



# *The Great Family Fight*

Icelandic drama in five acts by Christian Lanciai

*The Characters:*

*The sons of Thorsten and their party:*

Thorsten Blind

Gerd, his wife

*Their sons:*

Sten

Erik

Ulf

Mård

Bjarne, Gerd's brother

Eyvind homeless

Astrid, his mother

*The sons of Torleif and their party:*

*Thorsten Blind's nephews:*

Leif

Stenleif

Bjorn

Torgny

Stentor of the Field  
Bjorg, his daughter  
Thor Guest-Friend  
Gunnar Hakansson, farmer of the east  
Kare, his son

and various other fighters of Iceland,  
where the action takes place in the 10th century.

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# *The Great Family Fight*

Act I Scene 1. The high hall of a large homestead.

*Thorsten* My sons and nephews, I have summoned you here to openly explain to you the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so that none of you may ever become liable and happen to the consequences of misunderstandings. Now when my brother is dead you are all my sons, and none of you shall ever be wronged.

*Leif* Uncle, we are paralysed by grief for the sudden death of our father and mother, we don't understand anything of it, and our souls are beset by a great darkness of evil forebodings, for we fear that not even our noble uncle could replace our clairvoyant father, who was the most well known man on Iceland.

*Thorsten* I recognize your voice, my oldest nephew, always vibrating with lucidity and wisdom. I can understand the apprehension, but your father, my brother, and I were together always like one force. He was my arms and my weapon, but I was his common sense. My blindness since my birth was always a dire and cursed ordeal, which by the years though was compensated more and more by mental faculties that I am probably alone in possession of. All my desires for the future though are aimed at you, my four sons, and you, my four nephews, being able to substitute the power, the capacity and the weapon which we all lost with Torleif, my brother, with your own.

*Sten* Tell our cousins, father, what really happened.

*Thorsten* No one took the lives of your father and mother. Their death was perfectly natural.

*Stenleif (rising upset)* Natural! Thank you! All that was missing was that they died in their beds! They were not even old! Tell me, how do you die on Iceland out of doors

if you are not killed! You can't just drop down dead for no reason, and no one can make me believe that both father and mother died out of doors in a natural way and simultaneously! I demand to know what really happened!

*Sten* It was spring, Stenleif. Your father and mother were lying out in the grass. Everything was beautiful. The birds were singing. It was hot. They were together. What do you think they were doing? Your father got horny and started fucking. Unfortunately he grew too hot and pushed his heart too fast before he had reached home. Your mother was not impregnate. Instead of a satisfying coition she had a corpse in her arms. Her disappointment was so overwhelming, so what do you think she did?

*Thorsten* Sten, I was the one to clarify the truth, not you. You have a tendency to make everything appear base and cheap. Your mother, Leif and Stenleif, Bjorn and Torgny, died of grief. She killed herself. She did not want to live any more. That's how simple it was.

*Stenleif* And so we are fatherless and lawless at the mercy of our four older and superior cousins, who now mock us and want to cheat us of our heritage.

*Thorsten* I summoned you here for the very reason to preserve peace among you.

*Sten (spitefully)* Those four small fries have always played dirty tricks on us. Drive them off, father. We are sick of them and always were.

*Thorsten* My oldest son, behave! Or else you are not worth being my heir!

*Leif* That Sten was always the one who started all quarrels between us. We can't live in peace with each other unless uncle once and for all puts an end to his constant provocations.

*Sten* And you, haughty smart aleck, will always dictate to our father what he should do, as if you were his guardian! Don't you think he could think by himself, what?

*Torsten* Sten, Sten, don't get excited! It will be the ruin of all of you if you can't learn to control yourself!

*Erik (rising)* Sten is right, father. We can't live with those four. They must get off the farm. As long as we had uncle Torleif he kept them in order, but without a righteous chastising father with his strong weapons to keep them straight, they have to become unbearable. We four brothers, your real sons and heirs, have to demand their discharge from here.

*Thorsten* Erik, Erik, you don't know what you are asking for! The farm does not belong to you or to them! It belongs to me and my dead brother!

*Ulf (rising)* But he is gone now, *(with a gesture of disdain)* and instead we have those.

*Thorsten (in a great effort to appear firm)* The farm with all its grounds belongs to me as long as I live. All eight of you are my heirs. You must get on well together, for only you are now able to manage it all!

*Mård* You can't count money, father. We trusted our uncle, but those were always unreliable.

*Ulf* They always tried to cheat us.

*Erik* They have to leave the farm!

*Leif (calmly)* And where, dear cousins, would you intend for us to go?

*Sten* You can go to blazes!

*Leif (calmly)* You don't find any blazes on Iceland.

*Sten* Then go to hell!

*Leif (calmly)* You hear, uncle, how your sons hate us.

*Thorsten* Sten, Sten, come to your senses! You will get nowhere that way!

*Sten* If they don't leave by themselves we will have to drive them off by force.

*Thorsten* What have they done to you then?

*Ulf* We are tired of them.

*Mård* They only want our destruction.

*Erik* We don't trust them.

*Leif* You just want the entire farm for yourselves. Your hatred against us is blindly biassed by your greed.

*Stenleif (rising, upset)* If you wish to drive us away from our father's farm by force, we can defend ourselves with weapons!

*Leif* Stenleif, sit down!

*Thorsten* Bjorn and Torgny, you haven't said anything.

*Bjorn* We grieve for our father.

*Torgny* We grieve for our mother.

*Sten* Let them cry, father. That's all they are good for, those faint-hearted milksops. It's just that in this house we can't bear with grown-up crybabies. We have enough of whining women, and men's whinings on top of that cannot be tolerated. If you keep them here, father, they will just go crying themselves into incapacitated parasites in grief for their dead mother. If you have to cry out, we would prefer you to go and drown yourselves.

*Bjorn (rising)* We've had enough!

*Torgny (rising)* He is insulting the memory of our parents!

*Thorsten* Alas, Torleif, why in the name of all the gods did you have to get a heart attack! You couldn't have passed away more inconveniently!

*Sten* On the contrary, father. He left us so that we at last could find the opportunity to free ourselves from his miserable sons.

*Thorsten* They are your brothers! They are my nephews!

*Sten* They are miserable nonetheless.

*Leif (rising)* My brothers, let's show these bullies that we can manage better without them. Are you with me?

*Stenleif, Bjorn and Torgny* Yes!

*Leif* Our thanks for everything, uncle, and begging your permission to leave your farm forever.

*Thorsten* I wanted this least of all. Are you abandoning us, my noblest nephews?

*Sten (calms down and sits down)* Let them go, father.

*Thorsten* But where will they go?

*Leif* Our mother holds some lands on the other side of the fiord. There we will build ourselves a farm as good as this one.

*Thorsten* But those lands are hard to cultivate and sloping steeply. It's difficult to build anything there, which is why it was never done.

*Leif* Since your sons obviously doubt that we are men we will prove ourselves better than men. Just to challenge them we shall make the impossible.

*Stenleif* Well spoken, brother!

*Bjorn* Let's leave.

*Thorsten* You will need timber, sheep, horses and cows. Take whatever you need.

*Leif* Thank you. We have enough. We need nothing of what belongs to our dearest cousins. Come, brothers. *(They leave.)*

*Thorsten (after a moment)* I am ashamed of you, my sons.

*Sten (morosely)* You will see, father, that they will be back with their tails between their legs, asking your leave to come and live here again, and they will be more unbearable parasites than ever.

*Thorsten* The risk is that you are wrong, my son, and that they will manage and perform better than you.

*Mård* That risk is non-existent. None of them does even have a woman.

*Ulf* They are uneducated whelps.

*Erik* And supercilious.

*Ulf* They brag a lot but are reluctant to work.

*Thorsten* You prejudiced incorrigible fools! I have never felt more ashamed of you than today, when you should have showed some respect to the memory of your uncle and his wife! Nothing is more dangerous than to insult a grieving man in his sorrow, especially if you are related to him! Haven't we had enough family feuds here on Iceland?

*Sten* They were the ones who started.

*Erik* They have been a nuisance to us all our lives.

*Thorsten* And I suppose you never harassed them? Know your place, you lousy whipsters! You don't know what you have done! We were the most wealthy and influential family on Iceland, and suddenly we are cleft in twain! How will the council consider us now? It could lead to their honour but never to yours!

*Gerd (enters)* Have you concluded your reconciliation meeting now?

*Thorsten* Yes, and it resulted in open conflict. The sons of Torleif have left us now.

*Gerd* Didn't they understand how their parents died?

*Thorsten* Your sons, Gerd, did not understand their sorrow but trampled on it.

*Gerd* My sons, you say? And they are not your sons as well perhaps?

*Thorsten* They are your sons in their flesh, Gerd, for you only mark their hearts. But I have seen their souls, and therefore they are no longer my sons.

*Gerd* Where are you going, Thorsten?

*Thorsten* Out of the putrid air contaminated by your sons. *(leaves)*

*Gerd* Have you been quarrelling with your cousins again?

*Ulf* Cousins exist to be quarrelled with.

*Gerd* But you have got your father in a bad temper.

*Sten* That's his problem.

*Gerd* And what do you intend to do?  
*Sten* Live. What else?

Scene 2. Inside a large sauna.

*Stentor* Welcome, all sons of Torleif! Make yourselves at home here in my humble abode! This cabin will be entirely at your disposal until you have finished your own roof over your heads.

*Leif* Old father, we thank you for your hospitality and generosity. Without your help we wouldn't know where to go.

*Stenleif* It's no fun to sleep outdoors when it is raining.

*Stentor* All Iceland regrets the misfortune that has befallen you. No one ever thought the most solid and stable family in the country could be divided.

*Torgny* We were driven out.

*Stentor* Of course you were driven out. The sons of Thorsten have done this to their own damage. As a family of eight able sons you were invulnerable as the most awesome and respected family of Iceland. Suddenly you have become vulnerable, and no one will fear anyone of your house any more. But please feel safe here in my sauna.

*Leif* We thank you, good Stentor. We have never known you before but for your envy, but suddenly you have become our friend.

*Stentor* It is my duty to assist when my neighbours get into trouble, and I can afford to be generous.

*Leif* You were never generous to our father or uncle, which makes us appreciate your generosity the more now when we have fallen into poverty.

*Stentor* Next to your uncle I am wealthiest on Iceland. What would you not do to help his victims? (*leaves*)

*Björn* Do you trust him, Leif?

*Stenleif* Are you sure he hasn't been paid by our cousins to have us disposed of?

*Torgny* What kind of suspicions is that, Stenleif!

*Stenleif* Stentor always regarded us with wry glances, and his smile was always poison. Now he can't even look us in the eyes. (*a knock*)

*Torgny* Who is it?

*Leif* Open, Torgny! (*Torgny opens the door. Bjorg is there.*)  
Bjorg!

*Bjorg* Don't look so surprised. I am glad I arrived in time.

*Leif* What business has Bjorg, the fairest maid of Iceland, coming alone to four unmarried brothers?

*Bjorg* Don't ask stupid questions. I came here to warn you.

*Bjorn* What has happened?

*Bjorg* Nothing has happened as yet, stupid, but much will happen if you just keep standing there gaping like silly asses.

Leif            You speak in riddles, Bjorg, with the waistlong hair.

Bjorg          Very well, Leif, with the stiff stature, to make it short, you will all be killed if you stay here.

Torgny        Killed?

Stenleif      How?

Leif            Why?

Bjorg          Your cousins have promised father a fortune if he burns you out. He will only be happy to exterminate half of your hated family.

Leif            So you betray your father, you, his only daughter?

Bjorg          My father is a monster of greed. He will do no good unless he profits by its destructive purpose.

Bjorn          But doesn't your father know that you are here?

Bjorg          I knew about the plan before I came here. I overheard father's conversation with the sons of Thorsten. I hid here before you and father arrived here. Everything has been prepared to burn you down here in the sauna. When everything is aflame, father and his men will wait outside to kill everyone trying to escape. Don't you feel already the scent of burning? They have already lit the fire!

Leif            And you are in here with us.

Torgny        We don't have our weapons here! We are lost!

Bjorn          Never trust any benefactor.

Leif            Do you have any plans, Bjorg, for our escape?

Bjorg          Or else I wouldn't be here. When father built the sauna he made it like a fortress of defence. That's why there is a concealed tunnel underneath, the entrance to which is only known by my father and me. It leads underground and opens into a gorge.

Leif            So all we have to do is to go underground.

Bjorg          Yes. *(it starts crackling, and gradually it starts glowing and flaming.)*

Leif            Are you coming with us?

Bjorg          I will show you the way.

Leif            I mean, will you come with us for good?

Bjorg          That will be a later decision. I will lead you out to freedom, but I will keep my freedom. In the long run though you could win me over.

all             How?

Bjorg *(jokingly)* So eager already?

Stenleif      You must know, Bjorg, that you are the most desired woman on Iceland.

Torgny        All Iceland will fight for you and over you.

Bjorg          I know. And next week my father will arrange sporting games to be able to select among all my suitors. If you are still alive then you are welcome to participate.

Stenleif      We shall build the finest house and farm on Iceland to your honour, and we shall overcome all fighters on Iceland.

Bjorg          The hardest fight will be with your cousins. Sten is my hardest suitor.

Bjorn          He shall never get you.

*Bjorg (coldly)* No one shall ever get me except the one I choose myself.

*Leif* Is your father in agreement with that?

*Bjorg* Yes. But come along now. We must hurry.

*(She leads them out through a hatch in the floor. The flames break in and prevail, and the stage is filled with smoke.)*

### Scene 3. The sporting games.

Many fighters are gathered.

*Stentor* Welcome, all you splendid men of Iceland! I am convinced that all the best men of Iceland and of all the world are gathered here today, since our country is the only free country in the world. Our only threat is Christianity, which I sincerely wish everyone to beware of, and which I myself will fight all my life, since its only purpose, like that of king Harald, is to bind us in thralldom.

*Thorsten* Wrong, Stentor! Christianity is a way to implement law and order!

*Stentor* Welcome, noble Thorsten Blind, to renew our argument about it, like we did so many times before. All your four sons are also welcome, whom we all know are among the foremost fighters on Iceland. It is for me an honour, all you young stalwart men, that you are all suitors to my daughter. Thereby you honour not only her but also yourselves, since you thereby show that Bjorg could only be won by the best man on Iceland, which title you all are claiming.

