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## THIODOLF THE ICELANDER.

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### CHAPTER XLVI.

In that same night in Iceland Uncle Nefolf and Aunt Gunhilda were sitting on their high stools by the hearth, wrapped up in furs; the snow-storm raged without so fearfully, that the iron-bound doors rattled together; the wolf lay cowering under Nefolf's seat, and often howled in wild affright. Then the old warrior chid him, and attempted anew with his deep husky voice to sing one of Pietro's songs to the sound of a half-strung lute; but the wind and the wolf howled too discordantly the while, and he was obliged to give up, especially when Gunhilda said:

"We shall but make our loneliness the deeper and drearier by the mournful echo of those bright days when the three blooming young ones sat here by us on the hearth. Ah! in what land is our well-beloved Thiodolf now wandering, in sorrow or in joy?"

They remained silent awhile; only at length, as Gunhilda was looking earnestly and fixedly at the fire, Nefolf said:

"Seest thou anything of our Thiodolf in the flashes of the flames? I know that thou hast inherited the prophetic gift from thy mother."

"I am not this day of strong mind enough to divine," answered Gunhilda; and her eyes filled with tears. "But yet it is as if the flames would tell me of Thiodolf, they flicker so strangely and significantly. Wreaths are wound this night round his head; that I seem clearly to see; but there may be thorns woven with them."

Again all was silent; at length the wolf got up and began to look round with glaring eyes, and to show his teeth. At the same time, the hounds without in their kennel began a wild barking and howling.

"Sturle," cried Nefolf to one of the attendants, "look over the out-works. A stranger must be at the gate. If there be but one, or if he have not too many with him, let him in without farther question. The poor stranger may have knocked long enough," said Nefolf, again turning to Gunhilda, while the attendant was gone; "and neither man nor beast has heard him in the uproar of this spring storm. Ah! in sooth, none know how to knock as boldly and loudly as our Thiodolf did."

The gates of the court turned on their hinges, the heavily-descending beams clattered down with their padlocks and fastenings, as the footsteps of many men were heard on the paved court approaching the hall. The inner doors opened, and there entered, led in by Sturle, a tall, youthful figure in a very strange garb; some soldiers dressed like him followed. The wolf opened wide his blood-red jaws upon the stranger guests, and their leader grasped the curved sword which hung at his side from a splendid girdle;—but Nefolf called off the furious animal, and it curled itself up again quietly before the fire. In the mean while the old chief desired the servant to put seats by the hearth, and he held out to the strangers a drink of the choicest mead in a silver-bound horn.

"My errand first," said the foremost of the guests, bending his turbaned head almost to the ground. His followers imitated him. "I see plainly," he continued, "that I stand in presence of Uncle Nefolf and Aunt Gunhilda, and also that Thiodolf's faithful wolf is lying on the hearth."

"Sir," answered Nefolf, "our words make my heart swell with gladness and longing; but it would be for ever shame to me if I let a stranger do his bidding with me before he had tasted, as a guest, of my drinking-horn. Sit down, ye foreign men of war, and accept my hospitality."

The orders of old Nefolf were obeyed; and during the meal which the attendants now furnished abundantly, the host began to speak of the joy which every Icelander would feel at their being in foreign lands such valiant seamen, who could govern their helms and spread their sails in spite of the wild storms of spring and the foaming waves, affording thus an opportunity for the voyage to these shores.

"You will less wonder at that, noble chief," said the guest, "when I tell you that we are Arabs."

"Ha! welcome, brave comrades on the sea!" cried old Nefolf. "My brother Asmundur and I, we have often ranged with you, now as friends, now as foes, on the southern coasts, where orange trees blossom and laurels cast their shade. I ought to have known you at once by your dress and your weapons; but those days are long gone by. Even in my dreams, I have not for years seen an Arab. But it is ever a great joy to me to receive one like you, and his faithful followers."

"Sir," answered the Arab, with an embarrassed smile, "I come not here altogether as a guest, but rather as a messenger, and that by constraint."

