

Thorsteín the Staff-Struck

There was an ulven named Thorarín living at the feet of the Great Wolf's Hackles in the village of Sunnudal, so named for his pack, Sun-Dale. He was old and his vision was clouded with time. He had been a great warrior in his youth, raiding all the foes of his Pack and accounting himself with great skill. He was not an easy man to get along with, even though he was old. He had one son named Thorsteín. Thorsteín was a strong, even-tempered ulven, and he worked so hard on his father's farm that he was just as productive as three others together. Thorarín did not have a large farm, but he owned many fine weapons from his time as a great warrior. The father and son had many fine rams, and their breeding stock was accounted for greatly in trade, for sheep of their lineage were strong in spirit and great in health.

There was an ulven named Throd. He was a farmhand of Bjarní's at the mouth of the Singing River, bonded to him as a thrall from a past raid. He took care of Bjarní's flocks because he was regarded as great with the rams. Throd was overbearing, and he made those around him feel like he worked for a powerful chieftain, though he himself became no more valuable or popular for that.

Two men named Thorhall and Thorvald were working for Bjarní at that time. They were always gossiping about everything they heard in the Clan's holdings.

Thorsteín and Throd arranged a ram's-fight for their most spirited rams. At the fight, Throd's ram was getting the worst of it. Now when Throd found that his ram was being beaten, he dealt Thorsteín's ram a heavy blow in the jaw. Thorsteín saw this and dealt Throd's ram an even greater blow. Throd's ram ran off, and people really started shouting. Throd then struck Thorsteín on the brow with his prod, causing the skin to tear and slip down over his eye. Thorsteín then cut off part of his shirt and bandaged his brow, acting as if nothing had ever happened, and he asked those in attendance not to tell his father about it. The matter was dropped then and there.

Thorvald and Thorhall taunted him about this and nicknamed him Thorsteín Staff-struck.

Shortly before Midwinter that year, the women at Sunnadal got up for work. Thorsteín got up too and carried the hay but then lay back down on the bench. Then old Thorarín, his father, came in the room and asked who was lying there. Thorsteín said he was.

"Why were you on your feet so early, son?" asked old Thorarín.

Thorsteín answered, "I do not think there are too many others to do the work that must be done around here."

"Do you not have a headache, son?" asked old Thorarín.

"Not that I am aware of," said Thorsteín.

"What can you tell me, son, about the ram's fight that took place last summer? Were you not knocked unconscious, kinsmen, like a dog?"

"I do not see any honor," said Thorsteín, "in calling it an attack rather than an accident."

Thorarín said, "I did not think that I had a coward for a son."

"Do not say anything now, father" said Thorsteín, "that you will later learn is an exaggeration."

"I will not say as much now," said Thorarín, "as I have a mind to."

Thorsteín then got up and grabbed his weapons. He then set off and walked to the barn where Throd was attending to Bjarní's sheep. Throd was there.

Thorsteín found Throd and said to him, "I want to know, Throd my friend, whether the blow I took from you last summer at the ram's fight was an accident or dealt intentionally, and whether you are willing to compensate me for it."

Throd answered, "If you have two mouths, then put your tongue in each one of them and say with one that it was an accident, if you like, and with the other that it was dealt in earnest. And that is all the compensation that you

are going to receive from me."

"Then prepare yourself," said Thorsteín, "for the possibility that I will not come seeking again."

Thorsteín then ran up to Throd and dealt him his death-blow.

Afterwards, he went to the farmhouse at the mouth of the Singing River and found a woman outside and said to her, "Tell Bjarní that a ram has gored his stable-worker Throd and that Throd will be waiting there until he goes to the barn."

"You go home," she replied, "and I will tell him when I please."

Thorsteín then went home, and the woman returned to her work.

Bjarní got up that morning and when he sat down at the table, he asked where Throd was. The others replied that he must have gone to see to the flocks.

"I would have considered him back by now," said Bjarní, "if he was well."