*Stenleif* You haven't welcomed us, Stentor.

*Stentor* Did I not welcome you? No, I actually didn't, gorgeous sons of Torleif! And I deeply regret the sorry death of your father. As Thorsten's brother and eyes he was the like of Thorsten both in wisdom and respect.

*Bjorn* Don't deplore us for the loss of our father. Deplore our cousins instead for the loss of us as the result of our father's departure.

*Sten* Are you asking for trouble, Bjorn?

*Stentor* No, no, no, we are not here to fight but to compete! You all accepted the terms for being here today, that no one must be killed. We are here to compete in archery, javelin-throwing and wrestling, but there must be no close combat with weapons. Anyone resorting to violence will immediately be refused by Bjorg!

*Stenleif* Still you yourself recently tried to murder four of your daughter's suitors.

*Stentor* That's a different matter.

*Stenleif* Are you standing above your own law?

*Stentor* That's irrelevant.

*Stenleif* Would it have been relevant if it had succeeded?

*Stentor* Stenleif, son of Torleif, had I known that the four you are speaking of were my daughter's suitors, they would never have been able to escape from my house the back way.

*Stenleif* Hypocrite!



Leif           Calm down, Stenleif. Think of Bjorg.

Stenleif       That's the one I am thinking of. All her suitors are worthy of her in comparison with her unworthy father.

Leif           Control yourself, Stenleif!

Sten (*jeeringly*) Stenleif always knew how to talk but never to act like a man.

Stenleif       Says you, the lowest coward of all!

Sten           Allow me to commence the archery before that maniac immediately breaks all the rules. (*raises his bow and shoots.*)

(*satisfied*) The very bull's eye! Try to beat that one!

(*all become busy in the competition. One after the other steps forth and shoots, but they all end up in the shadow of Sten's results.*)

Eyvind (*comes forth and shoots*)(*satisfied*) Beat that one if you can, Sten son of Thorsten!

Sten           Who are you?

Eyvind        It doesn't matter. They call me Eyvind.

(*murmur among the men*) It is Eyvind Homeless!

(*others*)       A master marksman!

(*others*)       Sten will never beat that!

Sten           Are you Eyvind Homeless?

Eyvind        That's what they call me.

Sten           Are you also wooing Bjorg?

Eyvind        Yes, for that's what all the best men seem to be doing.

Sten           This will be a duel between the two of us, Eyvind Homeless.

Eyvind        All have not fired off yet. Don't forget the sons of Torleif.

Sten           They are all forgotten long since.

(*the competition carries on*)

Stentor (*to Thorsten*) Who is Eyvind Homeless?

Thorsten      A foundling, son of Astrid the midwife.

Stentor        Wasn't Torleif hard on her?

Thorsten      It has never been suggested that Eyvind would be a son of Torleif.

(*the competition carries on. The sons of Torleif are next. Leif shoots.*)

The men (*appreciating*) A mastershot!

(*Stenleif shoots.*)

The men (*admiring*) Better still!

(*Bjorn shoots.*)

The men (*impressed*) Even better!

(*Torgny shoots.*)

The men (*with acclaim*) Fantastic!

Torgny (*satisfied*) Beat that if you can, Eyvind Homeless!

Eyvind (*steps forth*) I accept the challenge. Know, sons of Torleif, that there is nothing you can do that I can't do even better. Watch carefully now! In four shots I will split all your four arrows! (*strings his bow*)

Bjorg          Stop! (*Eyvind lowers his bow.*)

Stentor        Why do you stop him, my daughter?

*Bjorg* I will never be the wife of Eyvind Homeless.

*Eyvind (haughtily)* It's your funeral, virgin. *(to the men)* I regret you will be unable to watch the four best shots of the contest! So I am out of the game. *(wants to leave)*

*Sten* Stop, Eyvind! We know you are superior to the sons of Torleif. You can always count on us in the future.

*Eyvind* Thank you. Don't count on me.

*Leif* If such a fine archer as Eyvind homeless is to be disqualified because he is the best man of all of us, neither will I stay on in the race.

*Bjorn* Neither will I.

*Stenleif* Neither will I. *(Torgny joins him.)*

*Another* If the sons of Torleif withdraw, there is no point in carrying on with the game.

*A third* No one wants to vie with only the sons of Thorsten.

*Sten* Are you yellow, sons of Torleif?

*Stenleif* Cousin arsonist who hires old men for murderers, no one is afraid of you. *(attacks him)*

*Stentor* Separate them!

*(All interfere. Great uproar. General fight: all against all. Bjorg is laughing.)*

Does this make you happy, daughter?

*Bjorg* Blame yourself, father, who invited all these mad cocks to the same party.

*Stentor* Don't you want any of them for your husband then?

*Bjorg* I made up my mind last week already.

*Stentor* Why didn't you say anything? Whom have you chosen then?

*Bjorg* The sons of Torleif.

*Stentor* Which one of them?

*Bjorg* All four.

*Stentor (horrified)* All four?

*Bjorg* All four, just because you tried to burn them to death. I will leave your home today, father. Don't count on ever seeing me again.

*Stentor (desperate)* But they are the worst party on Iceland! They have nothing! They are homeless and hopeless and without any means! My daughter! You can't be serious! *(She is gone already.)*

Gone. *(The fighting goes on among the men without retarding.)*

Thorsten, how would you suggest that we resolve this?

*Thorsten* Stentor, you invited all these young bulls yourself. Only you could dissolve their party. *(leaves with Gerd)*

*Stentor (clasps his head. The unstoppable turmoil goes on. Curtain.)*

Scene 4. A cave in the mountains.  
Bjorg dresses the wounds of the sons of Torleif.

*Bjorg* Don't complain. You all got a wife at least.  
*Stenleif (morosely)* We are not complaining.  
*Bjorn* We didn't ask for a wife.  
*Leif* Don't complain, Bjorn.  
*Torgny* Everything is that lousy Stentor's fault.  
*Bjorg* You should thank him for having begotten me.  
*Bjorn (angry)* We didn't ask for you!  
*Leif* Shut up, Bjorn!  
*Bjorn* No, I can't stand it any longer! What kind of settlement is this? She can't be the wife of all four of us, can she?  
*Torgny (innocently)* Why not?  
*Bjorn* There are four of us, stupid!  
*Stenleif* We should be happy for not being five.  
*Bjorg* That's right, Stenleif.  
*Bjorn* But how in Odin's name could it work practically!  
*Leif* No one thought of that.  
*Torgny* That would be up to her to arrange.  
*Bjorg* I agree with you, Torgny.  
*Bjorn* Don't suck out, Torgny! I could never know a woman who has been known by all my brothers!  
*Bjorg (calmly)* And why not, Bjorn?  
*Bjorn (beside himself)* Why not? Because...  
*Bjorg* Because you would burst of jealousy. Is that what you mean?  
*Bjorn* Yes!  
*Leif (after a pause)* That's a stumbling block indeed. How did you plan to get us over that detail, Bjorg?  
*Bjorg* It's very simple. I would never have joined you if I hadn't thought it all out from the beginning. I will be a good wife to all four of you, but not all of you at the same time. You have to take turns. Therefore I will be Leif's wife the first year, then Stenleif's wife for a year, then Bjorn's for a year, then Torgny's for a year, and then again Leif's for a year, and so on. Thus I am your wife only every fourth year, and in the periods of three years in between you will have to content yourselves with being grass-widowers. And woe betide you if you are unfaithful to me!  
*Bjorn (after a pause)* Those are hard terms, Bjorg.  
*Bjorg* Those are my terms.  
*Leif* I think we accept.  
*Bjorg* You can only accept such terms if you really love me all four of you. If you all accept it I will know that you love me.  
*Torgny* We accept.  
*Stenleif* Yes, I accept also.

*Bjorn (with a sigh)* Yes.

*Bjorg* Good! Then we are all happy and content. Well, what are you waiting for? Weren't you going to build me a house?

*Bjorn (leaves)* You are well off, Leif, who got her first.

*Leif* Love is timeless, Bjorn.

*Stenleif (leaves)* Happy honeymoon, Leif. (*Torgny follows.*)

*Bjorg (after a pause)* Well, Leif, what are you waiting for?

*Leif* What are *you* waiting for?

*Bjorg* That you should go out and build me a house.

(*Leif dutifully walks out.*)

There! Now at least I am happily married!

## Act II Scene 1. At the sons of Thorsten.

*Thorsten* Well, my sons, what did you learn from your visit to your cousins?

*Mård* They have accomplished miracles in less than half a year. Their new farm is more splendid than most, they rapidly constructed stalls, a barn and a pig pen, they lack nothing, and in addition they have the most beautiful woman of Iceland for their wife.

*Thorsten* Yes, I heard only good things about their diligence and constructive eagerness. They are without doubt four of the most qualified sons of Iceland. But I asked you what you learned from your visit.

*Erik* In addition to that, father, your friend Stentor has changed sides and become their best friend and protector. He is now doing everything for them.

*Thorsten* That's natural. They did win his daughter.

*Ulf* But suppose, father, that the sons of Torleif and Stentor now join hands against us? Stentor has probably confessed everything to them about the effort to burn them out.

*Thorsten* That venture was perhaps the greatest mistake of your lives, my sons. You were only dishonoured by it, while they got Bjorg into the bargain.

*Sten* It's so damned unfair!

*Thorsten* Is it, Sten?

*Sten* Yes! They were outcast without means, and yet they succeeded in building the finest farm on Iceland. We should immediately get across the strait and set it on fire!

*Thorsten* Why, Sten?

*Sten* Because it is so damned unfair that they should just have it so good and only be rewarded whatever they do, while we always have to draw the shortest straw. I was the one who loved Bjorg, and she preferred four mediocrities to me!

*Thorsten* And for that you wish to burn down the farm of your cousins and her?

*Sten* Yes! You can't guess how well fashioned it was, father! It was perfectly adapted after the natural gorges and hills around there, it could resist any slides and

avalanches and deluvions, they always have the sun in the south while they erected perfect windshields against all storms that could surprise them, their homestead is ingeniously constructed and more beautiful than any fort in the North, everything they have built shows off creative joy and rich innovations without comparison. Why should they have everything and we be just left aside as if we were the incompetent parasites?

*Thorsten* You have no right to nourish any grudge against your cousins just because they succeeded in turning their misfortune to the opposite. And to take revenge on them only for jealousy would be the absolutely most stupid thing you could do. You must learn from them instead and turn it to your own advantage.

*Mård* You would be stupid indeed, Sten, to set fire to their farm for nothing and thereby perhaps also kill Bjorg and turn all Iceland against you.

*Erik* Bjorg is their force and life insurance. No one wishes them any harm any more because of Bjorg.

*Ulf* What is it you want, Sten?

*Sten* I want Bjorg!

*Mård* Then you must first excel your cousins in slyness.

*Sten* How

*Ulf* Is it possible?

*Erik* It has to work. We must prove ourselves better than the sons of Torleif.

*Sten* Yes, but how?

*Thorsten* You will get nowhere in your petty discussions. I will tell you what I intend to do. I will arrange a great reconciliation party here at home to which all the leading men of Iceland and also Stentor and your cousins shall be invited.

Welcome, brother-in-law! (*enter Bjarne*)

*Bjarne* Thank you. I just heard about the coming festivities when I was out speaking with Gerd. How are you, my nephews?

*Erik* Thank you, well.

*Ulf* You are perhaps the right man to help us.

*Bjarne* With what?

*Ulf* You'll hear. (*signs to him to listen to Thorsten.*)

*Thorsten* Yes, Bjarne, we are preparing a great reconciliation party, the purpose of which is to make it clear to all Iceland that all rumours about the enmity between my sons and their cousins with Stentor of the Field are false. When the party is over everyone shall know that the sons of Thorsten and the sons of Torleif are living together again like brothers without a trace of any squabble, and the seal on the eternal friendship is Stentor of the Field, whose daughter nowadays is the wife of my nephews and the sister-in-law of my sons.

*Bjarne* That sounds a little too optimistic, brother-in-law.

*Thorsten* Do you have anything against it?

*Bjarne* Not at all, but I know your sons.

*Thorsten* Are you prejudiced about them,?

*Bjarne* Not at all, but I might be able to help them.

Erik            Father, go out, and let's hear what uncle Bjarne could have on his mind.

Thorsten       You are really doing me a favour, Bjarne, if you help my sons on to do what is right.

Bjarne         What is your wish about them?

Thorsten       That they would get rid of their hatred.

Sten            Go out now, father.

Thorsten       Very well. I will leave you alone with Bjarne.  
*(at the exit)* So, Gerd, I think your brother now could turn our sons to better thoughts.  
*(closes the door behind.)*

Bjarne         First of all, my nephews, you have to be kind to your cousins.

Ulf             And why would we be that?

Bjarne         Bewcause I have a plan. We will invite them for a game of dice.  
*(makes a sign to the brothers to come closer. He starts whispering among them.)*

## Scene 2. At the sons of Torleif.

Leif            What are you doing here, Sten?

Sten            My brother, I come in humility to invite you for a recociliation. My father wishes to reconcile himself with the entire family of his brother, and we his sons wish to do the same. To seal this great reconciliation my father arranges a feast to which all prominent men of our country now are invited. And you will get everything back which we in our recklessness bereft you of.

Bjorn          Don't trust him. There is some treachery behind.

Sten            Are you so suspicious, brother?

Stenleif       Don't call him brother, you insolent and crawling rat! Do you think we could take your feigned humility for anything else than playacting?

Leif            Brother, take it easy. Let's not unnecessarily taint our own hospitality. Sten has after all come here without weapons and is therefore most welcome. But this change of mind comes as a surprise. We expected nothing less than eternal enmity from you after your brave effort to set fire to us all.

Sten            We didn't do it. It was Stentor.

Stenleif       He is lying! Hasn't Stentor honestly confessed to us that he received money form you to burn us out?

Leif            The money controlling the deed is more powerful than the arm of the deed, Sten.

Sten            Stentor is sly and excludes no means in his calculations. He lies and makes up things when it suits him. He is also welcome to our party.

Leif            I see no reason why we should decline, Sten, but for safety's sake I think we will come armed.

Stenleif       We can expect nothing good from your family.

Sten            You won't need to come armed.

Bjorn *(suspicious)* What is then the hatch?

*Leif (after a pause)* Bjorn is right. What's the real meaning of it all, Sten?

*Torgny* You have to reveal everything. Or else we will not come.