Then Achmet, for he it was, related how he had been overcome by Thiodolf, and bound by so-

lemn oath to inquire what Uncle Nefolf and Aunt Gunhilda were doing, and also to bring tidings of his dear wolf. The old people looked at each other with sparkling eyes, and Nefolf often asked:

"Was he alone in your castle, quite alone?" Achmet colored as he answered yes. And his host begged him to rest with them till the rage of the spring storms was over, and then he could take back more assured and detailed news of Nefolf, and his wife, and the wolf. Achmet accepted the hospitable invitation, constrained thereto by the bad state of his ship, but with a certain scornful smile, which seemed to augur no good in the wolf's opinion, for he suddenly made a rush at the stranger, grinding his teeth, and it was only with difficulty that his master could recall him.

When the guests and Gunhilda were gone to rest, Nefolf went up to the grave of his brother, and chanted to him, through the snowy mound, how bravely and gloriously his Thiodolf had behaved on the ruins of old Carthage.

### CHAPTER XLVII.

One morning early Thiodolf was sitting thoughtfully at the gate of one of the courts of the Væringier fortress. He was waiting for some young Arab horses which he and Philip meant to mount; and during the delay, he had taken his lute in his hand, and drew forth from it sadly solemn strains. Philip stood beside him, and sang, without Thiodolf's heeding him, the following words to the vibrations of the strings:

"See, see, and hearken  
Where mists the sea-waves darken,  
'Neath lion one doth weep—  
'Tis Achilles sounds the lyre,  
Mighty knight, the Greeks' desire—  
His breast doth all sorrows keep.

Now the battle lowers  
Against the foeman's towers,  
Yet far from the fight I stray;  
And her, my heart's only pleasure,  
Brisest, my blooming treasure,  
Hath envy now torn away.

Silent in sorrow,  
I must die ere to-morrow;  
Naught now can rescue me  
But her gentle accents sounding,  
Or the fierce joys of war surrounding,  
Could again make me bold and free."

The sudden appearance of Helmfrid interrupted both lute and song. The great Væringier chief placed himself with kindling eyes before Thiodolf, and seized the hilt of the good sword Throng-piercer, saying:

"Come forth, good sword, come forth now from thy too long repose! The Bulgarians have broken loose, their allies are with them, and to-morrow we take the field."

With a cry of joy, Thiodolf sprang up.—Philip knelt down, kissed the point of Throng-piercer, and said low:

"Where thou leadest the way, I will quickly follow, so help me God!"

At the same moment the young Arab horses were led up. Thiodolf went kindly up to them, patted one on the back, stroked the mane of another, and looked confidingly into the bright eyes of the third, as he said:

"You poor beasts, you are not by a great deal as happy as we are, for you cannot yet take the field with us. Say yourselves, my brave fellows, are you not still much too wild and untamed?—But have patience, and let yourselves be taught; then in a year's time you can follow us, and I hope that the Bulgarians will hold out as long. Rather more than less, for it is said they are a bold and very warlike nation."

Then he ordered the horses to be taken away, sounded his silver horn, and when Icelanders and Norwegians had gathered around him, he spoke to them with joyous, encouraging words, making known to them the news of the war, and calling upon them to go forth to it with no less bright arms and clean equipments than they had been wont to exhibit before the fair ladies of Constantinople in their place of exercise. A gay clashing of shields gave the answer; and when Thiodolf, bowing to them, dismissed them, the troop dispersed joyfully to prepare their horses and arms for their departure.

Helmfrid had seen with pleasure the demeanor of his young captain; and now that he stood alone, he took him under the arm, saying:

"Beloved young hero, the emperor has a strong wish concerning thee. He desires that thou shouldst let thyself be baptized before thou goest forth, partly because he can then show thee more honor and favor, but chiefly because he would know that thy soul is safe in paradise, in case it be God's will that thou shouldst die in this war."

"The emperor is most kind and gracious," said Thiodolf, as if smiling to himself; but he can never desire that I should take the field with a lie in my mouth. There would be an end of all rejoicing in great deeds; and I may say it to you, master, I hope to complete many such before we look again on the towers of this beautiful city."

