

1: Introduction



"I wonder how Styrbjorn's village is faring?" Odin mused, watching those fighting on the battlefield outside Valhalla.

Not long ago did Haakon Gilmarsson attack the village and kill many of the inhabitants and the Chieftain, Styrbjorn.

So Odin called on his two ravens, Hugin and Munin, and bid them leave for the village immediately.

The following days the two ravens soared above the small village in southern Norway; then reported home what they had seen.

Finding the village had not been difficult, since one could hear it from miles away. Great trunks were felled in the woods further up the countryside. The humans toiled and worked to bring these trunks to the beach. There they hammered and hacked, chopped, and cut, while a huge, fierce man energetically roared and barked orders to them.

“That’s Sven, Styrbjorn’s brother. He’ll get the village back on its feet. But tell me, my little messengers, what did you see of Hauge, son of Chieftain Styrbjorn?”

Of him they told, that he was often to be found in the mountain near his father’s grave, mainly in the company of his friend Lauge Longsight, and that he is growing into a tall, handsome boy.

Odin told the ravens to keep a sharp eye on the boy. So, in the following years the ravens often reported news of the Chieftain’s son. Having grown to be fifteen, his wanderings in the village was often accompanied by the giggles and shy stares of the girls.

However, his mother, Aasa, gave no hint to let go of her son, and made no effort to find him a decent girl.

That would come in time; but she had enough on her mind as it was. The humans still reckoned her their mistress, even though they had elected Sven as their Chieftain. The ravens often heard whispers about those two.

Humans aren’t always as smart as they ought to be, Odin thought. Better lend young Hauge a hand.



2: A Gift from the Gods

There, right in front of him it lies shining in the sand!

It is a large nugget of amber, smoothed by sand and stones in the sea, and golden like the sun. In a few hours the tide will once again cover the tiny beach, and take back the glowing treasure.

Hauge bends down, picking up the amber. He turns it slowly, watching it sparkle in the sunlight.



Certainly, this must be a gift from the Gods! Never before has he seen a nugget of amber like this. So big, so beautiful! Over the years, he has found many small pieces. Some have become jewellery for his mother, and some were exchanged for other things when traders came by.

But this...! This is precious! No one must see it. Not now, at least, and definitely not uncle Sven. Fortunately, he's not at home at the moment, even though it probably won't be long before he is.

"Hauge! Hauge, where are you?" It's Torleif, Lauge Longsight's younger brother, looking for him.

Hauge quickly hides the amber in the small leather pouch he has beneath his tunic.

"Oh, there you are!" The round, red-haired head of Torleif is looking down at him from the cliffs above the beach. "Lauge asks for you. He's got something to show you, I think." Torleif is flat on his stomach on the rock. "What're you doing?" he asks curiously.

"Nothing," Hauge answers quickly, climbing up to meet him.

3: By the Burial Mound

“When do you think they’ll be home? The ships, I mean,” Torleif asks as they walk up the mountain.

“Don’t know. Probably soon, though. Fall is coming.” He points at the yellowing leaves of the willow trees. Hauge stops. They have reached the burial mound.



“Oh yeah,” Torleif says, looking at Hauge. “That’s your Dad, there. How long has it been, Hauge?”

“Three years.” Hauge replies quietly. The memories leave him with a lump in his throat.

“So your Dad’s in Valhalla now?”

“Yes. Yes, I’m sure of that. He’s been there for a long time. Sometimes, though, I can feel his spirit here. And that’s nice!” Hauge speaks more to himself than to Torleif. Then asks: “How old are you, Torleif?”

“Eight. So, I don’t recall much of it. Just that it was very scary, and that the houses burned. Not ours, though.” Torleif has turned around, looking at the village.

“The village is nice now.”

True, it is nice, and bigger, too. The newly turfed roofs shine in the sunlight. Hauge can see his own house clearly. Sven has helped them build it. It's bigger than the old one, and there's more space around it. It's next to the wooden road to one side, and to the small stream on the other. The stream is now fenced with wood. That way it's easier to control it when, in spring, the glacial torrents rush down from the mountains.

They head up the path behind the burial mound. Torleif skips and jumps ahead of Hauge. Suddenly he stops. "Hauge, look! Look at that flower!" He's pointing at a tiny plant growing in a crevice in the rock.



"What's about it?"

"It's one of those Astrid always collects."

"Astrid?" Hauge asks, surprised. He hasn't seen much of the mute thrall-girl lately. After the burial his mother gave her to Sigrid, Lauge and Torleif's mother.