*Sten* Very well, brothers, as the highlight of the festivities we have the honour to invite you, Leif, to a combat with me without weapons.

*Leif* What do you mean by a combat without weapons?

*Sten* A game of dice.

*Leif* I don't play games.

*Sten* It's just a play. You acquired great wealth and honour by your arduous work, and together with everything you will get back from our father you and your brothers will become quite equal with me and my brothers. You only have one advantage to us, and that is Bjorg.

*Leif* You wish to play for her?

*Bjorn* She is ours!

*Torgny* We will never let her go!

*Sten* Calm down! The game is just a play to crown our new friendship and to renew the memories of our common childhood. We both have much money and property to wage, so we need hardly dare to wage any meat. Further, all the foremost men of Iceland will witness the game and control that no rules are broken. The wages will be voluntary, and anyone may break the game at any time. What do you say?

*Leif* Hem!

*Bjorn* Don't trust him.

*Stenleif* I suspect the vilest of all traps.

*Torgny* He wants to tempt us from home just to put our farm on fire.

*Leif* That would turn all Iceland against him.

*Sten* It will just be a friendly game for the sake of excitement instead of more violent fights, nothing else. What do you say?

*Leif* We will come for the sake of your father, Sten. He has arranged it, and we trust and believe him although we don't trust you.

*Sten* And what about the game of dice? Do you accept the challenge, or are you yellow?

*Leif* Of course I accept it. Challenges must be accepted, and to refuse a challenge is cowardice.

*Sten* Good. (*offers his hand*) You are most heartily welcome.

*Leif (accepts Sten's hand with some hesitation)* When?

*Sten* On Odin's day in eight days, at noon.

*Leif* We will be there.

*Stenleif* But woe betide you if we will regret it!

*Sten* You will never forget it all your life, I promise. (*leaves*)

*Torgny* What did he mean by that?

*Leif* We shall see. One thing is certain though, my brothers, and that is that we face a challenge, which might be the greatest of our lives.

*Bjorn* What do you think we might expect?

*Leif* We can have no idea. Their father surely means only well, but Sten could very well manipulate his intentions to something far worse than Stentor's sauna.

*Stenleif* Shall we bring Bjorg?

*Leif* Never. She will guard the farm. When evil is involved, which it always is when Sten feigns benevolence, the women must be kept out. And we will need a fire watcher.

Scene 3. The feast at the sons of Thorsten.

An immense banquet is served outdoors.

Everyone is well fed and drunk and in perfectly good moods.

*Thorsten (rising from the high seat)* It's a great joy for me to have you all gathered here, especially since none is absent of all invited. A feast of reconciliation is something all too rare here on Iceland, since our tribe seems to carry the curse to find an arch enemy in every close kinsman of his. If this is a result of the climate or our democratic system and order I cannot decide, but I can't believe it's because of some sick mental inheritance when I hear so many healthy and joyful, young and strong voices here around this happy banquet. May this feast of reconciliation become a turning point in the history of all our bloody family feuds! I intend to make a good example myself by here announcing to all of you that I have accepted Christianity.

*(general astonishment)*

*Various voices* It will hardly make any difference.

Is he going to preach now as well?

The old man has gone balmy.

Thorsten Blind is getting old and foolish.

*Thorsten* I hear all your jeering comments, young men, but I promise you that you will all have followed my example within a hundred years.

*Various voices* We don't live that long.

What good does that do us in a hundred years.

He thinks a Christian body is better than a human body.

*Stentor (rising)* You are all young and bitchy stallions valuing your bravado most of all, I am sure, and I might perhaps myself be most of all against Christianity here on Iceland, since I can't view it as anything else but an effort by foreign priests to rob us of our values, but have you all forgotten already the excellent food and drink so generously provided for us by our host? Have you already forgotten that this is an unparalleled feast of reconciliation? Instead of waiting for someone to rise and thank for the dinner he rose himself to deliver a warming speech of thanks to you all for just being here. Such an example of good will, I assure you all, you will never hear again in the future. Thereby I wish to raise my cup with a toast to the host and his faithful eyes of Gerd his wife, with a sincere thanks for an unforgettable party.

*(raises his cup. All heartily share the toast.)*

*Various voices* The party isn't over yet.



The best part remains.

We demand sports!

Wasn't Sten supposed to have a friendly fight with Leif?

*Thorsten (rising again)* All violence is hereby banned forever from our farm. Leif son of Torleif has accepted a challenge though from our Sten to an exciting game of dice, which you will all be able to witness.

*Various voices* You can play dice at home.

What kind of nonsense is this?

What are the wages?

Bjorg, of course!

Then it could be really exciting!

*Sten (rising)* To avoid all risks for the game to derail into atrocities, since you all know that I and Leif have had difficulties in tolerating each other, I have given over the dice to my uncle Bjarne, who thereby will play in my place. Do you accept it, Leif?

*Leif* A wise decision, considering your violent temper.

*Various voices* Could this be correct?

It will be correct if Leif accepts it.

*Torgny* Don't do it, Leif.

*Bjarne* Are you afraid of me, Torgny son of Torleif?

*Bjorn (to Stenleif)* Bjarne has travelled widely and collected many secret tricks. He could be dangerous to Leif.

*Stenleif* Don't do it, Leif.

*Bjarne* Leif may pull out of the game whenever he pleases, as soon as he doesn't dare to continue.

*Leif* I accept the conditions.

*Bjarne (exposes the dice)* You may all examine the dice, if you want to.

*Bjorn (to Leif)* Bjarne has been at the imperial court of Germany where he learned many bad tricks.

*Leif (back)* Then I am warned and will be on my guard.

*A voice* A young strong man against a crooked old man in a silly game of dice. What disappointment!

*another* It could become interesting indeed. Bjarne is a sly old fox and difficult to see through. It could be an intriguing showdown of souls if nothing else.

*Bjarne* I hereby leave it to Leif to always make the first throw as long as the game continues. Let us make room here in the middle of the three tables of the party so that all may see everything clearly and well, and we will call out the results of the throws every time, and anyone should be able to control everything.

*Leif* You have a reputation, Bjarne, of being initiated in the black arts. Magic is not allowed this time.

*Bjarne (laughs)* Ha-ha-ha! Are you superstitious, Leif son of Torleif? I am not. In a game like this any trick is impossible. Neither is it a question of luck but of skill. If you have the right attitude to the game you win. If you lose yourself in the game for the sake of the game you lose the game. That's how simple it is. So let us poise our

psychic powers against each other. Let's begin. Since you have the first throw, you will also make the first wages.

*Leif (produces two silver copins)* I wage two coins of silver.

*Bjarne* A prudent wage. You may win.

*Various voices* Leif takes it easy.

He is right in doing so.

Two silver coins is the lowest fee for entering any real game of dice.

*(Leif throws the dice.)*

*Leif (elated)* Five and six.

*Bjarne (throws the dice)* Six and six. I have won.

*Leif (surprised)* I wage the same again.

*Bjarne* And I double it.

*Leif* Very well. I call. *(throws the dice)*

*(sorry)* Two and two.

*Bjarne (throws the dice)* Two and one. You have won.

*(cheers among the guests)*

*Leif* I wage everything.

*Bjarne* I call.

*Leif (throws the dice)* Four and five.

*Bjarne (throws the dice)* Three and six. Tie.

*Leif (throws)* One and six.

*Bjarne (throws)* Three and five. I have won.

*(all are satisfied)*

*Various voices* It seems all correct.

If they continue doubling their bets it could develop into an interesting game.

*Bjarne* I wage all my gains.

*Leif* I call. *(throws the dice)(proud)* Six and six.

*Bjarne (throws)* Six and six. Tie.

*Leif (throws)* Two and five.

*Bjarne (throws)* Six and three. I have won. I wage it all again.

*Leif (to his brothers)* How much money did we bring?

*Bjorn* We have enough. Just make your bets.

*Leif* Good. I call. *(throws the dice)* Six and one.

*Bjarne (throws)* Four and four. I have won. I wage it all again.

*Leif* I call. *(throws)* Three and five.

*Bjarne (throws)* Four and four. Tie.

*Leif (throws)* Three and two.

*Bjarne (throws)* One and four. Tie again.

*Leif (throws)* Four and four.

*Bjarne (throws)* Six and three. I have won again. I wage it all again.

*Leif* I call. *(throws)* Six and three.

*Bjarne (throws)* Five and five. I have won. I wage it all again.

*Leif* I am on. *(throws)* Four and four.

Bjarne (*throws*) Five and four. I have won.

Bjorn The cash is finished, Leif.

Bjarne You don't need to wage any more, Leif. Let's take it easy. We will play for all you have lost. If you win you are back where you started.

Leif Good. (*throws*) One and one.

Bjarne (*throws*) Snake eyes here also. Tie.

Leif You can't constantly win, Bjarne. (*throws*) Two threes.

Bjorn What happens if he loses?

Stenleif We will owe Bjarne the double.

Bjarne (*throws*) Two and four. Tie.

Leif (*throws*) Five and one.

Bjarne (*throws*) You get bad results, Leif. Six and one. I have won. Shall we go on?

Leif You can't win all the time, Bjarne. I want to go on until I win for once. Then we can talk about quitting.

Bjarne Good. I wage all my winnings from you.

Leif I call. We do have money, don't we, brothers? Today we received half of all grounds and properties of our uncle!

Bjorn Don't be presumptuous. Leif!

Leif (*throws*) Two and one.

Bjarne (*throws*) Two threes. I have won. I wage all I have won from you again, so that you can get it all back in one single throw.

Leif I am on. (*throws*) Three and six.

Bjarne (*throws*) Five and five. I have won.

Leif This is incredible!

Bjarne But true. Do you want to quit?

Leif And admit defeat? Never!

Bjarne In that case I wage again all my winnings from you. It now amounts to about 10,000 silver coins, if my count is correct.

Leif Your count agrees with mine. We have enough. I call. (*throws the dice*)

Torgny Stop it now, Leif!

Leif Too late. Six and four.

Bjarne (*throws*) Five and five. Tie.

Leif (*throws*) Four and four.

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and three. I have won. I wage it all again.

One among the guests Twenty thousand at stake! (*Eyvind enters discreetly.*)

another It's getting exciting.

Leif I call. (*throws*) Six and five.

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and six. I have won.

Leif You are inhuman.

Bjarne Not at all. But you might be unlucky.

Leif Never! You must lose some time!

Bjarne There must be a first time some time. I offer you again everything you lost.

Leif I call. (*throws*) Three and five.

Bjarne (*throws*) Five and four. I have won. I wage everything and the profit.

Eyvind Eighty thousand at stake, brothers!

Leif What are you doing here, Eyvind Homeless?

Eyvind I am here on a visit. Is that forbidden?

Leif Are you a brother of theirs?

Eyvind No, but I owe them my moral support, for they sometimes lend me theirs.

Bjarne Don't talk but play.

Leif (*throws*) Four and three.

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and three. I have won.

Bjorn This is going too far.

Torgny Don't wage any more, Leif!

Bjarne If you wish to go on you will have to wage something else than money now, Leif, or else you wage more than you own in spite of your uncle's properties. I offer you as usual everything you have lost.

Leif We have sheep. I wage all our sheep. (*throws*) Three and six.

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and four. I have won. I offer you everything again including your sheep.

Leif We have swine. I wage all our swine. (*throws*) Three and five.

Bjarne (*throws*) Four and five. I have won.

Leif We have horses and cows. I wage our horses and cows. (*throws*) Four and four.

Bjarne (*throws*) Three and six. I have won.

Leif We have oxen and barns. I wage our oxen and barns. (*throws*) Two and six.

Bjarne (*throws*) Two and six. Tie.

Leif (*throws*) Five and three.

Bjarne (*throws*) Four and five. I have won.

Leif We have farmhouses. I wage all our buildings except our manor. (*throws*) Two and five.

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and two. I have won.

Leif I wage the manor. (*throws*) Five and three.

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and four. I have won.

Leif I wage all our lands. (*throws*) Six and five. At last!!

Bjarne (*throws*) Six and – (*waits for the dice to finish rolling*) – six! I have won.

Sten Now you have nothing further to wage, Leif.

Ulf You have waged and lost everything! You owe nothing any more!

Bjarne You'll have everything back, Leif, if you wage your youngest brother Torgny.

Leif You have to lose at least once, Bjarne! (*quiets his brothers*) Then I will quit. I wage Torgny. (*throws*) Three and five. Dull numbers!

Bjarne (*kastar*) Six and three. I have won. You can wage Bjorn against Torgny and regain all you have lost.

Leif Done! (*throws*) Two and four.

*Bjarne (throws)* Two fives. I have won. You can wage the wild Stenleif, whom no one can brace, except you with your intelligence.

*Leif* Good. I wage Stenleif. *(throws)* Three and three.

*Bjarne (throws)* Two and six. I have won even Stenleif. What do you have left to wage against all you have lost including your brothers?

*Leif* I have myself. I can wage myself. I wage myself and my life. *(throws)* Two fives.

*Bjarne (shakes the dice long in his hand)* Let's see now what your life is worth. *(throws)* Six and five. Eleven eyes of the dice. Congratulations! That was all the eyes except one.

*Sten* You only have Bjorg left now, Leif.

*Torgny* You must not wage her, Leif!

*Sten* Are you or Leif the one who plays, Torgny son of Torleif?

*Thorsten* This so called game has long since transcended all limits of decency. Break off the game at once!

*Bjarne* Only Leif has the authority to break it off. Do you dare one more round, Leif, or do you withdraw after having played all your wife's other men except yourself? You will get everything back and the double if you win.

*Bjorn* Don't do something, Leif, you will later come to regret!

*Stenleif* Bjarne must have cheated! You can't win so many rounds consecutively!

*Bjarne (rises and walks around with the dice)* The game has been open all the way, you have all been able to watch us use exactly the same pair of dice all the time, here they are, examine them closely and confirm whether we have played honourably or not, and Leif has all the time had the liberty to pull out, but he hasn't wanted to. He always wanted to carry on.

*Leif* I have lost everything including myself except the very last thing. The game has gone too far to be stopped before it has reached the end of the line. I believe Bjarne has played honestly. No one can accuse him of cheating, and his last offer is generous. I call by waging Bjorg. Give me the dice!

*Torgny* You have no right to play out another human being, Leif!

*Sten* Is it you or he who is playing, Torgny son of Torleif?