### CHAPTER XLVIII.

The next morning a countless multitude of people were collected before the church of St. Sophia, and all the troops of the city stood in their full, brilliant armor, while from the holy dome poured forth solemn songs of praise to the swelling tones of the organ. The emperor was about to assist at a High Mass for good success to the departing army; and also many young nobles and deserving warriors were to be made knights. When the bells ceased, and the service was heard to begin, Philip bent forward to Thiodolf, who remained without with his band of Icelanders and the other heathen soldiers, saying:

"Beloved and noble master, blame me not if I now leave thee. Christ calls, and that alone can ever make me go away from thee."

Thiodolf nodded assent kindly, and Philip went into the church. Sadly the Northern chief remained behind. He so dearly loved the white Christ, and so dearly this church of St. Sophia, and yet had not gained the needful knowledge, so that he must keep aloof from the solemn service. How did his heart beat, when High Mass being ended, a herald came to the gate of the church, proclaiming that the order of knighthood was now to be conferred, and whoever thought he had any claims to it must place himself before the imperial throne; but if he were a heathen warrior, he must first receive the holy water of baptism, to administer which many holy Bishops stood ready with willing hearts. The last part seemed added especially for Thiodolf's sake; it was almost as if his feet struggled violently to advance; but he said to himself, "Halt! for the honor and glory of the white Christ, halt!" And so he remained faithful, though in deep sorrow.

The herald went back into the church; and Philip at the same moment, came forth, to take again his old place beside Thiodolf.

"How now, boy?" asked Thiodolf in surprise; "have they not chosen to make even thee a knight?"

Philip bent his head in silence. "I understand not that," continued Thiodolf; "thou art a Christian, born of a knightly race; thou wieldest well thine arms; and I see that the imperial pages have an especial right to this honor. Philip, I must know what shuts thee out from it, and, as thy chief, I command thee, by the duty thou owest me, to tell me the cause."

Philip again bent low, and said, "I must no longer keep silence. Well, then, it is my own will that keeps me from knighthood. The disciple must not be above his master. When once the bravest of all Væringier chiefs has received knighthood, I will also receive it."

Thiodolf, with deep feeling, pressed the youth to his heart, and could hardly bring out the words, "In troubles and in death, in joy and in sorrow we are one, thou gallant boy, inseparably one!"

Then came the imperial family from the church; behind them were the new knights. The troops in the square stood to their arms, and Thiodolf brushing from his eyes the tears of a blessed emotion, placed himself in grave warlike attitude at the head of his company.

The emperor in his full pomp passed close before him, and seemed for a moment about to pause that he might whisper words of warning and instruction into the ear of the young captain; but the solemnity of the moment made him pass on. He bowed with a sad fatherly kindness, and went by. His two daughters followed him; the elder Zoe greeted Thiodolf kindly and gently as ever, and even the pale Theodora looked this time with smiling graciousness on the once hateful Northman. Yes, she made with her white hand the sign of the cross over him, and whispered, "God grant thee light; thou art yet a noble branch, which gives promise of blossom."

Again it arose darkly in Thiodolf's mind whether this was the Secret Helper who had parted from him so peacefully in the garden, and the goddess Freya under both forms; he could not unravel the thought, for the fair young Zoe now passed by, and his senses became confused. He only noticed that she kept her beautiful eyes firmly fixed on the ground, and seemed diligently to avoid giving him a glance. Soon after came the new knights in their bright armor, looking gaily around, and were greeted with loud acclamations by the hopeful crowd. Then Thiodolf's heart waxed very heavy, but he turned and pressed Philip's hand, and the dawn of a bright hope for the future sprang up within him.

On the evening of this day, Pietro, who had been drawn forth into the city by the trumpets and horns and drums of the collecting troops, found, on his return, Malgherita busied in preparing a beautiful suit of armor, and adorning it with all that it yet wanted for full perfection.

"This will be thine, Pietro," said she, turning to him her pale, smiling face. "Since the Bulgarian war has been spoken of, I have prepared this noble armor for thee, and see, at the right

moment it is ready. May this restore health to thee! only suffer me to put on these new arms, noble Marquis of Castellfranco."