"Didn't you know?" Torleif relish the moment; he knows something Hauge doesn't. "Astrid collects lots of plants and dries them. My mother says that she learnt a lot about plants from that strange man. The one who was here, you know, back then, when it all happened! He has a very odd name."

“Whom are you talking about?”

“Oh, you know; the one who was with that awkward man. He was a warlock of some kind, or something.”

“Ooh, you’re talking about Hannibal?”

“Exactly, that’s his name! A lot of people didn’t like them. But my mother says that that Hannibal guy, he was all right! Anyway, Astrid is really good with all that plant stuff. Last time I had a sore throat, she healed it. My mother told me it was a magic potion. But I think she just said so to make me drink it.”

Torleif chatters on, but Hauge isn’t listening. Where might Hannibal be now? He often thinks about him. Wonder if he’s still with that monk, Peter? He did promise to return, but maybe he was just saying so?

4: Magical Runes

“Good to see you, Hauge!” Lauge greets with a smile, patting the ledge beside him.

“Spotted anything yet?”

“Nah, not yet,” Lauge points across the sea. “There is nothing, except those nasty looking black clouds.” He points towards the horizon.

True enough, the sky is turning rather dark.

“I think a gale is on its way”.

“You wanted to show me something?” Hauge asks. “I don’t suppose it is the weather?”

Lauge smiles a strange smile. “Eh, well – maybe not,” he says in a secretive tone. Then turns to Torleif commanding:”hey beat it. Get out of here.”

“I want to see it too; it’s unfair, it is! I found him, and brought him to you! While you just sat here!” he utters sulkily.

“Go home! Now!”



Torleif reluctantly gets up. He climbs off the ledge. Very, very slow. Once he's finally out of reach, he turns and yells up at them defiantly:

"I'll just tell mom you hit me, I will!"

"Scram it, you little rat!" Lauge yells back. "And you will not breathe a Hel-bound word to her, or I'll send the Silvans after you! They'll make you whimper so much that even Loki will pity you!"

Once Torleif has left, Lauge smiles again and carefully pulls out a piece of wood from beneath the fur he is sitting on.

"What's that?" Hauge asks curiously. "A piece of wood? What have you made now?" Lauge spends a lot of his time on his post carving various things in wood: spoons, little bowls, and platters.

Sometimes, he makes fancy handles for various tools. He's getting pretty good at it.

Proudly Lauge hands him the little piece of oak-wood. It looks like an ordinary slap of wood. Why is he so proud about that? Guess it could make quite a big plate one day?

“Turn it over!” Lauge says eagerly.



“But – those are – runes!” Hauge exclaims astonished, the strange, pointy symbols, which so very few know how to do! Lauge has been sitting up here on his spot – burning runes in a piece of wood! Hauge is speechless – and a little frightened. He knows that those strange signs mean something; that they gain power when they are used.

“How did you - ? I mean where, where did you get them?”

Lauge smiles secretively. Then he leans towards Hauge, whispering, as if the mountain has ears:

“Sigurd, the bard, you know! He’s the one who taught me!”

Sigurd! Yes, of course!

Sigurd arrived with Sven, Vagn, and all the others, after the attack. Before then, no one here knew how to burn runes. Sigurd is the only one who masters the burning and use of runes!

“Why did he show you?” Hauge asks. It’s not what you’re expecting the lookout to concern himself with.

“I don’t know, actually! He said the more who knew about them, the better. Apparently, a lot of people in Daneland know them. While the rest of you were busy in the fields this summer he came up and showed me. He said I was a good, fast learner, he did!” Lauge says proudly.

“Do they mean anything?”

Lauge points at the various symbols, while slowly reading out aloud: “Lau-ge - burned – these - runes – for – Hau-ge, - son – of – Styr-bjorn.”

Hauge can’t help but be impressed. To think that these strange signs on a piece of wood could mean so much!

“You can do it in stone, too,” Lauge says eagerly. “I was actually thinking that we could raise a stone in honour of your father. I can do the runes.”

Hauge looks at his friend, astonished. “Actually, we could do that!” He pauses: “but I’ll have to talk to my mother first, and probably, Sven too.”

“Sven, Sven, Sven!” Lauge sneers. “If everything was up to Sven, and that Vagn, then...”

A cold gust of wind cuts Lauge off. They both look up.

5: Fury of Thor

Big, dark, heavy clouds have blocked out the sun, and the sea is foaming. The violent clouds draw breath, ready to release tempestuous winds and mounting seas. A distant lightning tears blindingly a zigzagging rift between the sky and the sea, a roll of thunder following.