*Bjorn* Torgny is right. Leif had no right to play out neither us nor Bjorg. He could have played out himself, but he didn't own the rest of us.

*Sten* You have no say, small fry, for you are already played out with your big brother! You are all slaves under me! His last way is to play out even Bjorg to us!

*Stenleif* Shut up, you barking hound dog, or I will cleave you down to your hips!

*Sten* Hold him before he resorts to violence!

*Leif (makes an averting gesture)* Quiet, all of you! I have to concentrate!  
*(throws the dice)* Six and one.

*Bjarne* The highest and the lowest. I prefer something in between.

*(throws the dice)* Three and four. Tie.

*Gerd (to Thorsten)* Break off the game, husband, before it is too late!

*Thorsten (calms her)* It is already too late. The game has to be played out.

*Leif (throws)* Six and one again!

*Bjarne* The most extreme numbers only give a mediocre result. *(throws)* Two and five. Tie again.

*Torgny* I can't bear it! *(rushes out)*

*Sten (to his own)* Where did he go?

*Ulf* Out to throw some water.

*Sten* Make sure he doesn't get away.

*Leif (throws)* Four and five. Somewhat better.

*Bjarne* You are improving, friend! Suddenly you have won!

*(throws)* Three and six. Tie again.

*Leif (shakes the dice)* Where did Torgny go ?

*Bjorn* He needed to go out for a vomit out of disgust for this party.

*Leif (drops the dice unintentionally)* One and one! I dropped them!

*Sten* The dice are cast! Laid card lies!

*Bjarne (shakes the dice calmly and throws them. Casually stating:)* Six and six. I have won.

*Sten* Erik, Ulf and Mård! Get across the strait immediately and fetch Bjorg! She must get here!

*Leif (crushed, hides his face in his hands)* We are lost!

*Thorsten (rising)* The game is now over. I hereby disqualify the game.

*Sten* Disqualified, father? How can you do such a thing? Everyone here has been witnessing the absolute honesty of the game!

*Thorsten* No one has any right to gamble away other people's lives by dice.

*Sten* You should have said so before it was done. What is done is done and can't be undone! I call you all present here as witnesses that the game was open and honest all the way! It was Leif himself who all the time insisted on carrying on the game! Am I right or wrong?

*Eyvind* You are right, Sten. No one can accuse your uncle of having cheated.

*Bjarne* I regret your bad luck, Leif. Show now that you are a good loser!

*Stenleif* You old skinny scarecrow, you have tempted him to lose his head by your base tricks and black arts! You should have your head cut off without any further!

*Sten* You are in another man's house, Stenleif, and have no right to violate our hospitality to you aliens. I ask you all, sons of Torleif, if anyone of you could claim that Bjarne played falsely?

*(The sons of Torleif can't say anything.)*

*Leif* Everything seems to have been fair play. Yet something unexplainable has happened in this game which seems unnatural. How did you do it, Bjarne? Explain your method!

*Bjarne* According to your measures I was just plain lucky.

*Leif* You denied yourself the existence of luck and bad luck when we started the game.

*Bjarne* In that case it was skill.

*Leif* Who has ever been able to show skill in games of pure hazard?

*Sten* You have seen it demonstrated now, if you haven't been blind, Leif son of Torleif.

*Leif* In that case I have been blind.

*Bjarne* That's probably the only explanation. You only gambled for yourself, Leif, while I gambled for others, for my nephews. You entered the game for the sake of the game, while I kept to my purpose.

*Leif* Still the outcome of the game defies all logic.

*Bjarne* So do all strange things in this world. (*enter Mård*)

*Sten* Well, where is Bjorg?

*Mård* She didn't want to come.

*Sten* That doesn't matter! Didn't you take her by force?

*Mård* Ulf grabbed her hair and pulled her along. Then I rushed here in advance. They are on their way.

*Ulf (enters with Bjorg, dragging her by her hair)* I had to drag her myself every inch of the way. She refused to cooperate. (*throws her down on the floor*)

*Björn* Bjorg!

*Bjorg (with torn clothes and dishevelled hair)* Don't touch me! Is it true, sons of Torleif, that you have played me out on dice?

*Leif* I did it, Bjorg, after having played out all my brothers.

*Bjorg* And what about you? Did you wage me before or after you had waged yourself?

*Leif* After.

*Bjorg* So you didn't even own me when you played me out. So you had no right to wage me.

*Leif* That is quite right. Only you among all of us still own yourself and your own freedom.

*Sten* You are all witnesses that we honestly won Bjorg by fair play! She belongs to us now!

*Thorsten* Even if it were true what you said, Sten, you would never have her, for by your means to get her you would only lose her.

*Gerd* Can no one dispose of that misfortune Sten, who would only bring my entire family into his own misfortune if he is allowed to continue!

*Thorsten* Gerd! You are speaking about your own son!

*Gerd* I know! He will be the death of us all if he may live!

*Sten* She is hysterical.

*Leif (rising from the floor)* Sten, if you insist on actually having won Bjorg and all of us with everything we own, there can be nothing but the most bitter enmity and hatred between us forever. And we have many friends. Consider your intentions! It could be the hardest tribal feud on Iceland ever!

*Thorsten* Enough! The game was ridiculous and absurd from the start. Take everything back, dear nephews, and consider the game a play that never happened. The only purpose of this reunion was peace, unity and reconciliation!

*Bjarne* I suggest one last round of the game.

*Leif*           We have nothing left to wage, Bjarne.  
*Bjarne*        Even if we make peace I don't think there could ever be any lasting peace between my nephews and you. They are too staunch, and you are too clever. Therefore I suggest this wager. If I lose, my nephews must go into exile for twelve years. Then they may return but must then live one year incognito without being recognized. If they are recognized in the thirteenth year they must go for another exile for twelve years. The same fate will be yours if you lose, Leif. The properties of you and my nephews will go to the winner. What about this proposition?  
*Sten*           Splendid!! We can never live in peace with each other anyway.  
*Leif*           And what happens to Bjorg?  
*Bjarne (lowers his head)* We all have to submit to the fact that you did not own yourself when you waged her. She is free to follow whoever she chooses.  
*Bjorg*         I follow the losers.  
*Eyvind*        And I follow the winners.  
*Bjarne*        Thereby neither the winners will not be entirely without losses nor the winners completely without gains. What do you think of the wager, Leif?  
*Leif*         We have nothing to lose. But you may have the first throw this time, Bjarne.  
                                *(falls back on his knees on the gaming floor again.)*  
*Bjarne (takes the dice, shakes them and falls down on his knees on the floor.)*  
                                As you wish, friend. *(throws the dice. Does not comment the result.)*  
*Many (rushing forth to look)* One and three!  
*several*        That's the end of Bjarne's luck!  
*some*          Beat him now, Leif!  
*Leif (throws the dice)* Then we would lose Bjorg. *(watches the dice without a word)*  
*all (rushing forth to look)* Two and two!  
*several*        Tie!  
*A few*         Throw them again!  
*Bjarne (seizes the dice)* At least we are even now, Leif. *(throws)*  
*many*          Three and three!  
*several*        That's easy to beat!  
*some*          Beat him now, Leif, so that we may slay the intolerable sons of Thorsten!  
*Leif*          Friends, don't forget that you are guests under the roof of the sons of Thorsten!  
  *(throws the dice)*  
*many*          Four and three!  
*several*        You can do better, Leif!  
*some*          You have lost your zest!  
*Bjarne*         We probably both have. *(throws)*  
*many*          One and *(waiting for the dice)* – six! Tie again!  
*several*        Throw again!  
*A few*         You have to win now, Leif!  
*Leif (throws)* It really makes no difference to me. I am no longer master of my own wishes.



*Bjarne* That's always the result of all conflicts, Leif.  
*many* Six and three!  
*several* Now is your chance, Leif!  
*A few* He has to lose now!  
*Bjarne* I almost wish I did. (*throws*)  
*many* Six and (*waiting*) – four! Bjarne has won!  
*several* O no!  
*a few* This is too sad!  
*Leif* I give in, Bjarne. You have won. We leave Iceland and bring Bjorg with us.  
*Sten* Yes, do so!  
*Thorsten* Wait a moment! Something is not right here!  
*Torgny (entering suddenly)* Leif! Stenleif! Bjorn! They have set our farm on fire!  
*Leif (rising)* Who set fire to our farm?  
*Bjorg* It must have been Erik. He remained after Ulf.  
*Leif* It was the finest farm of Iceland. You had it from us for nothing. Is that how you take care of the heritage of others, sons of Thorsten?  
*Thorsten* It must not be true!  
*Torgny* Get out all of you and look if you don't believe me!  
*Leif* Torgny! Björn! Stenleif! Come along! We can't stay here! (*leaves hurriedly*)  
*Sten* Drive out the base intruders!  
*Stenleif* Do you see this handful of dust that I take from this earth? Do you mark how I throw it at you? Next time it will be a cloud of arrows, spears and weapons aimed at your rotten hearts, damned sons of Thorsten! (*leaves*)  
*Bjorg* Ulf, for once having grabbed my hair I will one day wash off your dirty hands in the blood of your own heart. (*leaves*)  
*Bjorn* Uncle Thorsten, I regret that your feast of reconciliation didn't lead to anything better than eternal irreconcilable hatred the flame of which never can be put out before you are all dead. (*leaves*)  
*Torgny* You have violated our wife and burnt our home. Ask the norns what this might mean for your outcome. (*leaves*)  
*Thor (one of the guests, after a long pause)* That was a sad party.  
*Thorsten* My sons! Why do you insist on breaking your old father's heart at any price! Gerd! Lead me out! (*breaks up with Gerd. All the guests do the same.*)  
*Bjarne* My nephews, I have done what I could for you. Now you will have to manage by yourselves. (*leaves after his sister*)  
*Ulf (after a pause)* We stand alone and don't even have Bjorg for any comfort.  
*Eyvind* What is Bjorg? A women for four men! What do you call such a woman? You call her strumpet! And you cry for such a loss? Shame on you! The whole world is crowded with such strumpets! Be men, my brothers, and arm yourselves instead for the coming revenge of the sons of Torleif, which is sure to come one day!  
*Mård* It's probably only Eyvind Homeless who can help us now.

*Ulf* Come, my brothers. Let's go and take care of what is left of our cousins and try to get organized! We are after all the richest men on Iceland now, and there are sure to be many women who want us now.

*Sten* Bjorg is the only thing we have lost.

*Eyvind* Yes, all you have lost is a strumpet, and on top of that you have got rid of your cousins for at least twelve years. Enjoy the twelve years, increase your riches, get yourselves families, and live it up!

*Sten (after a solemn moment)* After this party, that is more easily said than done.

Act III Scene 1. In the wilderness.

*Thor (catches up with them)* Leif! Stenleif! Sons of Torleif! Stop!

*Leif* Who are you?

*Thor* Call me Thor. I wish to follow you.

*Leif* Why? We are exiled from the human community.

*Thor* You aren't at all. The sons of Thorsten are the condemned ones.

*Stenleif* They are the ones who condemned us.

*Thor* A mistake has been committed. It was you, Leif, who won over Bjarne, but no one has realized that.

*Leif* Bjarne beat me with six-four against six-three.

*Tor* Wrong! Who threw the dice first in the last round?

*Leif* Wasn't it I?

*Tor* No! In the beginning of the round you gave the initiative to Bjarne! You beat him several times! But the others were so occupied by the game that they automatically took part as if it was still you who had the initiative, they took over the whole game without realizing themselves their mistake, and everything looked as if you lost, while you in fact won over Bjarne again and again!

*Bjorn* He is right, Leif.

*Leif* Who are you, Thor?

*Thor* I am a colleague of Eyvind Homeless. I know who my mother was, but I have never known my father. Rumour says though that I could be an illegitimate son of your uncle.

*Leif* Our cousins won Eyvind, but we have won their own half brother Thor, who honours us in our exile with his friendship. Therefore you shall be called Thor Guest-Friend.

*Thor* You don't have to go into exile at all.

*Leif* We own nothing, our cousins have burnt our houses and taken all our weapons, we can't even defend ourselves, and whoever won the game we still remain exiled for twelve years and another twelve years if we are recognized the thirteenth.

*Thor* Remain on Iceland. Many are like me convinced that it was Bjarne and not you who lost the game. Many are prepared to protect you against the sons of Thorsten. They have made fools of themselves while all sympathies are on your side.

*Leif* If you are a half brother of the sons of Thorsten you are a traitor against them.

*Thor* I would rather betray unrighteous brothers than let down the unfairly treated. And in that case you are all the same wholly my blood cousins.

*Stenleif* That is actually true. I am the first one to greet you heartily welcome into our midst, Thor Guest-Friend! (*embraces him cheerfully*)

*Bjorn* But you can never be another husband of Bjorg's.

*Thor* Neither do I have any desire of that.

*Torgny* What do you desire then?

*Thor* To be Stenleif's armour-bearer.

*Bjorn* That's not asking too much.

*Leif* What do you say, Stenleif? Do you need an armour-bearer?

*Stenleif* Something tells me that this little young man could be the very man I will need in the hardest moment of my life.

*Leif* Then you are heartily welcome, guest-friend, in our outlawed and destitute company, now and forever, as our only true cousin.

*(The four brothers carry cheerily on as if they now suddenly were five.)*

## Scene 2. At the sons of Thorsten.

*Mård* Thor has joined the sons of Torleif.

*Sten (upset)* Thor? Our own half brother?

*Mård* Yes. And he is not alone.

*Sten* What do you mean, Mård? Out with it!

*Mård* After the game of dice and the fire to their farm, the sympathies of most able men are now on the side of the sons of Torleif. They need hardly leave Iceland.

*Sten* So they break our agreement? They ignore their ordered exile?

*Mård* That's how it seems.

*Sten* That means war.

*Mård* Yes, it does, and we are almost alone. Our only reliable moral support on Iceland is Eyvind Homeless.

*Sten* With him we can defend ourselves against all Iceland.

*Mård* We just need to get at the sons of Torleif. No one will challenge us if they are gone.

*Sten* That's true. They have to be killed! Every one of them!

*Mård* Including Thor?

*Sten* Especially Thor, who has betrayed us!

*Mård* And who will then get Bjorg?

*Sten* We can leave that slut to Eyvind to handle as he pleases.

