another reason, too, Hauge!"

Hauge had intended to go to England this summer. But now he might better consider doing something else. Like going north after walrus ivory tusks in Iceland, as the bone maker in Skiringssal had suggested last winter. He's thought a lot about it since then, anyway.

They had cleared more land during last summer. Still, they hadn't had time enough to actually grow anything there, why this winter's supplies have been scarce, too. So, if they are able to trade with valuable walrus tusks it would really make improvements to their situation.

He has already discussed it with Vagn. He is the only one in the village who has actually been up there. Although, this was a long time before he came here with Sven. So even though Hauge doesn't like him, Vagn will be good to have along.

Besides, due to their increasing numbers, some actually talk about finding new places to settle in.

"Sorry, what did you say, Hannibal?"

"I just said that there's another reason why Edwina wants to stay here, too."

"Oh, and what's that?"

"Well you see, Hauge," Hannibal says mischievously. "Ever since you saved her, Hilda, and Olav from that avalanche, she's talked about you in quite a different way! That is, talked well about you, actually!" Hannibal laughs, and then continues: "I know what I'm talking about, Hauge! And I'm telling you, she has grown very fond of you, too!"

6. An Important Meeting

Torleif arrives first at the burial mound. He skips around ahead of Aasa. She isn't as agile as she used to be, why it's hard to walk up the mountain. At least it isn't slippery anymore. Fortunately, the sun has gained power by now and the last snow has melted away.

Torleif reaches Hauge at the mound long before her.

"It must be very important! Whatever it is that you want to talk to her about, isn't it?" he asks, grinning.

"Well, maybe! But you'd better get back down again, Torleif! It's not meant for your ears!" Hauge says determined.

"Bah!" Torleif grunts sourly as he runs further up the mountain towards the lookout.

"Walking up here – for sure becomes harder and harder," Aasa huffs. "But I suppose you have some good reasons, Hauge?"

"I thought it best that we met up here, the two of us, alone. Then my father, Styrbjorn, can listen as well!"



“What’s on your mind, then, Hauge?”

He looks her in the eyes: “I thought it was high time I started to think of my future. After all, I am the only one to carry on my father’s blood-line.”

Aasa doesn’t seem surprised. “Well, you’re not the only one who’s given thought to that end. And I think it’s time for you to get a bride.”

Aasa smiles secretively and continues: “I’m actually negotiating the dowry already!”

“The dowry? But – you haven’t said anything about that!” Hauge exclaims.

“No, I wanted to see if it was possible, before I talked to you about it. However, no problem there... And the girl is willing to become your bride, too!”

“But, how did you - ? I mean, there’s no way you can have sent a messenger – not that far away?”

“Why ever not? After all, it’s not that far away,” Aasa says forcefully.

“But, she can’t possibly be bringing any dowry!” Hauge continues, astonished.

“Oh, but she can! To be sure, Eigil have had some great years on his farm, so...”

“Eigil?” Hauge burst out. “What do you mean? Eigil?”

“Oh, but Hauge! Of course you know Eigil. He’s been taking good care of both Bjarke and Ingrid ever since they lost their parents in the attack on our village. And Ingrid will bring a pretty good dowry from Eigil. Besides, she has grown into a nice girl!”

Ingrid? Does his mother really want him to marry her?

He does remember the little girl, who lived with Sigrid and Lauge. She helped Sigrid with a lot of things. And, by now, she has probably grown well at handling house and farm, as they again live in their parent’s farm, further inland. But marry her?

“That is not the girl I am going to marry!”

Hauge places his hands on Aasa’s shoulders, looking at her firmly.

“Not that girl? What do you mean, Hauge?” She sounds far less certain now. And her eyes wander towards the burial mound when she continues: “your father would approve of my choice, as well!”

“No, mother! I am sure he would approve of my choice!”

“What? Did you - ? What do you mean? It’s my duty to handle things like that!” She is clearly shaken. “But, who would – could you consider suitable?”

“Not could, mother! It is, will be – Edwina!”

“Edwina! That foreign, English girl?”

Hauge nods.

“That is completely out of the question!” Aasa bursts out sharply. By now she has regained her authority. “First of all, that girl is one of those, what do you call them? - Christians! What would she know of the Gods? What would the Gods say? Secondly, rumour has it she’s an orphan now: since the Danes raided her town. So she can’t possibly be bringing any dowry. Besides, I happen to know that someone else wants her!”

“Someone else?”

“Yes, someone else! You see, Vagn has talked to me – it seems he wants her - as a kind of servant-girl!”

“Servant-girl!” Hauge cuts her off angrily. “There’s no way Edwina is to be someone’s servant-girl – especially not Vagn’s, considering the services he would want! I mean, Vagn? He’s a drunkard! Besides, she loathes him!”