Then the woman who Thorsteín had met spoke up and said, "It's true, as we must remind you, that respect must be shown to Gaia's favored daughters. Thorsteín Staff-Struck was here this morning and said that a ram had gored Throd and that he needed aid. But I did not wish to show deference to one who was outside of our Pack who spoke to me so roughly, and so I did not wake you then, and afterwards, I had forgotten all about it."

Bjarní got up from the table and then went to the barn and found Throd there, dead. He was then burned.

Afterwards, Bjarní prepared an action and had Thorsteín outlawed for the killing. But Thorsteín remained at home with his father, and Bjarní did nothing further about it.

That autumn at Bjarní's farm, the men were sitting by the fire, preparing sheep's heads, and Bjarní was lying outside on the top of the fire-room wall

listening to what they were saying.

Then the brothers Thorhall and Thorvald spoke up and said, "We never expected when we were taken on at Killer-Bjarni's, that we would be preparing sheep-heads here, while the outlaw Thorstein is preparing the heads of his gelded rams. It would have been better of him to yield more to his kin in Riverhead than to have his outlaw living like his equal in Sunnudal. But those who have passed into the Great Journey will be done with once they are wounded, and we do not know when he shall wipe this stain off of his honor."

A fellow farmer answered, "That kind of thing is worse said than unsaid, and anyone would think that treacherous spirits have been moving your tongues. We feel that he does not want to deprive the blind father and the other dependents who have not yet been marked by the Great Wolf of their bread and butter. But it will surprise me if you roast lamb-heads here much longer or praise what happened in Riverhead."

Then everyone went to eat and to sleep, and Bjarni did not show that he had heard what had been said.

The next morning, Bjarni woke Thorhall and Thorvald and told them to run to Sunnudal and bring him back Thorstein's severed head by breakfast time.

"You two seem to me," he said, "the most likely to wipe the stain from my honor, if I do not have the strength to do it myself."

Now they knew that they had said too much but went, nevertheless, over to Sunnudal. Thorstein was standing there in the doorway whetting a short blade.

When they arrived, he asked them where they were going, and they claimed that they were supposed to look for some lambs who had wandered from Bjarni's farm. Thorstein said that they would not need to look far for those right by the hay-field's wall.

"We might not find the lambs if you do not show us exactly where they are."

Then Thorsteín stepped outside. And when they had walked out into the hayfield, Thorvald brandished his axe and ran towards him, but Thorsteín blocked him with his arm, and he fell down, and Thorsteín thrust his sword through him. Thorhall then wanted to attack, but he went the same way as Thorvald. Thorsteín then struck off their heads and tied them to a ram, which he drove towards Bjarní's farm. The ram, having come from Bjarní's stock in trade, ran home to the farm at the mouth of the Singing River.

Some farmhands were outside, and they went in and told Bjarní that Thorvald and Thorhall were home, and that their journey had been made in vain. Bjarní then went outside and saw what the situation was. He did not say any more about it, but had their remains burned. Then all remained quiet until Midwinter.

Rannveig spoke up one evening when she and Bjarní had gone to bed. "What do you think is being discussed most often these days amongst the Clan?" she said.

"I do not know," said Bjarní, "Most idle words sound like nonsense to me."

"These days, people say most often that they do not know what Thorsteín Staff-struck will need to do before you find it necessary to take your vengeance on him. He has now slain three of your farmhands. Your Pack do not think they can count on you for support as long as this goes unavenged. You both do wrong and leave right undone."

Bjarní answered, "Now the saying applies that no one learns from another's mistakes. But I will heed what you are telling me, honored mate, even though Thorsteín has killed few innocent warriors."

They ended their discussion and slept through the night.

In the morning, Rannveig awoke as Bjarní was taking down his shield. She asked where he was going.

He answered, "Now, Thorsteín of Pack Sun-Dale and I are going to settle this matter of honor."

"How many of you are going," she asked.