*Mård* Do you think Ulf and Erik will agree to that? (*leaves*)

*Sten* I am the oldest son of the wealthiest man on Iceland.  
All the powers of manhood and natural advantages are on my side,  
I am even irresistible to all women but one,  
and still I am the loneliest man on Iceland.  
Father despizes me, avoids me and speaks condescendingly to me,  
as if I was something of a worm, and mother wants to see me dead.  
Now our half brother has failed me, and my own brothers have started doubting me.  
Who do I still have left? The wild Eyvind, this halfblood without ancestry,  
like nature itself defending me against humanity,  
and it feels with him by my side as if we could ravage all humanity.  
I have no other choice. Legally we won the game of dice in front of all Iceland,  
Bjorg and the sons of Torleif are legally our slaves,  
Erik was stupid enough to burn down a farm that could have been of  
great use to us if we had managed it better, that and Ulf's treatment of the lovely  
Bjorg has alone turned all the youth of Iceland against us. We are unfortunately  
presumptuous by nature, father and mother knew how to spoil us, we never had it  
difficult, and perhaps it was because we always had it so good that we started  
nourishing a bitter envy towards our cousins, who alone here on Iceland had it  
equally good. For they were better men than we and had a hardier education by  
wiser parents. We could never forgive them that.

Presumption breaks forth ever now and then in Ulf and Erik,  
and only Mård understands to channel surplus energy into careful calculation.  
Mård and Eyvind shall be my allies, Ulf and Erik will be our weapons.  
And perhaps we could use uncle Bjarne for necessary political manoeuvres,  
for if we are to manage against all Iceland we will need more than just muscles and  
brute force. Then we'll need a master of trickery like uncle Bjarne.

*Bjarne (enters)* Did you call for me?

*Sten* No, but stay anyway, uncle. We are facing a difficult task. According to  
the latest news the sons of Torleif will stay on Iceland to try to muster all valiant men  
against us and not without success.

*Bjarne* I know, dear nephew, but they are extremely clever. Many would gladly  
stand up for them with weapons and fighters, but according to my information they  
go instead for farms where they are not recognized. There they stay and take jobs as  
farm-workers and make themselves popular by which they bless the farm and the  
people they work with by their knowledge and constructive skills.

*Sten* I think we should look them up at once with a host of arms and finish  
them off before they have time to grow strong.

*Bjarne* That's exactly what they think you will do, and that's why I think they  
have chosen to live incognito as the servants of others. But I think it will be easy to  
find them anyway. Search for the most prosperous farm of Iceland, and there you  
will find a group of six people, five men and a woman, who work on that farm and  
who are the ones who have made it prosper. Then you can send an armed host  
against that farm and start some trouble for example by killing some sheep or

robbing some cattle. The people there are then forced to go out hunting for the cattle thieves, they will start the fight themselves, then it will be easy to cut down the natives and then to beset the sons of Torleif. But then you should not kill them. That would definitely turn all Iceland against your family. Instead you must force them into exile forever.

*Sten* A wise council, uncle. I will send out scouts all over Iceland. Soon we will find the farm that enjoyed the most obvious improvements this year.

### Scene 3. A simple farmhouse.

*Kare (comes rushing in)* Father, they have been at it again!

*Gunnar* It's the third week of villains ravaging among my sheep scaring off every groom and shepherd. Why do they torture us this way? My son, didn't you catch sight of them this time either?

*Kare* I saw some of them. They seem to be fighters, good riders and well equipped. They ride around with helmets covering their faces.

*Gunnar* I don't understand this. We have never done any man any harm. Could it then be base simple jealousy that has driven some neighbour out of his mind? We have been so incredibly affluent and prosperous ever since you, unknown friend, started working here as grooms.

*Stenleif* Let me ride out and take care of the thieves. With Kare by my side I will probably manage to drive them off for good.

*Gunnar* What can a simple work-man like you do against armed fighters?

*Stenleif* Trust me. I am sure we'll drive them off.

*Gunnar* Do you know who these villains are?

*Stenleif* I do have my suspicions.

*Gunnar* Do you know them? Could they be harassing us for your sake?

*Stenleif* It's possible.

*Gunnar* Kare, do you wish to ride out as this man's second hand?

*Kare* I don't know if I dare. I have never been fighting for serious before.

*Leif (enters)* What's up?

*Stenleif* They have found us out.

*Gunnar* This is getting more and more mysterious. Who are you really?

*Leif (on his knees)* We are just your humble faithful working servants, father Gunnar.

*Gunnar* Yes, I know that. But I was now asking for your identity. *(looks from one to the other)* And what kind of bullies keep pestering me to look for trouble with you?

*Bjorn (enters)* What is happening?

*Leif* The sons of Thorsten have found our hiding-place.

*Gunnar* The sons of Thorsten!

*Leif* Yes, father, they are the ones who wish to drive us out of Iceland and preferably have us killed before that.

*Gunnar* What do they want with you? Do they have a quarrel with you?

*Bjorn* They want to take away our wife from us.

*Gunnar* Your wife? Wasn't she your sister?

*Leif* Yes, we said so, to protect her.

*Gunnar* This is getting worse and worse all the time. (*rising*) Are you then deceivers?

*Bjorg (enters)* How upset you all look! What has happened?

*Leif* Yes, the local hooligans have been ravaging again among Gunnar's sheep.

*Gunnar* Are you, my good servant, dearest maid, a wife and not the sister of these five controversial men?

*Bjorg* No, father, I am only the wife of four of them.

*Gunnar* And who is it then who may not lie with you?

*Leif* It's our cousin, Thor Guest-Friend.

*Gunnar* So you are still all related with each other?

*Bjorn* Yes, father Gunnar. We are four brothers who have the same woman for a wife, and then we have a cousin.

*Gunnar (sits down)* How is it possible for this to work?

*Kåre* Father, don't worry. It's very simple. These four brothers are the sons of Torleif, of course!

*Gunnar* Are you then the sons of Torleif? And why then have you come here?

*Leif* To find some place to live in peace and quiet, since we needed time to organise ourselves for a vital resistance against our pursuers.

*Stenleif* The lousy sons of Thorsten took away our farm and lands and everything without right, and now they also want to kill us.

*Bjorn* They have now by scouting found out where we have gone, and now they want to tempt us out of here.

*Stenleif* I am well trained though and take upon me to chase them away.

*Gunnar (tired)* Yes, chase them away then, but if anything happens to Kare, every harm that has been done to him will be taken out of you on your body.

*Stenleif* But Kare didn't want to follow.

*Kare* Now when I know who the five of you are I am no longer afraid of anything. Everybody knows too well that Stenleif son of Torleif is the boldest and only invincible fighter on Iceland.

*Stenleif* Only Eyvind Homeless is sometimes my superior.

*Kare (smiling)* I doubt that! Come! What are we waiting for? (*Kare out with Stenleif*)

*Gunnar* If I had known it when you arrived I would never have received you. You have been of great service to me, though, and if you now also chase off the marauders from my lands I have nothing to complain of. On the contrary. And at the same time I understand how difficult your situation must be. Don't count on me helping you in your unavoidable war with the sons of Thorsten.

*Leif* We never did. But for what you have given us, moral support and a necessary sanctuary as a base for future operations, we are more than grateful and more happy than if you had given us a thousand fighters.

*Gunnar* You will have no more. You may remain as farm-workers as long as you need it, and I will completely forget everything that has been said here between us. For me you are still five brothers and one sister, that outward face will remain, if only you also chase off those horrible hooligans.

*Thor (enters)* I come from the fields. With great success Kare Gunnarsson and Stenleif have now put the cattle thieves in a fright, the brave Stenleif managed from his horseback to transform several of them into backbroken hedgehogs crawling on the ground like pincushions bleeding from a hundred arrows that penetrated their coats of mail. And they have given themselves away. Guess who is on his way here?

*all* No?

*Thor* Sten son of Thorsten himself in person and alone with your valiant son, father Gunnar, and the merry Stenleif.

*Gunnar* And my son? How did he manage?

*Thor* Without a single scratch like Stenleif.

*Gunnar* Thank heavens! Then I leave you here for your parley. I don't want to have anything to do with any of the lousy and damnable sons of Thorsten. (*leaves*)

*Thor* All Iceland says the same.

*Bjorn* I hear approaching horse hooves.

*Leif* Let's see now what Sten has to offer.

*Thor* Shouldn't we take him for a hostage?

*Leif* Never. We must demand peace and right, and that is all we can demand. If he refuses it he shall have war.

*Bjorn* Here they are. (*enter Stenleif, Kare and Sten.*)

*Stenleif* Look who I found out there!

*Leif* Welcome, Sten.

*Sten* Thank you.

*Leif* Kare, your father is out there and wishes to speak with you.

*Kare* May I not join you?

*Thor* Go out and ask your father. (*Kare leaves.*)

*Stenleif* Well! To the point!

*Sten* Thor, I see that you are here among our enemies.

*Thor* Rather justice among enemies than injustice at home.

*Sten* We never accepted you as a half brother. You have no status wherever you go.

*Leif* We accepted him though as our cousin, and as a cousin he is far better to us than the four false sons of Thorsten.

*Sten* Here he goes again.

*Stenleif* To the point! Present your arguments, Sten, son of Thorsten! What did you wish to speak about?

*Sten* It's not right that Thor should fight on your side. He is the greatest agitator on Iceland. At least a hundred fighters are constantly at his disposal. He is a half brother of ours and not of yours.

*Stenleif* But Sten, you just said that you never accepted him.

*Leif* So you don't want peace, Sten, son of Thorsten?

*Sten* You yourselves are disturbing the peace in making it impossible by remaining on Iceland in spite of the agreement reached in the eyes of all Iceland.

*Thor* Many have found reasonable objections against the way the game of dice was executed.

*Sten* That is irrelevant. Leif himself admitted the result, took the consequences and was allowed to keep Bjorg. So he has no further rights to any demands.

*Leif* So you don't want peace, Sten. So you want and demand and enforce a bloody war.

*Sten* You yourselves make it inevitable. But I do demand to have Thor back.

*Thor* With what right? Who owns me? Am I not allowed myself to choose on which side I will fight?

*Sten* You know very well that you dispose of considerable military forces and that your brothers against them would stand no chance.

*Thor* So you only want the command of my men? I am myself of no consequence?

*Sten* We demand your men, Thor. If you give them over to us you may fight on whatever side you please.

*Tor* Stenleif, Bjorn and Leif, do you want my men?

*Leif* We would by far prefer having you among us.

*Thor* Then you will get my men, Sten, but I will remain your enemy forever.

*Sten* We couldn't care less about what you do yourself. The only important thing is that you don't take your men on their side. I am satisfied with this settlement. The greater number is by far more important than the private man.

*Leif* Only the private man has any integrity, identity and dignity, though.

*Sten* Your soft words and your wisdom, Leif, is as usual just ordinary bullshit.

*Leif* Peace is all we want, which you have refused us, and thereby you make the war inevitable which will lay all the best men of Iceland in early undeserved graves. But we will give you another chance. Your word is not the last one. The last word is with your father, Thorsten Blind, who is still the sole owner of all your and our property.

*Sten* You have yourselves forfeited all that you owned! You have no say! You will never get anything! Legally you are dead!

*Stenleif* Listen to the dog barking.

*Bjorn* I rather think it comes from a bell-cow. So stupid and empty is the brain giving vent to such unintelligent blather.

*Sten* Only weapons have tongues strong enough for such a low conversation.

*(leaves in fury)*

*Thor* Away he goes.

*Leif* Brothers and cousin, our last hope is now Thorsten Blind. If he can't make peace any more, no one can.

*Bjorg* And not even a woman.

*Leif* No, Bjorg, not even a woman.



Act IV Scene 1. At the sons of Thorsten.

All the sons are present with Eyvind, Thorsten, Bjarne and Gerd. Enter Gunnar.

- Sten* Do you represent the sons of Torleif?
- Gunnar* Yes, I do, Gunnar Hakansson from the east side.
- Thorsten* Greetings, Gunnar Håkansson from the east. We are happy to have you here.
- Gunnar* I just hope it will lead to some positive result.
- Thorsten* We all hope so.
- Sten* What do you have to offer, Gunar Hakansson?
- Gunnar* Only what is fair: peace and justice.
- Sten* Is that all? We have heard that kind of trash before.
- Thorsten* Sten, leave the room.
- Sten* Why should I?
- Thorsten* I told you to leave the room.
- Gerd* Sten, your father has ordered you, and you must obey.
- Sten (as if he didn't understand anything)* As you wish, then. (*leaves*)
- Thorsten* Now we can start reasoning. I was convinced from the start that the game of dice was out of order, and most of those present on the occasion appear to share the same view. What Has Bjarne to say for himself?
- Bjarne* I played honestly. Leif however allowed himself to be completely carried away by the game. That's why he lost all the time. Then the entire congregation was also carried away by the game. They almost entirely took command of it. You can't take such an audience seriously when it afterwards wants to play the judge.
- Thorsten* I can't see any weak point in Bjarne's reasoning.
- Gunnar* Still you, Thorsten, who sees everything clearest of all, should have detected everything. Present at the game was Thor, your rumoured illegitimate son. He was one of your sons' closest men before and during the game, but afterwards he spontaneously joined the sons of Torleif. According to his testimony Leif won several times over Bjarne without anyone noticing it, because everyone was so excited by the game.
- Bjarne* Everyone agreed that I won in the last round and even Leif himself. The fact that he acknowledged me as the winner unanimously with everyone else is something you cannot alter long afterwards.
- Thorsten* Bjarne is unfortunately right. I regret that I could not observe what happened, but I heard the dice numbers being called out. In the last round I felt something was wrong but could not define it. I remember though that Bjarne finally won with six-four against Leif's six-three.
- Gunnar* But it was Bjarne who had the first throw and not Leif.
- Bjarne* Leif had the first throw throughout the game, didn't he, my nephews?
- Ulf, Erik* Yes, uncle, he did.
- Thorsten* I also seem to remember that he did.

*Gunnar* Word here stands against word, and I was not present myself. I am afraid we will reach no further on this point.

*Erik* So you can go home, Gunnar Hakansson!

*Torsten* Quiet, Erik, or I will turn you out as well!

*Gunnar* I have not come here to be insulted by your uneducated sons, Thorsten. I told the sons of Torleif from the start that I wanted nothing to do with them, and the same opinion is embraced by most who know them. Your sons however had no other neutral representative. But if they abuse me one more time my visit here is over.