Aasa looks at him, astounded.

Undaunted, Hauge continues: “I already have asked her. And she has agreed! Even though she would prefer me to be baptized in her God’s name. But we have agreed to it anyway: I will not be baptized! And she has no dowry! Yet married, that we will be! I’m sure, too, that you understand me.”

“No Hauge, I don’t! I really don’t. But – if you’re so sure you want her, I suppose you could take her as your second wife.”

“No, mother! I can’t do that. Hannibal has told me that you cannot have more than one spouse. Not when you’re a Christian. And Edwina is the one I want to marry! Her, and nobody else. And, I’m still certain that you do understand me.”

“What do you mean, Hauge?”

Hauge holds her. And, as he brings both of them close to Styrbjorn’s mound says: “Styrbjorn, my father... You and he... You loved each other. I know that. And I also know that you wouldn’t have shared him with anyone!”

Hauge remains at the burial mound for a while. Aasa has walked back down again. She has quite a lot to consider. But she has promised him that she will make an effort to get to know the young girl. Since that is his wish.

“Hurrah for the Danes!” someone suddenly yells from further up the mountain. It is Torleif.

“What do you mean?” Hauge yells back.

“Hurrah for the Danes who raided England!” Torleif hoots, grinning like a mad!

“You scoundrel, you...!” Hauge yells back, threateningly. But he can’t help smiling as he shouts: “It seems your ears are as good as your eyes, Torleif – ‘Long-ear’!”

7. Preparations

“Well, are you ready?” Hauge asks the women who are busily decorating the long house. Some arrange new-leaved twigs in pots. Others place fresh spring flowers decoratively on the long tables. A woman is placing torches in the floor sand and small oil-filled bowls on the tables. They and the flames from the fireplace will light up the large room.

This is a feast that will be remembered for many a generation! Hauge is certain about that, although he is anxiously awaiting the festive events. It will both be a sacrificial feast, a blót, and a wedding! And they have to do it in a way that will please all the Gods, even Edwina and Hannibal’s God!

Outside the long house he nearly knocks Hannibal down.

“Hauge! Are you running around with your eyes closed?” Hannibal laughs. “What’s on your mind?”

“You know very well what!” Hauge says a little offended. “Besides, you’re the only man who may see her, right?”

“Well, that is as it may be, Hauge! You have to accept that, even though you find it hard!” Hannibal leans in close and whispers: “but one thing I can promise you: she will be the most beautiful bride you have ever seen!”



They accompany each other for a walk around the busy village. Outside the houses everyone is airing their best clothes. It has been packed away in chests all winter, why air will refresh it. There's a good smell of freshly baked bread and meat being prepared in the big ovens.

"It's a shame you won't be at the sacrifice tomorrow."

"That's how it is, Hauge," Hannibal says. "But, apart from that, I think it's going to be a good wedding; and the way we've agreed on, so Edwina is comfortable with your ways, too."

"Well, we've never tried mixing it like this before: your faith – and ours, I mean."

“No, but it’s necessary. Since you are marrying a woman who’s been baptized! I’m afraid I must leave you for now, Hauge. I’ve still got plenty of tasks to take care of.”

8. Blót and Wedding

The spring sun is warm as the procession moves towards the burial mound the next day. Heading the procession are the young men who pull the sacrificial animals – a young bull and four sheep. Then follow most of the village people.

Aasa is in the middle of the procession. As the head of the family, she is the Gydja, and will be heading the sacrifices of the animals and perform the blessing of the young couple. Along with her are the Gode, the chieftain-priest, and the men who will assist Aasa with the practical parts of the sacrifices: swinging the axe and holding the animals. The Gode is carrying the holy chest.

Hauge walks just behind Aasa along with his best men. And, finally, the thralls bring up the rear of the procession. They carry everything else needed: pots, skewers, drinking horns, barrels of mead, and baskets full of bread.

“When will Edwina be here?” Lauge asks, walking next to Hauge.

“After the Blót. We’ve agreed to do it that way,” Hauge says, looking at him. But Lauge’s attention is elsewhere. He casts glances at Liv, the thrall-girl Hannibal bought in Skiringssal, and then set free. She walks with the other women.

“What’s this; will it be you next time?” Hauge laughs teasingly.

As the procession reaches the burial mound they stop next to five sacrificial posts which have been erected for the ceremony. Then the Gode steps forward. He opens the holy chest and presents it to Aasa, who gently lifts out the small icon of Frey.

“Hail Frey. Bring light and joy on this wedding feast!” she chants, and then carefully places the golden icon on the stone altar made especially for this day.