"I am not going to lead a war pack against Thorsteín," he said. "I will go alone."

"Don't risk your life alone," she said, "against the weapons of that terrible warrior."

Bjarní said, "Now, are you not a Daughter who does not understand the cycles of Gaia? You may not plant thoughts in a fertile soil that you are unwilling to harvest the next day. Well, I have listened to enough taunting, from you and from others, and it will not do any good to try and stop me when I wish to go."

Bjarní then went to Sunnudal. Thorsteín was standing in the doorway, and they exchanged a few words.

Bjarní said, "You are here to fight me in single combat today, on the hill on the hayfield."

"I am not at all prepared," said Thorsteín, "to fight with you, but I will leave my father's land to enter the Dírge, for I know that you will have the decency to provide my father with farm help if I go."

"You are not going to talk yourself out of this," said Bjarní.

"You will permit me to see my father first," said Thorsteín.

"Of course" said Bjarní.

Thorsteín went inside and told his father that Bjarní had come and challenged him to single combat.

Old Thorarín answered, "Any warrior who tangles with a powerful chief in his Clan's lands and has dishonored him cannot expect to wear out too many shirts. I do not feel sorry for you, because I feel you have brought this on yourself. Now take your weapons and defend yourself bravely, for I would never have stooped before a warrior like Bjarní in my day, even though he is

a great champion. Still, I would rather lose you to the jaws of the Great Wolf than have a coward for a son."

Thorsteín then went outside, and they went up on the hill and began to fight hard, damaging each other's mail and denting the helmets of one another.

And when they had fought for a long time, Bjarní said to Thorsteín, "I am thirsty now, for I am less used to hard work than you are."

"Then go to the brook," said Thorsteín, "and drink."

Bjarní did so, laying his sword down beside him.

Thorsteín picked it up, looked at it, and said, "You could not have had this sword with you in Riverhead."

Bjarní did not answer. Then they went back up the hill and fought for a while. Bjarní found the young ulven a skilled warrior, and the going seemed more difficult than he thought it would be.

"A lot is going wrong for me today," he said. "Now the straps on my boot have broken."

"Replace it, then" said Thorsteín, and he handed Bjarní a strip of leather.

Bjarní then bent over.

Thorsteín went inside, took two shields and a sword, went back up the hill to Bjarní and said to him, "Here is a shield and sword from my father, and this one will not be as blunted as the one you already have. I do not want to suffer your blows without a shield any more, but I would gladly have us end this game, for I am afraid that your good fortune will accomplish more than my bad luck, and everyone is eager to live through a struggle if they have the power to do so, that they may bring even greater deeds to the Great Wolf's ears."

"It will not do you any good to try and talk your way out of this," said Bjarní. "This fight is not yet over."

"I will not strike eagerly," said Thorstein.

Then Bjarni chopped Thorstein's shield away from him, and Thorstein chopped Bjarni's shield in twain.

"Now you swing!" said Bjarni.

Thorstein answered, "You dealt a blow no lighter than mine."

Bjarni said, "The same weapon you had earlier today is biting harder for you now."

Thorstein said, "I would save myself from a mishap if I could, and I fight with no fear of you, but instead wait to hear your judgment that I may submit to it."

It was then Bjarni's turn to swing, and both of them were now shieldless.

Then Bjarni said, "It would be a poor bargain to choose a crime over good luck. I would consider myself fully compensated for my three farmhands if you would promise me your loyalty."

Thorstein said, "I have had opportunities to betray you today, had my misfortune been stronger than your luck. I will not betray you, as I have treated your thralls with honor and burned them that they may pass from this world."

"I see that you are an honorable ulven," said Bjarni. "You must allow me to go in and see your father," he said, "and tell him what I want to."

"Go as you like for my part," said Thorstein, "but go with caution."

Then Bjarni went up to the sleeping-bench where old Thorarin was lying. Thorarin asked who was there, and Bjarni said it was he.