*Thorsten* Next man who speaks hard against Gunnar Hakansson gets out! (*silence*)  
Well, back to business.

*Mård* What is it you want, Gunnar Hakansson?

*Gunnar* Peace on Iceland. The sons of Torleif want to remain on Iceland and live in peace with Bjorg without anyone giving them trouble.

*Ulf* Where?

*Gunnar* Anywhere. You own many houses and grounds. Give them just one of them with some ground around to till, and you will achieve peace on Iceland.

*Ulf* They have broken the law of exile. Therefore they are outlaws and must so remain!

*Gunnar* In that case you, your brothers, your parents and your uncle will have nothing else to expect than total war.

*Ulf* We will defend ourselves.

*Gunnar* You will be obliged to. But you are in a bad position and have no moral support or ground. You drove off the sons of Torleif without right and then burned the farm they had built on their own grounds outside yours.

*Ulf* They had lost everything in the game of dice! It was ours!

*Thorsten* Get out, Ulf. You are shouting.

*Ulf* I don't care!

*Thorsten* Get out, you incorrigible scoundrel! (*Ulf pockets out*) Well, Gunnar Hakansson, you should know that no one wants peace more than I.

*Gunnar* That's why I am here. The only hope of peace is up to you.

*Thorsten* I am glad that my nephews wanted to wage on that possibility. I would myself gladly return everything to them that my sons wanted to take away from them. I all the time wanted to disregard the game of dice and its foolery, which only was intended for kicks.

*Bjarne* No, brother-in-law, it was a formal challenge from your son Sten which Leif accepted.

*Thorsten* He had to accept it to avoid being called a coward by my sons. But if he had known he would not play against Sten personally, he would never have accepted the game. You don't start duelling with your opponent's second.

*Bjarne* It was just for avoiding a duel that I stepped in. A game directly between Sten and Leif would immediately have brought a fight between them.

*Thorsten* Instead you turned it into a feud of life and death between my whole family and the sons of Torleif, in which all Iceland is engaging. Was that what you wanted, Bjarne? – Or it was perhaps exactly what Sten wanted.

*Gunnar* You touched the sensitive heart of the problem, Thorsten. Your eldest son must be banished from Iceland for life as its most dangerous trouble-maker. Most men on Iceland are agreed on that.

*Erik* And who might those most men on Iceland be? You and your lice, old dodderer?

*Thorsten* Erik, get out! Alas, these hopeless sons of mine! I am afraid, Gunnar, that if one is to be exiled they must all be exiled.

*Mård* And in that case we will all remain with the same right as the sons of Torleif.

*Torsten* You see, Gunnar, the dilemma of my situation.

*Gunnar* Your sons are truly hopeless if not even helpless.

*Erik* Who is now insulting who, father?

*Thorsten* Whatever you say or do, Erik, you will only worsen the situation.

*Erik* We only demand what is right!

*Gunnar* Obviously there is nothing here for me to do.

*Eyvind (steps forth)* Stay, uncle Gunnar. Listen to what I have to say. The matter is quite simple. The game was about who was to go into exile: Sten and his brothers or Leif and his brothers. The one who pulled the shortest straw would have Bjorg for comfort, while the winners would have me, since I hate promiscuous women like Bjorg, who is the wife of four men. Sten won and Leif lost according to everyone's uniform judgement. Instead of taking the consequences and go into exile, Leif and his brothers remain in the country with Bjorg. We cannot accept that. It's simply a violation of our legal agreement. So a full scale war is unavoidable. The sons of Torleif have asked for it themselves. They cannot expect anything else.

*Gunnar* Then I must ask you, sons of Thorsten, with what right you attacked my sheep and shepherds?

*Thorsten* Did you do so, my sons?

*Mård* We did it to make the sons of Torleif reveal themselves and show that they had stayed on spite of the agreement.

*Gunnar* Nonetheless, sons of Thorsten, by attacking an innocent man and his property you have turned half of Iceland into additional enemies. Consider my innocent sheep when you yourselves hit the ground!

*Thorsten* Sons! Sons! What have you done!

*Mård* We followed Bjarne's advice which was clever.

*Bjarne* I knew the sons of Torleif had stayed on, and I gave your sons advice of how to make them betray themselves.

*Thorsten* Bjarne, you have thereby forged a sword against my and your own sister's neck! Why can't you let my nephews live in peace? What harm have they done to you? Why do you persecute them?

*Erik* You always favoured them, father.

*Mård* They were always better than we.

*Eyvind* Sten will never forget his oath to one day prove himself better than they.

*Thorsten* So that's what it's all about: a contest of abilities?

*Eyvind* So it seems, Thorsten Blind.

*Gerd* Why put life at risk in the contest? And why do you have to involve the lives of others in your game?

*Bjarne* Gerd, you haven't been to the continent of Europe. There's something there called politics which is a system of laws that concerns all people whether they like it or not. This family feud and approaching war, which will rouse all Iceland, is only the sign that even Iceland has been struck by the European disease of politics.

*Gerd* Are we then no longer free as human beings?

*Bjarne* We have never been free from our destiny.

*Erik* This smells of Christianity.

*Bjarne* No, Erik, Christianity is just one out of many manifestations of the destiny I mentioned. Destiny is far older than any religion in the world. Destiny is perhaps what created the world.

*Gunnar* Is destiny not woven by the Weird Sisters?

*Bjarne* No one creates destiny. It has always been there, and it will ever remain. That's probably the only immortal entity that exists.

*Erik* Uncle is flipping out.

*Mård* His German arts have never appealed to us.

*Thorsten* You suggest, Bjarne, that we should accept the war as something we neither can prevent nor control?

*Bjarne* I am sorry, but that's how it seems.

*Gunnar* And what shall I then tell the sons of Torleif?

*Erik* That they will have to fight if they want anything!

*Mård* They have no legal right to remain on Iceland. Therefore they shall be visited by justice.

*Thorsten* So tell me then, Mård, you who know everything, what is justice?

*Mård* What is generally agreed upon to be right.

*Thorsten* How can you say then that it is right of the sons of Torleif to be driven out of the country when half the population of our country consider this to be wrong?

*Erik* Then the disagreement must be settled by force.

*Thorsten* That's how it is, Gunnar Hakansson! There are no people so mean, hopeless, troublesome, evil and inhuman as relatives against their own relations.

*Gunnar* It certainly doesn't look any better. If only some woman could arbitrate between all these presumptuous men!

*Eyvind* Woman is precisely what makes the situation hopeless.

*Gunnar* How come?

*Eyvind* Because everyone loves her, except me, for her being implacable towards Ulf, and perhaps because she is our very destiny.

*Erik* Are you getting as weird and fishy as uncle Bjarne?

*Eyvind* I am only trying to understand his realism.

*Gunnar* That will probably not be easy.

*Eyvind* We will probably not grasp the truth of destiny until we ruthlessly are faced with death in the heat and moment of truth in the battle.

*Torsten* Yes, so it seems.

*Gunnar* I must sincerely regret that you are so unaccommodating, sons of Thorsten. You will probably not see me again, because you will never get another chance.

*Erik* Another chance for what?

*Gunnar* For coming to your senses, insensible, ignorant and damned stupid asses! (*leaves*)

*Thorsten* There we lost all peace forever.

*Bjarne* You have the initiative now, fatal nephews. Show us now if you can lead destiny as you wish or if you like everyone else must be led by it where you don't want to go. (*leaves*)

*Gerd* I knew already when he was born that my eldest son would ruin my entire family.

*Erik* What kind of demented reasoning is that, mother? We have only done everything just to save the family!

*Gerd* You can't see beyond your own nose, Erik. You will never get married, and you will never have children. Your family is not just your family but the entire human race. (*leaves with Thorsten*)

*Erik* What does she mean?

*Mård* The old ones are nattering in their pathetic dementia. Fortunately we the young ones are still able to act and fight the sick broodings of thoughtful laziness with the muscular power of sound hard work and vital battle.

*Eyvind* We must mobilize now and organize our defense.

*Erik* Sten is our leader. He will give the orders to everyone about everything, for he knows best how the insolent sons of Torleif, the obnoxious bandits who only wish to harm us, will be brought down to earth at last, like finally exterminated vermin.

Scene 2. At the sons of Torleif in the humble cabin of Gunnar.

*Leif* No, I don't like it! This whole quarrel is all vanity and a hell for nothing!

*Bjorn* We have done everything we could, Leif.

*Gunnar* I wouldn't have left the place with mission unfulfilled if everything hadn't been hopeless indeed.

*Leif* I can never bring myself to start war against my own blood cousins, which must lead to a mass slaughter of the entire male population of Iceland! I am not capable of raising my sword against my own kin and against my own blind uncle's own sons!

*Torgny* We all feel like you, Leif, but it is inevitable. We have to make war now.

*Leif* There must be some other way. There hasn't been one single conflict in the history of man that couldn't be avoided by peaceful methods of talk.

*Thor* That may be true, but none of you must risk sacrificing yourself, for Sten is all too obviously in a bloodthirsty mood. I know him. Nothing can soothe him when his eyes are aglow from the unquenchable wrath of lunacy. I have grown up with them and fought a number of fights for them, and they once had great confidence in me. I volunteer to one more time try to talk them to some sense.

*Bjorn* They will only take you prisoner and abuse you as a hostage.

*Thor* I am not afraid of them, and I will place myself directly under the protection of Thorsten and his wife. He is after all my father, although he never admitted it himself.

*Stenleif* Against four blind raving senseless sons a blind lonely old man cannot do very much.

*Thor* I still wish to try.

*Bjorn* You will risk your life. We can't afford losing you.

*Gunnar* I am afraid, Thor, that your so called brothers never will forgive your treason against them. They will not hesitate to cut you up.

*Thor* I still believe I could handle them. Give me this chance. It's our last possibility. None of us want war, no one on Iceland wishes for it, and I alone might still be able to prevent it. You can't afford not to take that chance.

*Leif* Let Thor go. Perhaps he alone might still work miracles.

*Bjorn* They will just immediately cut a blood eagle in his back.

*Leif* We must let him go, since that's what he wants himself. We can't restrain our own consciences.

*Torgny* And what if this will be the death of Thor?

*Leif* Then it will probably also be the death of his cousins in due time. If the sons of Thorsten are made so inhuman by their evil that they murder Thor, no human being will be able to resist them. But I still believe the sons of Thorsten are human, and I think we all still believe that.

*Thor* I thank you, cousin. I will probably manage the problem.

*Leif* Good luck, our best self-sacrificing cousin! (*embraces him. All the others embrace him heartily one after another. Suddenly:* )

*Kare (enters)* Father! They are upon us!

*Gunnar* What is the matter with you? Who is upon us?

*Kare* They are coming riding against us in shining armours and helmets heavily armed in hundreds!

*Gunnar (shaking him)* Who is coming?

*Kare* The sons of Thorsten and all their men!

*Stenleif* We have to get away! To your horses! We immediately have to find our own!

*Gunnar* Hurry! Here you could be contained!

*Thor* Come, Leif. Now conscience has done its work and died. No prayers will help us any more.

*Gunnar* Hurry! Go with them, my son!

*Kare* And what about you, father?

*Gunnar* I am old, so I stay here to guard our cottage.

*Bjorg* Let me remain here with you, father Gunnar. Fighting doesn't suit me either.

*Gunnar* But here the sons of Thorsten could get you. You must hurry off with the others!

*(all leave except Gunnar)*

Thus am I the last man standing by his home, an tough stubborn old pine in the middle of the onslaught of the storm. But let the storm rage. I am old enough that it doesn't matter whether I fall or am left standing.

*Sten (in full armour, breaking in with a few fighters)* Hey, look at that! The protector of the outcasts in person! And where are the criminals?

*Gunnar* What criminals?

*Sten* You know very well, old hound dog, what cockroaches I mean!

*Gunnar* If you are looking for the sons of Torleif they are not here.

*Sten (aims his sword at the old man's throat)* I can see that! Where are they then?

*Gunnar* How could you think I could know anything about that?

*Sten* Traitor! You are lying! *(cuts him down)* Now lie there to rot, you traitor garbage! Take off that head and stick it to a lance! It's our first victorious trophy!

*Eyvind (treads forth)* Sten son of Thorsten, you have just accomplished the first victim of your war, a neutral ambassador, an old man who could not fight.

*Sten* And what do you mean by that?

*Eyvind* That the war has bad start.

*Sten* Go home to your mother, if you don't have anything positive to say. Men! Set every house on fire! We have to set clear examples without exceptions!

*(You hear and see how everything is set on fire.)*

*All leave except Eyvind.)*

*Eyvind* It was no bad advice that I should look up my mother. She is probably the only one who could clear the doubts that now overshadow my soul and zest for life. *(leaves)*

### Scene 3. Eyvind and his mother.

*Astrid* It was many years since you visited me, Eyvind.

*Eyvind* I know, mother. I found no reason.

*Astrid* What is the reason now so suddenly?

*Eyvind* All Iceland is at war, mother.

*Astrid* I know.

*Eyvind* I have taken a stand with the sons of Thorsten against the sons of Torleif.

*Astrid* You should have done the opposite.

*Eyvind* Why?

*Astrid* Because the sons of Torleif are right, and the sons of Thorsten will lose.

*Eyvind* I fight for the sons of Thorsten because I know them to be right whether they win or lose.

*Astrid* Why do you imagine they are right?

*Eyvind* They helped me much, and they have the right to defend their property.

*Astrid* If you are so certain about their cause, why then did you come here?

*Eyvind* The sons of Thorsten are right, but they let the end justify the means. That gave me misgivings.

*Astrid* Abandon the sons of Thorsten while you can. They will all get killed.

*Eyvind* How come you are so sure of that?

*Astrid* I just know it.

*Eyvind* There is something else behind.

*Astrid* I only wish you well, my son. I always did.

*Eyvind* It didn't always seem that way. You know more than you have told me. You never revealed to me my father's name.

*Astrid* Look up the sons of Torleif and fight by their side, before it is too late!

*Eyvind* Why?

*Astrid* Because you are their brother.

*Eyvind* What are you telling me, mother?

*Astrid* I was made to promise your father never to reveal your origin. I have been faithful to him since then and never revealed it to anyone. But when your own life is at stake a dead man can no longer make demands on my fidelity.

*Eyvind* So you tell me this just to save me?

*Astrid* It's unavoidable that the sons of Thorsten will perish. I wouldn't be a mother if I didn't do anything to save you from their destruction.