“Thor is angry,” Lauge mumbles. “Wonder why?”

Hauge clutches his leather pouch. Could it have something to do with him and the big nugget of amber? Wasn’t he meant to find it, after all? Should he give it back to the sea?

He grips the pouch tightly. He can feel the nugget. Should he show it to Lauge and ask him? He’s just about to take it out, when Lauge cries out:

“The ships! They’re out there! On their way in! And in this weather!”



Lauge is already up. Hauge scans the sea, but can't see anything except foam and waves out there. Then, suddenly – all the way out where sea and sky meets, he sees a small dot. Then it's gone again. There, there it is again! Now there are two!

"There!" Lauge points. "And there!"

It continues like that for a while. They appear and disappear again, and again. Two dots, then three; for a brief moment, even four!

“The waves must be pretty big out there,” Lauge says. “It will be difficult for them to cross in between the reefs and the beach.”

“We’ve better get down and spread the news,” Hauge says. “Then we can help them in.”

They hurry down the mountainside. While they’re still a good way from the first houses, Lauge starts yelling:

“The ships are coming! They are on their way! They’ll be here soon!”

Reaching the houses they separate, each running their own way, shouting the news into the houses.

Soon the streets are filled with frantic men and boys rushing towards the beach. The women and girls start preparing for the great welcoming feast: they butcher chickens and a few sheep, fetches vegetables and herbs. The meat is cooked in ovens. Finally, they start preparing the Long House for the celebration.

6: Dangerous Landings

Hauge joins the others on their way to the landing place on the beach. It is in a small cove south of the village. Normally, the cove is well sheltered from the wind and seas, but today the vicious force of the storm spills over the reefs. Cascades of frenzied foam and water crash onto the shore, whipping and soaking the group preparing to help the ships land on the flat beach.

“They’re coming!” someone shouts.

The first of the ships rounds the point and enters the cove. It’s Vagn’s ship, Hauge can tell. The men on the beach have strong ropes ready for them. From the ship they throw several lines towards land, but they’re still too far out. Hauge and a few of the older boys start fighting their way through the waves to grab the lines. The ship tilts dangerously, nearly turning sideways in the crushing waves as it enters very close to the low, sharp reefs at the mouth of the cove.

“Pull!”

The men heave with all their might. Slowly, they turn the ship. Then a breaking wave catches it and lifts it towards the beach. Battered and bruised the men onboard jump and crawl from the ship, as it is pulled further up on the beach, where it keels over and rests on one side.

“Welcome home!” someone shouts.

But right now, there’s no time for anything except to make sure the remaining three ships are pulled safely ashore, too.

By the time the fourth and final ship appears around the point, everyone is almost completely exhausted. This one is commanded by Sven himself and it barely clears the reefs at the mouth of the cove.

“This is bad!” Lauge shouts. He runs out into the water, trying to catch the lines. A monster wave pushes the ship towards the reefs. The next moment there is a crashing sound. Another wave now presses the ship towards the largest of the rocks. Many have now entered the water; some swimming to the ship. Then, it heels over, waves ramming it repeatedly against the reefs.

The men on the ship throw themselves overboard, swimming frantically towards land. Some of them are so exhausted that they have to be pulled in.

Sven is among the first to reach the shore.

“We must bring that ship in!” he yells, angry and desperate.

“Yes, but how?” Vagn asks, out of breath.

“Figure it out! It has to be saved!” Sven yells. “Get some of those empty barrels!” He points to some barrels further up on the beach. The ones they usually store salted fish in. Quickly, they roll them to the edge of the water, tie them together and push them out.



Some of the men then fight their way out to the ship with the ropes. They barely manage to do so, but finally, but with great difficulty they pull the barrels through the waves; tie them to the sides of the ship, and climb onboard.

Meanwhile, Sven commands the men on the beach:

“Tighten that up! Pull, damn you! Get that ship ashore! PULL!”

The ship creaks and screeches, then suddenly, with a loud squeak, it tears free from the reefs.

Now they are all pulling as hard as they can. The barrels keep the ship afloat, and after a short time of heaving, a great wave throws it the rest of the way onto the beach.

“Careful now! Watch the bow!” someone yells.

Too late! As the ship keels over the long prow breaks off with an ear-splitting crack.

They pull all the four ships a good way up onto the beach. Then, finally, it is time to greet the homecoming men properly.

And the joy of seeing them safely back again is great indeed.