"What is the news, Bjarni, my friend?" asked old Thorarin.

"Your son Thorsteín's death." answered Bjarní.

"Did he put up any defense?" asked Thorarín.

"I can think of no other warrior has ever been as keen to prove his worth to the Great Wolf as your son Thorsteín."

"It does not seem strange to me," said the old Ulven, "given that you have now defeated my son, that you were a tough opponent in Ríverhead."

Then Bjarní said, "I wish to invite you to my farm at the mouth of the Singing Ríver. You will hold one of the two seats of honor as long as you live, and I will be as a son to you and welcome you into my Pack."

"I am in the position," said the old man, "of someone who has no power, and only a fool rejoices in promises. Besides, the promises of you chieftains are such, when you wish to comfort a man after you have done something like this, that your relief lasts only a single moon. Then we are treated like any other dishonored elder, and, with that, our injuries are not soon forgotten. Yet whoever makes a bargain with a chieftain like you may nevertheless be pleased with his lot, no matter what the youth may say, and I will accept your offer, so come here to my sleeping bench. You will have to come close, for this old warrior is shaky on his feet from age and poor health, and I am not quite free of grief over the passing of my son into the forest of the Great Wolf."

Bjarní stepped towards the sleeping bench, and took old Thorarín's hand. Then he realized that Thorarín was groping about for a dagger and wanted to stab him.

Bjarní pulled back his hand. "You miserable old warrior! Now you'll get what you deserve! Your son Thorsteín is alive, and he is going to live with me at the mouth of the Singing Ríver. You will be given thralls to do your farm work, and you will not lack for anything so long as you live, for your spirit as a warrior has not dulled from age!"

Thorsteín then went home with Bjarní and remained with him until he died in battle, and no man was thought his equal in integrity and and bravery.

His name rings in the Great Wolf's ears, and it is certain he has passed through the Journey and was recognized with all the honor of a great warrior.

Bjarni maintained his honor, and he became more popular and more even-keeled the older he grew. He dealt with difficulties better than anyone, and his farm became a haven for many skilled Daughters of Gaia. He traveled towards the Dirge near the end of his life, and was known to have died facing great odds, with all the honor of a warrior, and it is more certain that he has passed by with the Great Wolf recognizing his name and deeds.

Bjarni was blessed with many descendants. His son was Beard-Boddi, who appears frequently in sagas and was the most excellent hunter in his days; Bjarni's daughter was named Halla, the mother of Gudrid, a great Daughter of Gaia, who conceived a child with Kolbein the Lorespeaker before his death. Another of Bjarni's daughters was Yngvild, a great witch who possessed the gift of reading the storms and who came to reside in Stormjarl, as the mate of Thorstein Sidu-Hallson. Their son was Magnus Stormjarl, the father of Einar, the father of Magni Raven's Speech, an even greater witch than her great-grandmother. Amundi was another of Yngvild's sons. He took Sigrid Grimward for a mate, the daughter of Thorgrim the Blind. Amundi and Sigrid's daughter was Hallfrid, the mother of Amundi, the father of Gudmund, the father of the Chieftain Magnus of Grimward and of Thora, whom Thorfield Goldenfield took as a mate, and of another Thora, the so-named Thora Raven's Mark, the mother of Orn Riverhead. Another of Amundi's daughters was Gudrun, the mother of Thordis, the mother of Helga, the mother of Gudny, the mother of Thord Black-Owl and his brothers. Another of Amundi's daughters was Rannveig, the mother of Stein, the father of Gudrun Steinjotunn, the mother of Arnfrid, whom Stout-Helgi of Shattered Spear mated with and later slew over his cowardice. Another daughter of Amundi was Thorkatla the Silent, the mother of Arnbjorg, the mother of Runecarver Fjallan, Thorgeir, and Thurid. And many great warriors, chieftains, and Daughters are descended from them.

There ends the story of Thorstein Staff-struck.