*Eyvind* Avaunt, woman! You don't know what ask of me! Would I forsake my honour only out of cowardice? Do you know why I took sides with the sons of Thorsten?

*Astrid* No.

*Eyvind* If the sons of Thorsten had received Bjorg I would have chosen the sons of Torleif. Now the sons of Torleif, whom you call my half-brothers, got Bjorg, and therefore I chose the sons of Thorsten, who still are my cousins.

*Astrid* Who then is this Bjorg?

*Eyvind* The reason for the war! Initially they vied about her, and the war started when she became one man's woman. As long as she was a maid and everyone suited for her everything was peace and harmony, but when she made up her mind for someone the war became inevitable. Therefore I chose the side against her. She is a slut, she belongs to several men, she has sullied the sons of Torleif, and therefore only the sons of Thorsten are honest and honourable men.

*Astrid* You believe then that you could live and exclude the human factor of women from your life?



*Eyvind* My manhood is my pride, and that is all my life. Women are parasites who only exist to suck out from man the joy, pride and honour which is his manhood. And while I have this objective attitude I am invulnerable in battle. Only Stenleif can compete with me, and only the two of us have ever been able to defeat each other.

*Astrid* Stenleif and his brothers are your brothers!

*Eyvind* I know that now, and I regret, mother, that you let me know it. Thereby I cannot kill any of them.

*Astrid* Then refrain from the battle!

*Eyvind* That would be to let the sons of Thorsten down. Mother, you are just a woman, and by your council you have like all women only weakened the man. I did wrong in coming to you. I should have managed alone. Your advice has now brought me out on an impossible way of balance, which only can end by somebody killing me. May I then at least die in battle fighting for my cousins the sons of Thorsten!

*Astrid* Eyvind! Come back!

*Eyvind* No, mother. I will never come back. (*leaves*)

*Astrid* Eyvind! (*sinks together alone in the dark.*)

#### Act V Scene 1. At home with Torsten blinde.

*Thorsten* Who is coming?

*Gerd* Is it Bjarne. Why do you come back, Bjarne?

*Bjarne* I refuse to take part in the fight. Your reckless sons will have to manage alone, Thorsten. I am tired of them.

*Thorsten* What has happened?

*Bjarne* Your sons attacked the sons of Torleif without warning. They have burnt Gunnar Hakansson's farm and stuck his head on a spear. That spear they are carrying around, like boasting of a heroic deed and sign of victory. All Iceland has reacted against the recklessness of your sons. After a series of defeats in the east they have now withdrawn here while at the same time the sons of Torleif have had time to get organized. The two greatest armed hosts Iceland has ever seen now stand poised against each other on opposite sides of the Field of Pots. They are equal in forces, but your nephews have better morale and are better organized, while your sons just keep boasting, drinking and making themselves intolerable.

*Thorsten* And that's why you have abandoned them?

*Bjarne* Yes.

*Thorsten* You dog! Get back at once! I demand it! Or else I will have you condemned in the assembly for high treason! Wasn't it you, Bjarne, who initiated the shameful game of dice which gave us all this scandalous mess? If you don't immediately return to my sons and help them you will never see me again.

*Bjarne (to Gerd)* Is he mad? Doesn't he realize that his sons are lost?

*Gerd* Yes, but he blames you for it, and therefore you must help them. That will be your atonement.

*Bjarne* Your sentence on me is terrible, Thorsten.

*Thorsten* But fair! Begone!

*Bjarne* Take it easy. With my help your sons will surely prevail anyway. (*leaves*)

*Thorsten* Where is he going, Gerd?

*Gerd* (*looks out through the window*) He returns to his horse.

*Thorsten* And where is he riding? Into the country or towards the sea?

*Gerd* He rides straight west towards the sea. He is in a hurry to get away from the Field of Pots heading fast in the opposite direction.

*Thorsten* Then we shall never see him again. My wife, your brother has denounced us. He rides towards the coast now to embark on the first available ship that will carry him away from Iceland forever.

*Gerd* I know. But I will stay on.

*Thorsten* You stay by me, you poor mother of four abortive sons.

*Gerd* No, I will remain on Iceland. Instead of my brother their mother will visit her sons and stand them by.

*Thorsten* Are you serious?

*Gerd* Yes. As my brother helped them so far, so shall I help them now. And if I can't help them in any other way, I can always help them to die.

*Thorsten* You leave me alone without my eyes?

*Gerd* If your good God is willing, I will be back, but I doubt that he is good. (*leaves*)

*Thorsten* My last support in life, don't fail me! Don't follow all evil damnable rotten people into their self-inflicted death! Don't look up the grave that everyone else is seeking in their blind ignorance! Too late! No answer! Now I will only hear the silence, like I always only had to look in the dark.

## Scene 2. The camp of the sons of Torleif.

*Leif* Bjorg, war is no place for you.

*Bjorg* Haven't I followed you then across mountains and over valleys, through storms, icy rains, glaciers, heaths and snowy ranges, have I not camped with you under inhuman and ruthless weathers in the wilderness in tents of furs and blankets for our only protection against the storms and shelter from the lashing torrential rains, have I not shared all your horrible exile and its ordeals with you, have I not been hardened naked against the winter cold like you yourselves like sheer eskimos under the crackling skies of haunting northern lights constantly foreboding death in the cold fear of the endless winter nights, and would I then let you down now after all this? – Dress me in male armour, give me spear and sword and put a helmet with horns on my head, and I shall be more terrible than any Valkyrie!

*Bjorn* (*to Leif*) We never succeeded in taming Bjorg's wilfulness.

*Leif* Bjorg, you will get what you want then, but at least put your hair under the armour, so that not everyone at once will see you as just a woman.

*Bjorg* Are there not men with as rich and flowing hair as I, and do they hide their pride? On the contrary! The longer the hair, the more terrible the fighters! Let them see my bold loose hair and fear a vengeance more terrible than that of any male!

*Stenleif (to Leif)* She is brave.

*Bjorn* We should let her have her will.

*Bjorg* You will not regret it.

*Leif* My brother Stenleif, you are the foremost of all of us as an unparalleled warrior. I hereby give you the highest command of all our men. When you are ready to begin the fight, then give the sign, and we will all at the same time like one man commence this decisive battle. Every man will watch you, only you shall give the sign, I will entrust no one else with that responsibility.

*Stenleif* You can safely rely on me. When everything is ready I will give the signal.

*Leif* Good – Thor, our only true cousin, I command you to keep out of the fight. You must not fight your brothers.

*Thor* They are only half brothers of mine. You sons of Torleif are more than brothers to me.

*Leif* Obey me. You must not fight.

*Thor* What do you want me to do instead? I can't just watch this the greatest battle of Iceland and refuse to take part in it!

*Stenleif* Let Thor be my squire, and I will have someone close to me with whom I could talk.

*Leif* What about that, Thor?

*Thor* I would love to. I will keep you well supported with weapons, Stenleif.

*Stenleif* Yes, I don't doubt it.

*Leif* Every man to his position! Let us get every unity of our host into order!

You, Stenleif, will remain here on the hill, where you can be seen all over the plain. We will all observe you and wait for your signal.

*Stenleif* Good. I will watch everyone from here. When I am satisfied enough with the general order I will give the sign.

*Leif* Good. Farewell, brother. Good luck.

*Stenleif* The same to you, brother. (*Leif leaves with all except Thor.*)

Well, Thor, what do you think of our position?

*Thor* It is rather favourable. The wind is in our back, we are not blinded by the sun, the sight is perfectly clear, and we can fight downhill. The sons of Thorsten are fools if they start the fight themselves.

*Stenleif* No one is counting on them to start. Their positions are typical groups of defense. It is too obvious that we have to attack them. And can you discern who is present among them?

*Thor* I certainly can. How radiant is not the presence of Erik, where he proudly swings his sword and lance on horseback in front of a splendid gathering of

the best and finest men ever seen in Iceland! I have never seen my half brother more dashing in splendour.

*Stenleif* Who else do you see?

*Thor* A bit more to the right is the stalwart Ulf. He has also dressed up today shining like a god in the sunlight, and his blond hair, he must have washed it recently, he keeps spread over his like silver shining and unassailable mail. With his back straight like his father in his youth he proudly defies us and is prepared to spite us in the approaching inevitable battle.

*Stenleif* Do you see anyone else?

*Thor* I see the gloomy Mård, but he is not as dashing. Still he efficiently rides between the lines flashing swiftly delivering intelligent orders. He speaks to the fighters with encouraging and unmistakable fire and has an uplifting influence, for they listen gladly and eagerly. He is apparently the strategy and brain of your cousins.

*Stenleif* He was the one who never made a fool of himself. Can't you find Sten?

*Thor* Of course I see Sten! All black and ominous as a stumbling rock he rests immovable on his horse and seems to try to search out the secrets of the day. Like a deep volcanic incalculable natural force he waits for the moment which will summon his greatest, most horrible and most implacable powers. He also wears his ravenblack long hair loose over his back, and his entire appearance promises but death to everyone who is bold enough to cross his uncompromising path. But who is there? There is new figure that has stolen in among the ranks of the enemies.

*Stenleif* Who is it?

*Thor* It is our doomed cousins' mother. It is Gerd. She is storming forth calling on her son, the irrevocable Sten, who refuses to answer his mother. He just whisks her away. Instead she therefore now rides up to Ulf.

*Stenleif* What does she want?

*Thor* She seems to admonish her sons. Ulf cuts her short, and she now heads for Mård, but the youngest son promptly turns his back on her. But she catches sight of the dashing Erik.

*Stenleif* How does she behave to Erik?

*Thor* About in the same way, and Erik answers her kindly. Now she gets down from her horse. Have you seen! In front of Erik she falls to the ground and implores him ardently on her knees...

*Stenleif* Can you understand what the woman wants?

*Thor* It is impossible. It is obvious, though, that Erik does not chase her away. Now he descends from his horse and kindly takes care of his desperate and high , strung mother. Now, Stenleif, would be the right moment to attack.

*Stenleif* I cannot do that.

*Thor* Why not?

*Stenleif* Would I then violently attack my own cousins in the flesh, when they are at their most dashing and handsome with all life in front of them? And why would I

risk punishing Erik for having burnt all our property, at the very moment when he tries to console a desperate mother? We are not inhuman, Thor Guest-Friend.

*Thor* Will you then not take the initiative and start the battle? Will you let the opportunity pass you by?

*Stenleif* I can't order an attack when that surely would lead to an innocent woman being sacrificed.

*Thor* Now I see the good Erik conducting Gerd out of the field. He gently removes her from the lines. Neither he will take her seriously but only wishes to get rid of the old woman.

*Stenleif* He will never escape being upset by a desperate mother's last words.

*Thor* Now he returns to his command.

*Stenleif* And where do you find Gerd?

*Thor* She has vanished.

*Stenleif* All eyes of our forces are now directed towards us. I feel how all their attention is total. Our enemy has himself removed the last obstacle to our bloody settlement. Not even a final human factor could placate them. The course is completed. I give the signal.

*(gives the signal. The air is filled with a terrific war cry.  
The stage is laid in complete darkness.)*

Scene 3. In the heat of the battle. Out of the mist Mård appears.

*Mård* What has happened? Where are my men? Suddenly clouds hid the sun, and the entire plain was veiled in a stifling murderous fog. Damn it! How shall we now get the lines in order?

*Torgny (appears)* Surrender! But it is only Mård!

*Mård* So, the youngest against the youngest! How appropriate! *(They fight and vanish in the fog.)*

*Kare (appears)* Everything is just like milk. We were just reaching an advantage when this fog came along ruining everything! Now I have to search in vain for my father's murderers. It's hardly possible any longer to differ between friend and enemy.

*Eyvind (appears)* Who is there?

*Kare* A friend of the sons of Torleif.

*Eyvind* Thus no son of Torleif? Surrender or die! *(They fight.)*

*Kare* Who are you yourself?

*Eyvind* A friend of the sons of Thorsten!

*Kare* Thus no son of Thorsten!

*Eyvind* What is a puppy like you doing in the war of the grown-ups?

*Kare* Defending myself and honour against bullying brutality!

*Eyvind* You mean you are right?

*Kare* The superior force that murdered my father and stuck his head on a spear without cause you can but be right against!

*Eyvind* You are furious but stand no chance, poor boy. Leave the fighting before your insistency has sacrificed you on the altar of godless meaninglessness!

*Kare* If you belong to my father's murderers I would never spare you. I would rather die then by your hand than desist from defending the honour of my family and father against crookedness!

*Eyvind* You give me no choice then. *(They fight. Eyvind kills Kare.)*

My boy, I regret this, but you ignored what was good for you, and I did warn you. In war you have no other choice than to advance and murder without distinction. That was now my fourteenth today. There are still at least a hundred left. But who is there? Friend or enemy?

*Bjorg (in full armour)* Answer yourself to such an impossible question!

*Eyvind* A woman!

*Bjorg* You seem surprised. Fight instead, if you are a man!

*Eyvind* I will not fight a woman. You must be Bjorg.

*Bjorg* And who are you then, gaping by surprise with drivelling mouth?

*Eyvind* It doesn't matter. I was always homeless. So have I seen the woman then who was the basis of this entire fatal tribal feud.

*Bjorg* What are you drivelling about? Fight or surrender! Or else you are dead!

*Eyvind* But she is beautiful. For such a woman you could actually die.

*Bjorg* You are still gaping like an idiot by sheer surprise. Have you never seen a woman until now?

*Eyvind* Yes, I have seen you before, but it was a long time ago.

*Bjorg* Can't you fight?

*Eyvind* I wanted to spare you, but duty compels me to avenge all the evil that one single woman caused two completely honest and perfect families. *(Throws his weapons)* I will not fight you, but let's wrestle!

*Bjorg (backs off)* The wild beast is awakened. I can't beat an unarmed man.

*Eyvind (grabs her, throws her to the ground)* You, false beauty, is to blame for all the misfortune of Iceland! Now you shall pay! *(tears off her armour and his own as well and intends to rape her.)*

*Bjorg* He is mad!

*Eyvind (vanquishes her completely)* No, I am a man like all the others! And like to all other men, woman will be my ruin! *(rapes her)*

*(Sten appears.)*

*Sten* What is this? In the middle of the heat of the battle a coition right open on the heath! But it is Bjorg! What rapist is this? *(runs his sword in the back of Eyvind)* Die, you miserable bastard! *(Eyvind falls backwards and reveals himself.)*

Eyvind! What have I done! My brother! *(hugs him.)*

*Eyvind (dying)* You did the right thing, soldier. Now you have killed one of the sons of Torleif. *(dies)*

*Sten* It must not be true!