Flushing with joy, Pietro grasped at the shining armor; but soon letting fall his hand, he said, "That is not for me. Could I leave thee all lonely, Malgherita?"

"Why not?" answered she with sad calmness. "All joy is over for me; and wherefore should I detain in my misery one who perchance may again in freedom look up into the blue of heaven? Pietro, I speak to thee for thy good; go into the field."

"To become untrue to my banner," murmured the knight angrily. "I ask thee thyself, Malgherita, what could ever be a holy and safe device for me were I capable of forsaking thee, the consecrated image, to whom I am pledged by vows, by joys, and by sorrows a thousand fold? Speak no more of it, and let the Bulgarian war rage as it pleases. It concerns me not."

Malgherita would not cease from her entreaties, and a strife, earnest as it was loving, arose between the two. At this moment the door of the room opened, and a tall armed man entered. "Now, then, Thiodolf may decide; he comes at the right moment!" cried Malgherita.

But Pietro looked narrowly at the gigantic stranger, and said:

"Thiodolf, my brother-in-arms, where hast thou left thy wild-bull helmet? One cannot tell if it is thou or not."

Then the armed man spoke hoarsely out of his iron vizor: "Pietro does well to remain here.—And Malgherita, how dost thou dare to drive him forth? Thou poor, forlorn creature! Say only where, where is thy Tristan, thy sad joy, unhappy wife?"

Malgherita sank trembling and weeping into Pietro's arms; the armed stranger threw up his vizor, and there stared forth the ghost-like features of the great baron; he turned away and went out of the room.

When at length Thiodolf himself, with looks half sad, half joyful, came to take leave, he found his friends still greatly troubled. Pietro related to him what had happened; and Thiodolf, falling back into his old familiar way, which he had put aside for more courtly manners, said, "Ay, little Malgherita, thou didst very wrong to try to drive Pietro away from thee. Has he less than thou to do penance? Should he heap new guilt on his head, and so go forth into the field? Little Malgherita, that would very ill besem a warrior. Armor weighs not heavily, blows of enemies fall not heavily; but one grain of guilt—my child, it is so heavy that it makes the gayest heart sick and sorry when the trumpets blow for an onset, and death stalks through the field of battle. I have not a very great deal of bad on my heart to answer for; but what I bear is a heavy burden to me, and therefore I can warn you so well. Keep henceforth such strange notions far away from thee, Malgherita, and then the apparition will not be able to frighten thee often again. And now, dear friends, we will forget all this history. Pietro remains with Malgherita, and Malgherita with Pietro; and I will tell you something very pleasant that befell me to-day."

Then he sat down familiarly between them, and began as follows:

"The noble minstrel, who lately arrived here on his travels, and bears the name of Romanus, met me at noontide as I entered the imperial gardens. I remembered well his strains on a certain evening—it does me no great honor, my friend, and therefore you will not ask me more about it—and involuntarily I drew in the reins of my horse. Romanus looked kindly in my face, touched the strings of his guitar, and sang something after the following fashion:

"Within the hollow lute Aslauga slept,  
And plaintive music sounded when she wept.  
O fairest flower, thou child of mystery,  
Wondrous alike thy birth and destiny;  
Shielded by gentle sounds and golden strings,  
The minstrel's skill thy quick deliverance brings.  
But upon him, so careless erst and free,  
An anxious care is fallen with the sweet charge of thee."

"Friend," said I, "what mean you by this verse?"

"That is asking too much of a poet," was his answer; "but what I may tell you concerning it is, that this beautiful Northern legend of Aslauga came into my mind at the sight of you; and it seems to me that my task is no less strange, though far more joyful and safe, than that of king Heimer, who carried about with him in his lute, the child of Sigurd." Then he went back into the grove; and my mind became strangely confused, till I could no longer distinguish between his form and that of King Heimer. But now that I am come to the end of my story, it strikes me that you will find nothing wonderful in it, dear friends."

"Wonderful!" repeated Malgherita, thoughtfully. "Dear Thiodolf, why should we wish for what is wonderful? Is it, or is it not, wonderful that the ghost of my father follows me unremittently? I myself know not. But thy tale is

heart-stirring, sweet and sad together. It speaks of a child, a lost, orphaned child; oh, my Tristan!"