*Bjorg (gradually recovering)* All that must not be true is always true. He didn't die until after having fulfilled his rape.

*Sten* Eyvind was the purest of men who never touched a woman.  
*Bjorg* Until now. He sullied me like everyone else did from the start.  
*Sten* Escape, Bjorg, away from this hell!  
*Bjorg* It is too late.  
*Ulf (enters)* There you are, Sten! Why do you stand here loitering? You are missed in the heat of the fight, and they fear that you have gone down! Show yourself, damn it!  
*Sten* We have lost Eyvind.  
*Ulf* Who is this? (*shows some interest for Bjorg*)  
*Sten* You don't touch her, Ulf!  
*Ulf* One of the outcasts who followed the sons of Torleif!  
*Sten (lets go of Eyvind and turns his weapon on Ulf)* Get back!  
*Ulf* But what's the matter with you?  
*Sten* Bjorg! Run off! Don't show yourself any more in the fight! (*Bjorg leaves the centre of the stage.*)  
*Ulf* Have you gone mad? Here in the middle of the fight a half naked woman, like placed by divine providence in the way for two over-stimulated soldiers, who both of us could have taken advantage of, and you of all people let her escape!  
*Sten* Our place is in the battle, not in the ditch. (*leaves*)  
*Ulf* And here lies Eyvind dead and equally half naked. I sense some unfathomable mystery here.  
*Stenleif (enters)* Surrender or die!  
*Ulf (seizes his weapon)* I will never surrender, Stenleif son of Torleif! (*They fight and hard.*)  
*Stenleif (kills Ulf after a hard fight.)* Ha! At last! Now the universe extols! Drink a base man's blood, you unsatiable earth, get drunk by the liquor of the sweet slaughter of a human scumbag; Bjorg, come here and wash your hair in the black heart's blood that forced you away from home!  
*Torgny (enters)* I hear brother Stenleif roar voluptuously resounding and causing terror in all men all over the plain.  
*Stenleif* I have killed Ulf! Now it's time for Bjorg to at last wash her hair!  
*Bjorn (enters with Bjorg)* I was the one who was supposed to kill him!  
*Torgny* Kill Sten instead! He and Erik are now the only ones alive of the four sons of Thorsten.  
*Björn* So even Mård is dead?  
*Torgny (proud)* Here you see his slayer!  
*Bjorn* Come! We must find Sten and Erik!  
*(all leave except Bjorg, who revels in washing her hair in Ulf's blood.)*

Scene 4. Another part of the battlefield.

*Sten (appearing)* We have lost. Half of us have disappeared and escaped home into the fog, which came conveniently to hide the infernal treason of the deserters, but the sons of Torleif have fought like one man with few casualties, in good order and in perfectly fair play. Their superior force is quite overwhelming. Shall I then escape as the last and most cowardly deserter?

*Gerd (appearing)* No, my son, you shall not.

*Sten* My mother! Where did you come from?

*Gerd* I have been here through the entire battle doing my duty as a mother.

*Sten* What have you done?

*Gerd* I have made sure my sons have lost.

*Sten* You didn't partake in the fighting like Bjorg?

*Gerd* No, I have been more efficient. When not one of my four sons wanted to listen to me, I turned instead to the ordinary fighters, and I convinced everyone I spoke with that the only right thing to do was to run away, and therefore they have all escaped and saved their lives.

*Sten* Mother, you are out of your senses.

*Gerd* But you alone, Sten, shall not escape.

*Sten* Mother, there is something appalling about you. What do you want? I can't understand the logic in your strange way of reasoning. And why would I alone not escape when you persuaded everyone else to run off?

*Gerd* You will not escape, Sten. Ulf and Mård are dead. Even Eyvind, your most invulnerable warrior, is no more.

*Sten* You are well informed.

*Gerd* Erik alone spoke to me like to a mother. Even he banished me from the battle, but he did it accommodatingly with curtesy and kindness. I will therefore save him. But you, Sten, shall never run away from this final family fight, which you alone originated.

*Sten* What is your point, mother?

*Gerd* Can't you guess? (*advances towards him*)

*Sten* No, mother, I can't guess.

*Gerd* Here I walk dressed in mail with a sword like any veteran, but I haven't smeared my sword yet, for it is reserved for a higher mission than the war.

*Sten* Mother, you frighten me with your blood spattered stare. You appear incalculable and demented. Why did you come here fully armed to the battle then if not to fight like everybody else?

*Gerd* Sten, I will embrace you one last time.

*Sten* Before you leave me? Before you die? Is your higher purpose then a suicide?

*Gerd* Yes, the most horrible suicide a mother can commit. You are cursed, Sten, a menial destroyer of human lives, and therefore I must take the life I gave you. (*runs promptly her sword through his breast.*)



*Sten* My mother! What are you doing! Are you then... (*sinks together*) ... as cursed as I. (*dies*)

*Gerd* I should have done that long ago. May I now take the punishment for having allowed him to live far too long. (*runs the sword into her own breast without hesitation, strikes right, and dies.*)

*Leif* (*after a while, comes by*) Erik is captured, all their men are scattered and have surrendered, and Sten is the only one no one knows anything about. He has played a most enigmatic part through all the battle. But what is this? (*discovers Gerd's body*) Gerd! And here beside her is Sten! (*examines them quickly*) They are both completely dead, but how did they die? – We'll investigate that later. (*calls out*) My men! Blow your horns to sound the signal that the battle is over! Sten is dead! (*enter some men*) Carry out these miserable bodies! Let these two lie openly for public display like Mård, Ulf and Eyvind! All five will be given full ceremonial rites as becomes honest heroes!

*(The bodies are carried out. Leif follows.)*

#### Scene 5.

All the leading men are gathered.

At the centre is Leif, unanimously hailed as the leading man of Iceland.

*Thor* Long live Leif, the first king of Iceland! Hail!

*all* Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!

*Thor* We have no hereditary royal dignity on Iceland, but if Iceland ever had a king it must be you, and there might never be another after you.

*Leif* Save your celebrations, Icelanders, which I never deserved. Few of us are they who deserve anything at all on this day for having taken the life of his neighbour, maybe relatives, maybe cousins, perhaps even brothers, fathers or sons. Those who really deserve honour are the dead ones, and all they deserve is solemn grief and sincere compassion of no end. Bring in the dead chiefs!

*(Sten, Ulf, Mård, Eyvind and Gerd are carried in on shields.)*

Cry, o all of Iceland, for your bravest and noblest, most indispensable fighters, that none of us wished to dispose of but who perished anyway. We know that Mård died regularly a hero's death in combat with our brother Torgny, and we know that Ulf died fighting to death in a bitter combat with Stenleif. But how Eyvind Homeless died, our own brother, is an unfathomable mystery, and even deeper is the end of Sten and mother Gerd veiled in pitchblack darkness of the unknown.

*Erik* Hypocrite! You only wish to hide the truth! (*a whoosh passes through the crowd*)

*Leif* Let our only prisoner come forth! (*Erik is let forth with his hands tied.*) What truth do you think we are hiding, Erik? Do you know anything about it?

*Erik* No, you know very well, Leif son of Torleif, that I don't know, and that's the only reason why you dare ask me! It's obvious to everyone that all you sons of Torleif in your blind hatred and greed didn't hesitate to slaughter women in the

bitter struggle and to kill Eyvind, your half brother, who though before the fight had promised not to take up any fight with his own brothers. Still he was killed by you from behind!

*Bjorn (steps forth)* It wasn't anyone of us.

*Erik* Who was it then?

*(silence)*

*Leif* Is there anyone present here who can explain the death of Eyvind?

*Erik* You ask the question, Leif, since you know yourself that no one can answer it except yourself. And you intend to keep it secret to strengthen your positions.

*Bjorg (steps forth)* I can answer the question of how Eyvind died.

*Torgny* Let's hear it.

*Bjorg* I took part in the battle myself armed as a man and encountered Eyvind, but he noticed immediately who I was. Instead of fighting with weapons he cast them aside and challenged me in wrestling. I was no wrestler, he subjected me and used his advantage to rape me. He had already half way killed me and intends to fulfill that intention before he leaves me, he always hated women, when suddenly Sten himself appears and runs his spear through Eyvind's back. Thus the brave Eyvind was killed from behind by jealousy personified in the sinister Sten.

*Astrid (appears)* Thus speaks the concubine of the immoral sons of Torleif just to save their position.

*Erik* You preferred of course the sinister Sten, Bjorg, didn't you?

*Bjorg* No. He asked me respectfully to leave the place.

*Erik* Respectfully! My foot! Who did ever find Sten respectful? Ha-ha! We know that whore! *(he succeeds in raising some mirth among the men.)*

*Stenleif (furious)* You don't insult the consort of the sons of Torleif! *(The mirth increases.)*

*Leif (sternly)* Get back, Stenleif! It is enough! We have departed from the subject. Erik, we wish to release you. Let his blind father come forth. *(Thorsten Blind appears.)*

*Thorsten* Erik! Are you still alive? My only son, where are you?

*Erik* Here, father. *(Thorsten finds him and embraces him tenderly.)*

*Thorsten* God be praised! God is then good after all, since he has spared one of the most criminal!

*Erik* Here we are all criminals, father, freshly arrived as we all are from the human butchery of battle.

*Thorsten* Still you are alive, and therefore all criminals be forgiven.

*Leif* That is also our opinion, Thorsten Blind. We only wish to remember all the fallen ones as heroes, and as heroes we wish to honour them forever.

*Thorsten* You are noble, Leif, my oldest nephew.

*Erik* No, father, don't trust his word. He is only faking.

*Leif* No, incredulous Erik, I never lied.

*Thorsten* That is true.

*Erik* Then speak out the whole truth, king Leif! What damages do the sons of Torleif demand for the war? Will you not take over my farm now and force me into exile with my blind father?

*Leif* No, Erik, you may calmly keep everything you have got. We will all five retire back to the ruined farm of Gunnar to reconstruct it. Then we will stay in the east.

*Erik* And leave me alive? Do you think then that I would refrain from my revenge?

*Leif* We have forgiven everything.

*Bjorn* We have seen enough blood.

*Stenleif* Yes, all Iceland has suffered enough.

*Erik* Wouldn't this suit your Christian mind, father? But ancient Viking law demands that you must never risk leaving an arsonist alive.

*Leif* We don't want your father's blood to die out, you hardened Erik.

*Thorsten* You can still marry and beget children, my son.

*Erik* I can not speak freely pinioned as I am. Release me from the cowardly ropes that cut into my flesh, and I will give you all an honest answer to your most generous and magnanimous proposition. *(on a sign from Leif two men cut Erik's ropes.)*

There! Now I am a human being again! So you wish to leave me alive, me alone, after having killed all my brothers? Suit yourselves! *(without anyone having noticed, he has produced a knife, attacks Leif and stabs him deep into his right breast.)* Revenge!

*(great outcry and uproar. Many rush with raised weapons on Erik. The commotion soon passes. The fighters rise all bloody from the massacred body of Erik. Bjorg has first of all hurried up to Leif after his fall. Several others have followed.)*

*Thor* How is he?

*Bjorg* That knife knew where to hit. Its name was hatred and reached unto the very heart.

*Stenleif* Brother! Speak to us!

*Leif (faintly)* It is over. *(dies)*

*Torgny (desperate)* He dies! He dies!

*Tor (calmly)* No, Torgny, he is already dead.

*Thorsten (confused)* What has happened?

*Bjorn* You old father, your last son has just passed away after having killed your oldest nephew.

*Thorsten* It must not be true!

*Bjorg* All that must not be true is all too true, unfortunately.

*Stenleif (desperate)* My brother! My brother! *(cries bitterly and throws himself on the ground in front of Leif.)*

*Bjorn* So this is then the end result of all our trouble. We have harvested bitter fruits from what others sowed before us.

*Thor* Leif's words have come true. We have deserved nothing but sorrow.

*Thorsten (confused)* I don't understand it. I don't understand it.

*Bjorg* Father, you need not understand it. It's bad enough that we are obliged to still go on living. *(takes care of the old man)*

*Thor* Lay the fallen king down to rest on yet another shield. Like the other six he shall have all possible ceremonies and honours.

*Torgny (questioning)* The other six?

*Thor* Do you think Leif would have refused Erik all the honours he had already granted all the rest?

*Thorsten (treads forth into the centre)*

What a day of woe is this! How could this happen?

Why then did you marry, and why did you give children to the world?

Why did I live at all? How is this possible?

Not even my wife was spared!

What kind of destiny is this that governs the world?

Is God then powerless against his own work?

And why did he create man if man has to turn out this way?

For sure there must be higher laws in this world than God's own,  
and not even God and least of all ourselves

will ever be able to understand those unfathomable laws.

*(While he has spoken the crowd has dispersed, the corpses been brought out on seven shields in procession and the stage darkened. When his last words ring out he is alone left on the stage which has grown completely dark. The last spotlight rests on him and goes out when he also tottering starts to grope his way out with his blind stick.)*

3-14 june 1990,  
translated in December 2022.

*Review (excerpts)*

The author has called this his 30th greater play his tribute to the Icelandic saga literature, about tribal feuds ending up in as bloody settlements as possible. The entire story is really about destiny and the secret mechanisms of its total incalculability, which seems to transcend both any human and divine sense of understanding. In the end nothing is left of anyone's belief or trust in any cosmic order, but everything is just as incalculable as all nature, to which all human lives are but as windblown autumn leaves.

Most remarkable is of course the great banquet scene with the game of dice (Act II scene 3) which almost dominates the entire drama. The author suggests an intermission after the first scene of the third act.

The background of the story is concealed in the legendary darkness of ancient times. It seems to belong to the unfinished fragmentary Icelandic sagas that never were translated or even printed. Thorsten Blind appears to have been one of the very first Christians of Iceland, but there are also clear influences from J.J. Wecksell's "Daniel Hjort" and Akira Kurosawa's film "Ran". This family drama could probably have taken place in the heathen dawn of any ancient nation. The only thing the author has revealed about his sources himself is that he has traced some actual concrete reality behind the legends.

J.B.W. July 1990, edited and translated by the author.