And weeping bitterly, she clung to her husband, feeling well that she must have been utterly desolate if he too had gone from her out into the wide world.

Thiodolf's farewell was sad and solemn, and yet the sorrowing parents saw their friend depart with a sort of joy. Did it not almost bring them a glimmering of hope that the true-hearted Thiodolf was about to pass over wide tracts of distant lands? If Tristan yet lived might he not be as well found in this expedition as in any other way? We will not wonder at these strange anticipations; we know from our own experience the ever trembling, never despairing, heart of man.

### CHAPTER XLIX.

When Thiodolf returned home, he found the old chief Helmfrid standing in one of the courts of the Væringier fortress, and throwing, by moonlight, three lances of very different shape at a target; as Thiodolf entered, and closed the door, all the three lances were fast sticking in the center; Philip went to take them out, wondering with glad amazement at the skill of the old chief.

"They are very good ones, dear brother-in-arms," said Helmfrid, as he went towards the young captain and held out the three lances to him. "I have these last days been especially preparing them for thee, and employed thereon my best skill. See here, this small, slender lance—it flies lightly through the air, and even a weak arm can fling it; but when directed aright it can rival the wind in speed—I call it the falcon, and deem that it will be a useful weapon to thee when in pursuit of a foe too ready to take flight. This second lance—I call it the bear—thou canst but use, dear Thiodolf, in trials of skill than in actual combat. For he can hurl the bear may wield and hurl every other weapon. But it may so betide that a foe in full armor may, with wild wrath come close up to thee—though it is not the fashion of the Bulgarians; but if such a one did come, then let fly the bear, and I shall promise thee that it shall pierce through whatever armor the haughty challenger may wear.—This third lance, finally, with its shaft of noble wood—with its beautiful point of steel and circle of pure gold—thou didst find the like sticking in the laurel-grove on the Lacedæmonian mountains when we made our first acquaintance—this weapon, dear youth, I call the king-lance; and thou must only use it on important decisive occasions; it is as good to use in close combat as at a distance. Guard carefully these three spears, my beloved son; I will leave them in the hands of thy armor-bearer, Philip; and God will grant thee to do with them great and glorious things. Good night, dear children. I vœen that in all my life I have never so heartily rejoiced in any war as in this one. I know that you will fulfil the bright hopes of an old man; and, then, good night for me! good day for you!"

The trumpets sounded clear in the early dawn which rose, strewing gold and crimson over the waves of the Propontis, as the departing troops assembled gaily in the great square of the city.

"Be praised, Thou, whom I know not!" said Thiodolf, devoutly smiling to himself; "be praised, Thou, to whom we may be brought by the White Christ, or by Heimdal, the messengers of the gods; be Thou praised for the great gladness which streams through my young heart on this heavenly morning, and help me to bring to pass in the field of battle deeds brave and well-pleasing to Thee."

Then he sprang on his horse, which neighed with joy; and a soft, kind voice, close by him, said, "Amen!"

Looking round, Thiodolf became aware of the noble merchant, Bertram, and asked him, "What do you say Amen, dear Sir?"

"To your prayer?"

"How is that, my friend! I certainly did not speak so loud that any man could hear me."

"That depends upon the kind of man, and his understanding. See, dear young knight, when just now you looked towards heaven so bravely and confidingly, so lovingly and solemnly, one hand on your breast, and the other firmly on your sword's hilt, then I knew of your prayer, and felt, without hearing a word, that I might say, Amen, with a glad heart."

Thiodolf stretched out his hand to Bertram with hearty love, looked for a time quizzically in his wise, honest eyes, and then, bending down to him, whispered gently in his ear, "Seek after Iselde for me, my true friend. I know no other man in the world to whom I would give the task but thee." Then he spurred his horse, and flew to the head of his company.

A knight in armor of peculiar elegance came towards him from another troop, and said, lowering his spear, "Sir Captain, let all rancor be at an end between us. I am the chamberlain, Michael Androgenos, and I am going to take the field with you."